

VOLUME 67 ISSUE 4



DECEMBER 2025

ING NEWSLINE

SALESIAN PROVINCE OF GUWAHATI



Saint Maria Troncatti:

A Model of Humble Service for the Salesian Family





Jubilee of Confreres and Provincial Community Day



Salesian Province of Mary Help of Christians, Guwahati

Vocation Camps 2025 - 2026

For Boys VII passed

1. Guwahati Region - (Dec 17 - 20, 2025)
Don Bosco School, Boko
2. Assam Plain Region (Dec 27 - 30, 2025)
Don Bosco School, Dimakuchi
3. Tura Region (Jan 05 - 08, 2026)
Don Bosco School, Chandmari
4. Bodoland Region (Jan 10 - 13, 2026)
Don Bosco School, Amguri
5. Karbi Anglong Region (Jan 19 - 22, 2026)
Don Bosco School, Satgaon



Come and See - Jn. 1:39



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For Private Circulation

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Published by:

Don Bosco Communications
Provincial House, Don Bosco
Guwahati – 781 001, Assam

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As we close another year and look towards the horizons of 2026, this edition of *ING Newsline* takes us on a journey through the heart of our Salesian mission in Northeast India. This journey spans from our earliest missionary foundations to the forefront of challenges in the digital age, from the humility of hidden service to the prophetic call to stand with the poor.

The Provincial's message sets the tone for our reflection, reminding us of the core values that inspire our work. This theme of true mission runs throughout this issue, starting with our feature on **Christ the King Parish, Sojong**, where we share the remarkable story of the first Catholic mission among the Karbi people. From those pioneering missionaries who cleared jungles to welcome a bishop in 1966, to the vibrant communities that thrive today, Sojong reminds us that patient presence and cultural sensitivity lead to lasting results.

This issue honours two figures whose lives exemplify different expressions of the same missionary spirit. In Part II on **Bishop Orestes Marengo**, which discusses his priestly ministry, we walk alongside this giant of evangelisation in Northeast India as he discovers lost Christian communities, trains future missionaries during World War II, and reluctantly accepts the call to become a bishop. His humility and pastoral dedication continue to inspire us. We also

remember **Fr Thomas Chenginiyaden** through his insightful article on African cultural ethos and its significance for evangelisation in Northeast India. His prophetic voice challenges us to distinguish between the Gospel and Western cultural forms, calling for genuine inculturation that honours the rich traditions of the communities we serve.

The call to authentic inculturation is reflected today in our coverage of **Assam Don Bosco University**, where academic excellence aligns with Salesian values, preparing young people to serve society with expertise and integrity. Meanwhile, **Fr Paul Kuttikaden's missionary anecdotes** remind us that the Gospel spreads not only through grand strategies but also through countless small acts of kindness, humour, and human connection.

Two major Church events shape our reflection in this issue. **Saint Maria Troncatti's canonisation** offers a luminous example of Salesian holiness—a woman who spent 43 years in the Ecuadorian Amazon, embodying Don Bosco's preventive system through loving presence, transforming daily work into prayer, and maintaining joy amidst hardship. Her final act—refusing medical treatment so the pilot might be saved—perfectly captures a life of complete self-gift.



Pope Leo XIV's Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi Te* issues a prophetic call that must mould all our ministries. Drawing on two thousand years of Catholic social teaching, the Holy Father reminds us that care for the poor is not an optional charity but a theological necessity at the heart of Christian faith. His insistence that we treat people experiencing poverty as active participants rather than passive objects directly challenges our pastoral approaches and calls us to structural reform alongside charitable works.

As we prepare for the year ahead, **Strenna 2026 — “Do Whatever He Tells You, Believers, Free To Serve”**— guides our way. Mary's words at Cana call us to a faith that recognises God's action in history, a freedom rooted in trust in Christ, and a service that naturally flows from the love we have received. The 150th anniversary of the Salesian Cooperators reminds us that Don Bosco always envisioned a great movement of lay and religious partners working together for young people.

Two articles explore the essential question of how we prepare for missions in changing times. Our **feature on initial formation** describes the careful guidance of our 15 novices, 48 post-novitiate students, 25 practical trainees, and 19 theology students as they advance through the stages towards

Salesian consecration. The article on **Artificial Intelligence in Salesian Ministry** provides balanced advice on incorporating new technologies while protecting the irreplaceable human encounter at the core of pastoral care. These pieces remind us that formation is an ongoing process and that discernment must accompany every new tool we adopt.

What unites these diverse articles is a common theme: authentic mission requires us to be deeply rooted in both Gospel values and local cultures, free from anything that obstructs true encounter, and courageous in serving the young and the poor. Whether we are following in the footsteps of Bishop Marengo through Assam's tea gardens, celebrating Saint Maria's canonisation, reflecting on AI's role in ministry, or responding to the Pope's call to prioritise the poor, we are invited to undergo the same conversion: from comfortable Christianity to missionary discipleship.

May this edition of *ING Newline* inspire our reflection, deepen our commitment, and renew our joy in the Salesian vocation. As Mary told the servants at Cana, so she tells us today: “Do whatever he tells you!” Let me wish all our readers a grace-filled celebration of the birth of our Saviour and a faith-filled New Year!

Joy Kachappilly



Message from the Provincial

As we near the end of another year and prepare to celebrate the birth of our Saviour, I am grateful for the many blessings the Lord has bestowed upon our Province. The Christmas season encourages us to reflect on the profound mystery of God's love—a love so great that the Eternal Word became flesh and dwelled among us, choosing to be born in poverty and humility.

The message of Christmas is simple yet profound: God is with us. Amid our joys and challenges, our victories and setbacks, God chooses to be present. As I reflect on our Province's journey over the past year, I notice many signs of this Emmanuel—our formees who willingly respond to the Lord's call, our missionaries who serve diligently in distant villages, our educators who patiently guide young people, and our parish communities that come together to celebrate the Eucharist, drawing strength for their daily struggles.

As we enter 2026, we embrace our new Strenna. Mary's words at the wedding feast of Cana are directed to us today. Like the servants at Cana, we are invited to trust completely in Jesus and to act with the freedom that comes from faith. This is the glorious liberty of the children of God—a freedom that empowers us to serve

generously, love unconditionally, and dedicate ourselves fully to the mission entrusted to us. This enabled Don Bosco to dream the impossible and St Maria Troncatti to spend 43 years in Ecuador, finding joy in hidden service, and it calls each of us to be bold witnesses of the Gospel in our time.

My heart overflows with gratitude for each Confrere who faithfully lives his Salesian consecration, for every sister who serves with maternal love, for our lay collaborators who share our mission with dedication, for our benefactors whose generosity makes our work possible, and for the young people who challenge us and keep us young at heart. I am particularly grateful for the witness of those who have gone before us—pioneers like Bishop Orestes Marengo and prophetic voices like Fr Thomas Chenginiyaden, whose lives remind us that holiness is a concrete reality, lived in the ordinary circumstances of daily fidelity.

As we gather around cribs in our communities, parishes, and homes, may the Child Jesus fill our hearts with his peace! I wish each of you a blessed and joyful Christmas, filled with the warmth of family, the joy of community, and the wonder of encountering the God who loved us enough to become one of us. As we enter 2026, I pray



that this new year brings you abundant blessings, renewed strength for the mission, and a deeper intimacy with the Lord who calls us by name.

Let us continue walking together as a family, supporting one another and serving young people with the enthusiasm and creativity that characterised our Father Don Bosco. With Mary Help of Christians as our guide and Don Bosco as our father and role model,

let us move forward with confidence and joy. May the infant Jesus bless you abundantly! May 2026 be a year of grace, growth, and generous service!

With fraternal affection and prayerful good wishes,

Fr Sebastian Kuricheal
Provincial

Christ the King Parish – Sojong

Fr Amit Chama Lakra

The article highlights Christ the King Parish in Sojong, founded in 1967 as the first Catholic mission centre among the Karbi people, with evangelisation efforts dating back to 1914. The parish was transferred to Salesian administration in 1972 and has since expanded significantly through infrastructure development, the establishment of schools and hostels, and the creation of additional mission centres, now recognised as Parishes. Multiple religious congregations and dedicated Salesian missionaries have served the parish's vibrant Karbi and Garo Catholic communities over nearly six decades of pastoral care.

Christ the King Parish, Sojong, was established on 11 January 1967 with Fr John Mariae (diocesan priest) as the Parish Priest. Sojong was the first Mission Centre among the Karbis. Today, Parish has a vibrant Karbi community and a large number of Garos. The history of the Catholic Church in Karbi Anglong has roots in the Karbi community of the Sojong area.

A few people from Marjong village near Umswai were the first Karbis to be baptised in 1914. Mgr Christopher Becker baptised them at Umtyrkhang village in Khasi Hills beyond the river Umiam. In 1934, Fr Orestes



Christ King Church, Sojong



School Assembly for the Primary Children

Marengo was appointed superior of the Mission District of Guwahati. He began to visit several villages belonging to Karbis, Garos, Tiwas and others. In those years, seven members from the Baptist church were received into the Catholic Church at Sojong. After the establishment of Nongpoh Parish in 1952, the priests from Nongpoh began to visit the villages of Umswai-Umpanai and the Sojong area. Fr Michael DeValle, Fr Julius Costa, Fr Mario Bianchi, and others made visits to the villages. In 1960, Fr John Mariae (a diocesan priest), immediately after his ordination, was sent to Nongpoh as an Assistant priest. Fr Michael Balavoine, who was at Nongpoh at that period, and Fr John Mariae shared a common vision to evangelise the people of Karbi Anglong. Both missionaries began to visit the villages of Karbi, Tiwa and Garo more often.

Fr Michael Balavoine insisted with Bishop Stephen Ferrando and the Salesian Provincial to open a mission centre among the Karbis. In 1966, Bishop Stephen Ferrando gave permission, and the two missionaries were asked to find a suitable

place for the mission centre. There were already a few Catholics at Marjong and Umpanai. In the same year, Bishop Stephen Ferrando himself visited the area to finalise the location of the mission centre. Fr John Mariae went ahead, cutting jungles, making bridges, and organising the people to welcome the Bishop. Fr Michael Balavoine accompanied the Bishop. Both Marjong and Umpanai were considered not suitable for the mission centre; Marjong was on the hilltop; Umpanai had no proper approach route. Attention was turned to Sojong. A few Catholics from Sojong had reached Marjong to welcome the Bishop. They led the Bishop and the missionaries to Sojong. Mr John Kathar, the village headman, promised to procure the hillock of Sojong for the Mission. As soon as the Bishop saw the location and the approach route, he was pleased and decided to open the Mission at Sojong.

Fr John Mariae was appointed the first Parish Priest of Sojong. The Parish was officially inaugurated on 11 January 1967. Mr Sylvester Teron was the first head catechist. On 15 January 1967, the Mission

school was reopened, which had been closed for some time. After one year, Fr Gabriel Fernandez from Kollam (Kerala) joined as an Assistant Priest; however, after a few months, he left Sojong for health reasons. Later on, Fr Gabriel, Fr Mathew Chandrakunnel, and Fr Cyriac Thundathil served as Assistant Priests successively. Fr John Mariae worked zealously, and the number of Catholics increased. In 1970, Fr John Mariae was appointed as Episcopal Vicar for Karbi Anglong. In 1971, he was transferred to Diphu. For a short period, the Parish was overseen by Fr Joseph Pooppillil MCBS, after which it was handed over to the Salesians in 1972.

On 26 January 1971, the Sisters of Apostolic Carmel (AC) established the Carmel Convent at Sojong. They continue to provide dedicated service to the Parish, school, hostel, and villages. They operated the weaving/knitting centre for girls at the Convent for several years, but it has now been discontinued.

Fr Joseph Pazhekadavan was the Parish Priest from 1973 to 1988. The Parish, the school and the hostels for boys and girls experienced further growth during his tenure. The construction of the beautiful Parish Church of Sojong was another great contribution of Fr Joseph. The Salesian community of Christ King Parish, Sojong, was canonically approved in 1988. Fr. Albano D'Mello, who was the Rector and Parish Priest from 1988 to 1992, brought to completion the church building. In the successive years, Fr George Maliekal (1992-96), Fr Sebastian Kunnathukuzhy (1996-2000), Fr Abraham Kanattu (2000-2002), Fr Tomy Anikuzhikattil (2002-2008) and Fr



Band Players in front of the School

Joseph Teron (2009-2015) served as Parish Priests who were also Rectors.

Fr Abraham Vetticad served the Parish for nearly a quarter of a century, beginning in 1978. He worked zealously, especially for the Garo community; he is fondly known as the 'Achu Father' (Grandpa). With his arrival, greater attention was given to the pastoral needs of the Garo community, which then numbered more than 7000 Catholics. With financial assistance from the Salesian Province of Guwahati, Fr George Maliekal (Parish Priest 1992-96) purchased the additional plot of land adjacent to the Mission land at Satgaon. Thanks to the generosity of Mgr Orestes Marengo and other resources, the new school building was constructed at Satgaon.



Extra-curricular activities

During Fr Sebastian Kunnathukuzhy's tenure as Parish Priest, despite not knowing the local languages, he managed to resolve land disputes in Satgaon, build a church there, complete the construction of classrooms in both Sojong and Satgaon, change the school's name from Christ King to Don Bosco School in Sojong, standardise the school uniforms according to Don Bosco School guidelines at both locations, increase school fees to cover teachers' salaries, and bring the Mother Teresa Sisters to Sojong and the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians to Satgaon. On 25 January 1997, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC) opened their convent at Satgaon, with the primary aim of attending to the pastoral, educational, and healthcare needs of the Garo community. The Sisters of Missionaries of Charity (MC) opened their convent at Sojong on 5 July 1998. They provide great service, especially to the area's poor and sick.

With the newly built church, convent, school, and hostels for boys and girls, Satgaon became a valued centre for the many Garo villages of the parish. On 4 January 2015, Satgaon was established as a parish with Fr Gabriel G Momin as its first parish priest and Fr Francis Lakra as the inaugural assistant parish priest.

The school at Rongkiri village was established in 2007 when Fr Joseph Teron served as the Parish Priest of Amkachi. When he was transferred to Sojong, with the understanding of the Provincial and his successor at Amkachi, Fr Teron continued to oversee it from Sojong. It remained with Sojong until March 2025. Currently, the Salesian Community of Baithalangso is responsible for the Rongkiri school, as it is much closer. It has 96 students and 27 boarders.

Fr Joseph Teron established a school at Karbirongsopi in 2010. The Handmaids of Christ Sisters have been running the school since 2012 and continue to run it. Currently, there are 164 students enrolled.

During his tenure as Parish Priest, Fr Joseph Teron established a village school at Borkok, a remote village, to serve the educational needs of the poor children there. Unfortunately, he had to close it down a few years later due to a lack of students.

In 2015, Fr Lucas Marak was appointed Rector and Parish Priest in Sojong. During his tenure, with the active financial support of the then-provincial, the presbytery was renovated. Upon completing his term as Rector, Fr Siby John Vattapara became the Rector and Parish Priest in 2021. During his brief three-year period, Fr Siby was able to



Inauguration of the Sports Day

refurbish the living rooms in the presbytery and build four village chapels. Three years later, in 2024, Fr Abraham Kanattu returned to Sojong as Rector and Parish Priest.

The Parish of Sojong has grown in the past years through the dedicated work of other Salesian priests like Fr Thomas Punnolikunnel, Fr Hubert Marak, Fr Isaac Mattappillil, Fr Victor Ampanattuvila, Fr Ignatius Sangma, Fr Benjamin Daimary, Fr Michael Bhengra, Fr Jose Thattil Umbavu, Fr Francis Xavier Lakra, Fr Joseph Puthenpurackal, Fr Aloysius Roland Halge, Fr Jonas Toppo, Fr Jose Perunneparambil and Fr Xavier Beck. Br Benjamin E. Kathar served as hostel warden for some years.

When the new Parish of Jirikyndeng was established in 1986, the areas of Kheroni and Hamren, which had previously been part of Sojong, became part of it. Subsequently, Hamren was designated as a separate Parish in 1990. Since 2009, Kheroni has become a

Parish. On 15 March 2004, a new Don Bosco School was inaugurated at Jengkha. The villagers donated 30 bighas of land at Jengkha for the school. It became a parish in 2015.

The Parish at Sojong encompasses fifteen villages with 270 Catholic families. The smallest village has 2 families, while the largest has 55 families. The overall Catholic population totals 1356 (666 males and 690 females). Don Bosco School, Sojong, was upgraded to Higher Secondary on 6 August 2010. At present, there are 656 students (348 boys and 308 girls).

In the past year, the parish has organised several programmes to engage different sections of the Catholic community. The Parish organised two retreats last year; these were well attended. Diphu Diocese Karbi Catholic Nimarli Asong (DDKKNA), the Karbi Catholic Women's Association, held its 33rd general convention on the



Boys' Hostel

grounds of the School at Sojong. One thousand three hundred fifty registered delegates participated in it. The Inter-Diocesan Football Tournament was also held at our school grounds last year.

As of December 2025, the Salesian community includes Fr Abraham Kanattu (Rector and Parish Priest), Fr Pradeep Ekka (Assistant Parish Priest and Principal) and Deacon Francis Xavier Minj.

Servant of God Bishop Orestes Marengo

—Fr Pradeep Ekka

On Thursday, 6 November 2025, the Theological Consultors at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints expressed a unanimous positive opinion regarding the heroic exercise of virtues of the Servant of God Oreste Marengo, bringing him a step closer to being declared Venerable. Part II describes the priestly ministry (1932- 1951) of Servant of God Bishop Orestes Marengo, highlighting his pioneering missionary work in Assam. He rediscovered and revived forgotten Christian communities among the Adivasis and in remote villages and tea estates. During World War II, a difficult period, he served as Master of Novices and Rector. His exceptional pastoral dedication, linguistic skills, and deep cultural understanding allowed him to serve effectively among various tribal groups, including the Karbi and Garo peoples. His foundational efforts influenced future generations of Salesian missionaries despite the hardships of war and internment. Though initially hesitant due to humility and self-doubt, Fr Marengo's nineteen years of distinguished service culminated in his appointment as the first Bishop of Dibrugarh in 1951.

Initial Apostolate in Guwahati (1932-1934)

After his ordination on 2 April 1932, Fr Marengo was posted to Guwahati, the first Salesian mission centre in the Brahmaputra Valley. Under Fr Vincent Scuderi (1902-1982), who served as Rector and Parish Priest, Fr Marengo was introduced to missionary life. He later remarked of

Scuderi: "Fr Scuderi was a giant of a missionary whose only fault was that he expected pygmies like myself to keep his pace." Fr Marengo also held the position of prefect of studies at the School.

The mission territory of Guwahati was vast, encompassing the two districts of Kamrup and Goalpara, approximately 350 by 80 kilometres, with 5,889 Catholics in 1932. The apostolates included an aspirantate, a



Parish, chaplaincies, an orphanage, a technical School, mission centres, and a railway chaplaincy. The Adivasi congregation was dispersed across small villages and tea gardens throughout this extensive area.

As a railway chaplain, Fr Marengo could travel easily by train for his missionary journeys, although the journey from stations to villages often involved long walks. The chapels in villages were usually bamboo and thatch huts with mats placed on mud floors for worship. Despite these modest conditions, Marengo's ministry began to produce remarkable results.

Discovery of Lost Christian Communities

In May 1933, Fr Marengo made a significant breakthrough by reaching out to the Christian community at Kumarikatta, close to the Bhutanese border and 90 kilometres north of Guwahati. The British had established jute and sugarcane plantations there, employing thousands of Adivasis from

Chotanagpur, many of whom were Catholics. When the plantations closed, these workers remained and established new villages but lost contact with the Church.

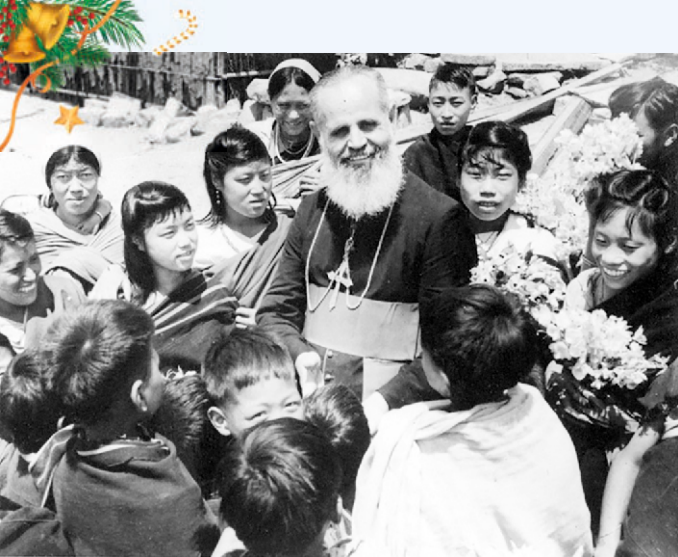
Fr Marengo was able to locate these Christians and administer sacraments after more than twenty years of pastoral neglect. These villagers were prosperous due to their land cultivation, though alcohol consumption remained a significant challenge for the otherwise hardworking and honest Adivasi people. Within a few years under Fr Marengo's care, the newly discovered villages became fervent communities. By 1934, there were 13 new Catholic communities in the area, each with a chapel, catechists, Schools, and teachers in the more important villages.

The success of this work was celebrated on 11 February 1934, when a gathering of 600 people was organised at Kumarikatta, with Mgr Louis Mathias presiding over the Holy Eucharist. Fr Marengo also discovered the Nagarijuli Tea Garden, 44 kilometres from Kumarikatta, which had a sizeable Catholic population that had been unserved for over twenty years. He helped them return to the Faith and regularise their marriages.

Ministry in Dibrugarh (1933-1934)

On 24 July 1933, Provincial Mgr Louis Mathias appointed Marengo to oversee the Dibrugarh mission for one year while Fr Leo Piasecki returned to Poland for home holidays. Dibrugarh, 435 kilometres north-east of Guwahati and situated on the Brahmaputra River, was a significant town known for its tea plantations.

The mission was originally established by Salvatorian Fathers in 1908 but was abandoned during World War I when



Bishop Marengo among Children

the German missionaries were compelled to leave. The Jesuits temporarily maintained it until the Salesians took over in 1922. In 1931, the mission district was divided, with Dibrugarh becoming the headquarters of the new eastern district.

During his year in Dibrugarh, Fr Marengo noted substantial growth in the Catholic population. The recorded number had been 8,000, but after a detailed visitation, he found it had increased to 15,000. This growth was mainly due to the steady influx of Catholic labourers from Chotanagpur, recruited through a system where Catholic priests in Chotanagpur selected workers, lending credibility to both labourers and tea planters.

The "Three Years Repatriation Scheme" introduced in 1930 granted labourers the right to either return home at company expense or sign new contracts after three years. Christians were spread across more than a hundred communities, and missionaries received first-class railway and steamer passes from the Assam-Bengal Railway Company to support their work.

While most tea garden managers were

Protestant, they were generally welcoming and helpful to missionaries, believing that "good Christians make good labourers."

Leadership in Guwahati Mission and School (1934-1936)

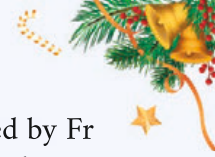
Returning to Guwahati on 24 July 1934, Fr Marengo assumed responsibility for the School. When Fr Scuderi was nominated Provincial of North India in 1934, Fr Marengo was appointed Rector of Don Bosco Guwahati, overseeing the mission until late 1935.

On 9 February 1935, the Feast of Don Bosco was celebrated for the first time in Guwahati, with Christians from all mission stations gathering for the event. A Lenten retreat for the Anglo-Indian community, preached by Fr Wollaston Douglas Joseph, sparked a spiritual awakening that resulted in more regular church attendance and voluntary community service, including Parishioners painting the church at their own expense.

When Fr Antony Alessi was called from Tezpur to oversee the School and Parish, Fr Marengo was freed to focus on dedicated mission work in the Kamrup and Goalpara Districts. He described 1936 as "the happiest year of my life," when he was free to travel from village to village, inspiring Christian communities. He recounted his mission tours: "My touring meant strenuous marching most of the time, under the scorching sun or pelting rain, accompanied by my faithful Guido (catechist) and, on occasions, one or two others."

Formator in West Bengal (1936-1946)

On Good Friday, 10 April 1936, a devastating fire destroyed the Salesian



formation house, Our Lady's House at Shillong. The novitiate, studentate of philosophy and theology, and cathedral were reduced to ashes within thirty minutes. Students had to temporarily relocate to the Jesuit summer villa 'Woodcot' at Sypoydhura, Kurseong, on the way to Darjeeling before moving to Bandel in early 1937.

Master of Novices at Bandel (1936-1938)

In November 1936, after suffering severe malaria during a month-long mission tour among the Bodos in Goalpara district, Fr Marengo received an urgent telegram summoning him to Calcutta. Fr Scuderi appointed him Master of Novices, partly out of concern for his health but primarily recognising his formation capabilities.

On 24 November 1936, eight novices commenced their novitiate under Fr Marengo at Bandel. The remarkable visit from Fr Anthony Candela from Rome in March 1937 led to positive evaluations and recommendations for dedicated facilities for the novitiate. Fr Marengo's talks to novices were highly regarded for their thoughtful insight and practical application. A surviving copybook from one novice records his spiritual guidance: "Make with great fervour the visit to the Blessed Sacrament. That will help you to remain with God during the day. A stronger interior life will be a remedy for you..."

Rector and Novice Master at Sonada (1938-1946)

In 1938, the novices and philosophy students were moved to Sonada in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Fr Marengo was appointed both Rector of the philosophy students and master of novices. He

converted an old brewery, purchased by Fr Scuderi, into a functional formation house with dormitories, classrooms, and a chapel.

Sonada, situated at 6,000 feet elevation and often misty, was described by Fr Marengo as "surely an ideal place for study with very little to distract you." He worked tirelessly to prepare facilities and sought benefactor support, assuring donors that "Persons wishing to help in the education of these boys by prayer or by sending donations can be assured of the sincere gratitude of the staff and pupils who offer special prayers daily."

Leadership During World War II

During World War II, Fr Marengo showed exceptional leadership as Italian and German confreres were interned. Because he had not returned to Italy since 1923, he was exempt from internment and stayed to care for the formation community. He worked with British police officials during regular inspections, dealt with the confiscation of the community's motor car and wireless set, and wanted more professors to teach the brothers.

The War years demanded tough decisions and careful planning. Non-Italian and non-German confreres were assigned to various missions to replace interned missionaries, while new novices from Italy could no longer be admitted, requiring alternative arrangements. Despite these difficulties, Fr Marengo continued to oversee the formation programme and sustain community life.

The chronicle noted upon his departure in December 1946: "With the departure of Fr Marengo, the college lost, as it were, one of its pillars. His fatherly care of the boys, his mortification, spirit of piety and work



were a constant source of good example to everyone in the house.”

Return to Assam: Tezpur and Nowgong Mission (1946-1951)

In June 1946, Fr Marengo wrote to Rector Major Fr. Peter Ricaldone expressing his strong desire to return to Assam: “The jungles of Assam are waiting for me, and I want to return to them willingly after ten years of absence. Hard life is good for me.” On 26 December 1946, he left Sonada to go back to his cherished mission field, taking eight aspirants with him to Shillong for their novitiate.

Ministry in Tezpur and Nowgong

Appointed to Tezpur Parish to oversee the Nowgong district, Fr Marengo worked under Fr Giuseppe Dal Broi, who managed the extensive Tezpur mission. Situated 180 kilometres from Guwahati on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra, Tezpur was established as a mission station on 1 June 1932 by pioneering missionaries Fr Alessi and Fr Ravalico.

The Nowgong mission district, formerly overseen from Guwahati, was transferred to Tezpur because it was closer (55 kilometres compared to 125 kilometres). In January 1947, Fr Marengo began intensive touring of the Nowgong mission, dedicating at least 20 days each month to pastoral visits. The Catholic population mainly consisted of Adivasis living in newly established villages and tea gardens, and he succeeded in visiting all villages every two months.

Work Among the Karbi Tribe

At Bishop Ferrando’s request, Fr Marengo led efforts among the Karbi Tribe (formerly known as Mikirs), achieving the first

Karbi baptism in 1948. In April 1949, Bishop Ferrando, Provincial Fr A. Alessi, and Fr Dal Broi visited the Mikir Hills under Marengo’s supervision. The bishop expressed great satisfaction with Marengo’s work and the growth of the Church in that mission area.

Care for Migrant Garos

The Garos migrated in large numbers from Bangladesh’s Sylhet District to Nowgong District, seeking better opportunities due to famine and hardship. Finding many new Garo settlements in severe poverty, with families starving and struck by malaria, Fr Marengo intervened with his limited resources to provide necessities and pastoral care.

Appointment as Bishop of Dibrugarh (1951)

By 1951, the steady growth of Catholic communities in Assam required the division of the diocese of Shillong. Dibrugarh was selected as the headquarters for the new diocese. Provincial Fr Mariano Uguet wrote to the Rector Major on 28 June 1949, identifying Fr Marengo as the leading candidate: “Fr Marengo, a good religious and zealous missionary, knows the languages and the area well, and has the respect of his Confreres.” Archbishop Louis Mathias agreed, calling Fr Marengo “the best candidate for such a great responsibility.”

On 23 July 1951, the appointment was announced. Ironically, Fr Marengo learned of his nomination from a rickshaw puller while returning from a retreat he had preached to the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians in Golaghat. The news came as a complete shock, as he had neither been consulted nor informed beforehand.



Prayer for the beatification and canonization of **Bishop Orestes Marengo**

Almighty and merciful Father,/

we your children,/

thank you very much for the gift

of Bishop Marengo to India,/

and especially to the North East./

As a great missionary/

he walked the length and breadth

of his mission area,/

learned many languages,/

and was unparalleled in his love

for everyone he met./

He spent long hours in prayer to you, Father,/

to shower your blessings on us./

Now that you have welcomed him in heaven,/

please make him a worthy intercessor for us

who invoke him/

for..... (mention your special intention)/

Give us the joy of experiencing him/

as an example of holiness for your people,/

so that in his footsteps/

we too may seek souls and serve you alone./

Through Jesus Christ your Son Our Lord./

Amen.

1 Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.

13-116

Kindly report favours received to the Bishop of
Tura where the SoG died. You may also contact
Vice-postulator: jputhen@gmail.com
94361 18732 / 94363-08357 (Provincial Guwahati)

Fr Marengo's initial response was marked by deep reluctance, citing fear of failure and lack of courage. He wrote to the Apostolic Nunzio describing his "extremely excitable and impressionable temperament." He explained that "any necessity for me of going out of my shell, of facing a little publicity, fills me with fear and dismay." He had been avoiding public functions due to nervous attacks that prevented him from articulating words properly.

After four months of prayer and consultation, and following counsel from Rector Major Fr Peter Ricaldone, who advised: "Have confidence in Mary, Help of Christians, and in Don Bosco," Fr Marengo finally accepted on 31 October 1951, writing: "If you think and say that I should accept, I will do so whatever be the cost."

Conclusion

Fr Marengo's nineteen years of priestly ministry (1932-1951) demonstrated exceptional pastoral dedication, administrative skill, and formative ability. His talent for discovering and reintegrating lost Christian communities, his success in expanding the Church's presence among diverse tribal groups, his leadership during the crisis of World War II, and his effective training of future missionaries established him as an outstanding missionary priest. His deep knowledge of local languages and cultures, coupled with his genuine love for the people he served, prepared him well for episcopal responsibilities. The hesitation he displayed in accepting the bishopric paradoxically confirmed his suitability, reflecting the humility and pastoral heart that had characterised his entire priestly ministry in Northeast India.

The African Cultural Ethos and Its Significance for Evangelisation in Northeast India

Fr Thomas Chenginiyaden

This article examines the striking similarities between African cultural values—characterised by meaningful greetings, generous hospitality, community solidarity, respect for elders, appreciation of silence, flexible time management, and joyful celebration—and the tribal customs of Northeast India. It argues that understanding these shared values is essential for effective evangelisation and catechesis in the region. The author criticises historical missionary approaches that imposed Western cultural forms alongside Christian faith, instead promoting genuine inculturation that distinguishes between core Christian doctrines and cultural expressions. This approach allows the Church to become truly rooted in local traditions, rather than being perceived as a foreign Western religion.

In our increasingly interconnected world, cultures often remain isolated within their own boundaries, unaware of the enriching values beyond their immediate experience. This article explores Africa's fundamental cultural values, which serve as a common foundation for unity amidst the continent's vast diversity. These cultural expressions bear striking similarities to the tribal cultures of Northeast India, providing valuable insights for missionaries aiming to make their ministry more relevant and effective. By examining African cultural ethos and drawing connections to Northeastern Indian cultures, this article encourages missionaries to become deeply rooted in the cultures they serve, thereby enhancing their evangelisation and catechesis efforts.

Understanding Cultural Ethos

Cultural ethos refers to the distinctive character, spirit, and core values that define a specific society or community. While culture encompasses the arts, customs, and routines of a society, ethos embodies the

fundamental principles and character that influence how members interact and perceive their world. This unseen framework guides decision-making, social customs, and approaches to family, work,



Fr Thomas in his Youthful Days

education, and civic duties. Passed down through storytelling, rituals, institutions, and everyday interactions, cultural ethos shapes identity and belonging while adapting to new challenges. Understanding a culture's ethos is essential for effective cross-cultural communication, as it reveals the deeper motivations and worldviews that influence human behaviour beyond superficial customs.



In the Company of his Siblings

The African Cultural Ethos

Africa, home to 1.2 billion people across 55 independent countries, speaks between 1500 and 2000 languages and comprises hundreds of tribes and ethnic groups. Despite this remarkable diversity, African cultures share fundamental traits: strong moral principles, deep respect for tradition, and high regard for elders and authority.

The following expressions characterise Africa's distinctive cultural ethos:

Greeting holds great importance in African culture, going beyond social politeness to become meaningful communication. Africans take time to greet each person individually, even the youngest child, often showing physical expressions of love and respect. This practice recognises the fundamental human need for acknowledgement and appreciation, responding to it quite effectively.

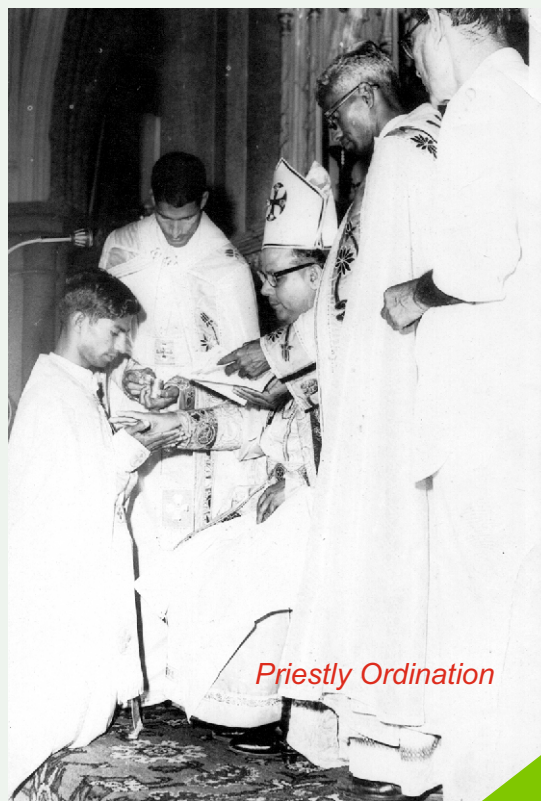
Hospitality shows remarkable generosity. An African can journey great distances without money, receiving warm welcomes from communities that share tribal ties. This hospitality, given freely and with love, serves as a shining example against human selfishness in a world driven by economics.

Solidarity and mutual support ensure that

no community member is left behind. Neighbours provide food and meet basic needs for those unable to care for themselves. Communities pool resources to build houses and support members during marriages, funerals, and emergencies. Everyone belongs; no one is a 'nobody.'

Respect for elders is deeply rooted in African values. Elders, who uphold and transmit cultural traditions, are consistently recognised, greeted with respect, served first at meals, and their opinions are considered with care. Unfortunately, Western cultural influences are gradually weakening this essential aspect.

Silence holds deep significance in African culture. Africans speak only when necessary and value comfortable silence, simply enjoying the presence of others. This sharply contrasts with modern civilisation's noise, reflecting a similar appreciation for silence



Priestly Ordination



With his Companions

in Indian culture as a means of self-mastery and uncovering truth.

Time is perceived differently in African culture—people are prioritised over schedules. Africans wait patiently for others, functioning on their own understanding of time, where events unfold naturally. Community meetings give everyone the chance to speak, regardless of how long it takes, valuing human dignity more than efficiency.

Joy and happiness find vibrant expression through song and dance. African celebrations are communal events where everyone participates freely. Struggles and pains are set aside as communities celebrate together, with singing and dancing central to both social gatherings and religious festivities.

Cultural Ethos of Northeast India

Northeast India's cultural ethos reflects many African characteristics while retaining its distinctive identity. The region consists of eight states—Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura—home to over 200 tribes speaking more than 100 languages.

This cultural landscape showcases indigenous traditions fused with Tibetan Buddhism, Christianity, and Hindu practices, forming a syncretic spiritual environment.

Community-focused values shape social organisation through extended families and clan systems. Collective ownership, especially of land and resources, strengthens bonds with ancestral territories and promotes sustainable environmental practices. Traditional festivals, oral literature, and artistic expressions form the heart of cultural identity, celebrating seasonal cycles, agricultural milestones, and reverence for ancestors through vibrant dance, music, and handicrafts.

The region emphasises hospitality, respect for elders, and gender equality, with many societies following matrilineal systems that grant women significant social and economic influence. Despite historical isolation and political challenges, these communities preserve cultural authenticity while adapting to modernity, establishing institutions that safeguard indigenous knowledge alongside contemporary learning. Strong environmental stewardship is evident through sacred groves, community forests, and traditional conservation practices, demonstrating deep ecological awareness.

Missiological Implications

The harmonious cultural similarities between Africa and Northeast India provide important lessons for missionaries. To stay relevant and effective in evangelisation, missionaries must set aside their own cultural traditions and discover the values



St. Joseph's Parish - Gambella



esteemed by those they serve. Assumptions of cultural superiority inevitably cause pastoral failure.

Faith and Culture: These are deeply interconnected, with culture providing the setting where faith is expressed, especially through liturgical and sacramental rites. Christianity aims to fully communicate itself through local cultural values without compromising doctrine. Throughout history, Christianity has shaped its multicultural identity by responding to diverse cultural contexts.

Missed Opportunities: Church history demonstrates that the greatest chances for conversion were lost due to a lack of understanding of local cultural values. Missionaries like Matteo Ricci, St John de Britto, and De Nobili recognised this challenge. Nonetheless, many others failed to effectively weave Christian faith with local traditions in China, South India, and Southeast Asia.

Christianity in Western Attire: Early missionaries, despite their self-sacrifice and zeal, presented Christianity through Western formats—worship, music, hymns, and social customs were predominantly Western. Devotional hymns used Western melodies with translated lyrics; Western dress and lifestyle made Christianity seem foreign. There was little effort to incorporate positive cultural elements of local populations.

Seminary Formation: Priestly formation was entirely Western, with candidates taught to adopt Western lifestyles in diet and dress. Priests received insufficient exposure to local cultures, fuelling the view of Christianity as a foreign religion.

Conclusion

India's civilisation predates Christianity, with culture and social traditions deeply influenced by the predominant religious practices. We must carefully distinguish

between essential religious elements and cultural customs. For example, handshaking as a greeting is Western, introduced by missionaries and colonial authorities, not inherent to Christianity.

While past mistakes arose from prevailing missionary attitudes rather than malice, correction remains necessary. When Indians refer to the Church as “Western” or “foreign,” there is truth that demands urgent attention.

Christianity is a faith for all people and cultures; sharing faith does not mean imposing social customs. Its true social expression is love for everyone, regardless of differences. The Church in India must recognise this challenge and plan a clear path forward, ensuring that expressions of faith honour and integrate the rich cultural traditions of the communities served.

Higher Education Section: Assam Don Bosco University

—Fr Bromio Ch. Marak

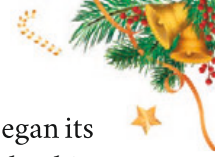
Assam Don Bosco University originated from a vision developed during the 1998 Golden Jubilee celebrations of Don Bosco School, Pan Bazar. It progressed with the acquisition of land at Azara in 1999, became a junior college in 2001, and was officially inaugurated as a University by the then Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi on 6 December 2008. In 2025, the University operates across three campuses—Tapesia (its main 500-acre campus), Azara, and Kharguli—offering comprehensive academic programmes through five schools and 26 departments. It remains the only private University in Assam with NAAC ‘A’ accreditation, attracting students from Northeast India and beyond in line with Don Bosco’s educational mission.

The story of Assam Don Bosco University begins with a vision that emerged during the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Don Bosco School, Pan Bazar, in 1998. The Salesians of the Province of Guwahati had long nurtured the desire to establish a Higher Secondary

School in Guwahati, with the eventual aim of developing it into a college and ultimately a university. This aspiration gained urgent momentum among the Salesians and received wholehearted support from the

ADBU, Azara Campus





Animation in the Atrium, Azara

guardians of students and even the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council (AHSEC).

Rev. Fr Dominic Jala, the then Salesian Provincial of Guwahati, granted permission to proceed with the project. In a historic transaction on 7 June 1999, Fr Kuriala Chittattukalam signed the sale deed for the present plot of land at Azara, an abandoned soap factory belonging to M/s Globe India Ltd, Fancy Lane, Kolkata. Fr Lukose Cheruvalil and Fr Santosh Minj witnessed the deed. Two days later, on 9 June 1999, Fr Kuriala Chittattukalam, Fr Lukose Cheruvalil, Fr George Plathotam, and Fr Jose Kadaprayil took possession of the land, marking the beginning of the Salesian presence at Azara.

The foundation stone for Don Bosco Junior College at Azara was laid on 15 November 2000 by Prof. HL Duorah, the then Vice Chancellor of Gauhati University, and blessed by Fr. Philip Barjo, the then Salesian Provincial of Guwahati. The Assam Higher Secondary Education Council granted permission to start Classes XI and XII (Commerce and Science) on 18 July 2001. On 25 July 2001, with 66 students in Class

XI, Don Bosco Junior College began its first day of classes under the leadership of Fr Kuriala as its first Principal.

The official inauguration took place on 1 August 2001 in the presence of Lt. Gen (Rtd) S.K. Sinha, the then Governor of Assam, Most Rev. Thomas Menampampil, the then Archbishop of Guwahati, Rev. Fr Philip Barjo, the then Salesian Provincial, and a galaxy of Salesians, religious men and women, and civil dignitaries. On 24 July 2003, the first batch of Arts students commenced their studies.

The Don Bosco Society Azara was registered at Shillong with the Registrar of Societies on 5 April 2002. The transformation from Junior College to University began in earnest when Fr Stephen Mavely joined the community at Azara on 1 May 2006 with the express mission of upgrading the institution. He took charge as Principal from Fr Kuriala Chittattukalam on 15 May 2006. Fr Joby Manjakkattil joined as Vice Principal-cum-Warden on 27 May 2006.

On 14 July 2006, the then Rector Major and his Council formally approved the opening of Don Bosco College at Azara in place of the existing Don Bosco Junior College and canonically erected Don Bosco College, Azara, as a regular house under the patronage of St John Bosco. Fr Stephen Mavely was appointed as its first Rector.

After much study and planning at various levels, the formal application to establish the University was sent to the General Council, Rome, on 3 December 2006, with approval obtained on 10 January 2007. Upon receiving permission from the Rector Major,



a formal application to the Government of Assam to establish the first State University in the private sector was submitted on 8 November 2007, accompanied by a Detailed Project Report prepared in consultation with M/S Kalinga Software Pvt Ltd.

The Government of Assam issued the Letter of Intent on 29 March 2008, which remains the Foundation Day of the University. An Ordinance followed this on 3 December 2008, and the University was formally inaugurated by Shri Tarun Gogoi, the then Chief Minister of Assam, on 6 December 2008. The Assam Don Bosco University Act, 2009, was passed on 9 January 2009 and published in the official gazette on 12 February 2009, formally completing the establishment process.

Development in the Early Years: Azara and Kharguli Campuses

When Assam Don Bosco University was established in 2008, Fr Stephen Mavelly was appointed as its first Vice Chancellor. The University Grants Commission empowered the University to award degrees under Section 2(f) of the UGC Act 1956 on 13 November 2009. When Rev. Fr Pascual Chavez, the then Rector Major of Don Bosco Society, visited north-east India, he blessed the Foundation Stone of the University on 10 November 2009 at the Azara Campus.

The first major academic venture was the establishment of Don Bosco College of Engineering and Technology as the University's first Constituent Centre, later rechristened as the School of Technology. The University received the final 'Letter of



Students in front of Don Bosco Institute of Management

Approval' from AICTE on 30 June 2008, and the College was inaugurated on 11 August 2008 with 240 students in four streams of engineering.

Fr Joseph Nellanatt joined the Azara campus of the University as Pro Vice Chancellor on 29 March 2008. Dr Basil Koikara was appointed Registrar on 25 September 2008, serving until 31 October 2017. During this period, several other Salesians contributed to the University's growth: Br Benjamin Kathar served as Warden from 18 June 2010 to November 2011, Fr Cyriac Vettickathadam joined as Controller of Examinations on 1 June 2011 and was transferred in November 2013 to start a new College at Bongaigaon.

A second campus is the Kharguli Campus, part of Don Bosco Institute, situated in the Ramsai Hills beside the majestic Brahmaputra and is an architectural marvel. The campus was inaugurated on 27 August 2009 and offers the MBA programme of the School of Commerce and Management. It also runs non-formal vocational courses. The successive directors of the Institute, Fr Thomas Vattathara, Fr Johnson Parackal, Fr John Parankimalil, and currently Fr Cletus Pattamkulam, oversee the programme.



Fr Joseph Anikuzhikkattil served as Rector of the Azara campus from 21 August 2011 to July 2012 and was also appointed Director of DBU Global. Br Joby Mani joined as hostel Warden on 16 July 2012 and was transferred to Baithalangso in February 2014. Fr Francis Fernandez joined on 27 January 2013 as Campus Minister and later became Controller of Examinations in 2014, serving until 16 July 2019.

Fr Paul Cheruthottupura from the Salesian Province of Kolkata joined on 6 June 2013 and served as Head of the newly introduced Department of Mass Communication until June 2016. Fr Abhilash Vadakkekara joined as Warden of Hostels on 16 January 2014 and was transferred to Tura on 2 April 2017. Fr Xavier Mattam from Dimapur Province joined on 22 March 2014 as Assistant Professor in Computer Science and Director of DBU Global.

The University achieved notable milestones during this period. A UGC Inspection Team visited on 2 November 2011, and a second visit on 29 October 2013 confirmed full compliance with UGC standards. On 27 November 2014, NAAC rated the University with a B+ grade. Distance Education started in 2010 with 78 students, and within six years, DBU-Global had over 5,000 students from 113 countries. The University celebrated its first Convocation on 19 September 2012, and since then, it has become an annual event.

The Tapesia Campus

A major milestone in the University's development was the acquisition of 230 acres of land at Tapesia, on the outskirts of Guwahati City, for the permanent campus. The groundbreaking and blessing ceremony

was held on 15 June 2012, jointly presided over by Rev. Fr Joseph Almeida, the outgoing Provincial of Guwahati, who had been a staunch supporter from the beginning, and Rev. Fr Thomas Vattathara, the new Provincial.

Construction works finally began with the signing of the contract in November 2013, with actual construction starting in April 2014. The first group of buildings was completed by July 2016, including Academic Block I, Men's and Women's Hostels, Food Court, Laundry, 30 Bachelor's Quarters, 24 Family Quarters, and Guest House.

The Salesians moved into Tapesia Gardens on 4 July 2016; the faculty occupied their residences a month later. On 1 August 2016, Fr Jose Pellissery from the Salesian Province of Kolkata joined on 10 February 2016 to assist with construction and became Superintendent of Hostels at Tapesia Campus, while students moved into the hostels on 16 August 2016. The inauguration of the Academic Year took place on 18 August 2016. On 30 June 2016, the University Community at Azara was divided into two groups: the Tapesia Campus Community, with Fr Stephen Mavelly (Rector), Fr Francis Fernandez (Controller of Examinations), Fr Jose Pellissery (Superintendent of Hostels), and student Fathers and Brothers; and the Azara Campus community with Fr Joseph Nellanatt (Vice-Rector), Fr Abhilash Vadakkekara (Warden) and Fr Xavier Mattam.

In December 2016, Don Bosco University, Tapesia community was canonically established with Fr Stephen Mavelly as Rector, while Fr Joseph Nellanatt was appointed Rector of the Azara Campus



Aerial view of Tapesia Campus

Community. The Campus was formally dedicated to the people of north-east India by Rev. Fr Pascual Chavez, former Rector Major, on 23 October 2016. A significant achievement came in June 2017 when the University was included under Section 12(B) of the UGC Act, making it eligible for various government grants.

Fr Thomas Punnolikunnel joined the Azara Community on 16 December 2016 as Spiritual Guide and Confessor. On 31 March 2017, Br Paul Makri joined as the Warden of Hostels in Azara. In the same year, Fr Xavier Mattam left Azara, and on 15 October, Fr Biju Michael Pulianmackal returned to join the Azara Community as Vice Rector and Registrar of the University. Fr Joseph Thelekkatt also worked in Azara as the superintendent of Hostels during this period from 2017 to 2018. Br Paul Makri was transferred in August 2019 to the community at Maligaon to pursue studies in Social Work at TISS, Guwahati. Fr Thomas Lakra briefly assumed his responsibilities until the appointment of Fr Vinod Lugun as the regular Warden in late August 2019.

Recent Developments

When Fr Biju Michael was elected the regional councillor for the South Asia region at the 28th General Chapter in 2020, Fr Johnny Jose Pathinanchil from the Salesian Province of Bangalore was appointed the registrar of the university. In the same year, Fr Anthony Dhason took charge as the Warden of the hostels at the Azara campus.

Fr Shajan Noronha from Bangalore province arrived at the Tapesia campus in May 2020 as a research scholar in the Department of English. In the same year, Fr Abraham Kanattu joined the Tapesia campus as its campus minister. In February 2021, Fr Pellissery left, and Fr Shajan became the Hostel Superintendent. In April 2021, he left for Kerala for post-COVID treatment and did not return. Fr Narendra Lakra was appointed as the superintendent of hostels at the Tapesia campus in 2021.

In 2022, the term of Fr Joseph Nellanatt as the Rector of Azara ended, and Fr Joy Kachappilly was appointed the Rector of the Salesian community. Fr Nellanatt continued to be Pro-Vice Chancellor of the university, residing at the Azara campus. In the same year, Fr Jose Palely from the Province of



Aerial View of the Administrative Block of the Tapesia Campus

Dimapur joined the Tapesia campus as Pro-Vice Chancellor. Fr Abraham Kanattu was appointed Rector of the Salesian community at Tapesia when Fr Stephen Mavelly concluded his term as the Rector.

A significant leadership change took place in 2023 at Assam Don Bosco University when Fr Jose Palely was appointed Vice Chancellor following Fr Stephen Mavelly's resignation, marking a new chapter in the university's leadership. That same year, Fr Pojit Marak was appointed Warden of the Tapesia hostels. In 2024, Fr Thomas Lakra was named campus minister at the Azara campus. Also in 2024, Fr Jose Palely became Rector of the Tapesia, succeeding Fr Abraham Kanattu, who had been transferred to Sojong in 2023. Following Fr Johnny Jose Pathinanchil's departure for his home province, Fr Zachary Varickasseril was appointed Registrar. In 2024, Fr James Chacko Molekunel from Kolkata joined the Tapesia campus as Director of the School of Social Sciences. When Fr Pojit Marak was transferred to Rongjeng, Fr Romanus Barwa was appointed Warden of the Tapesia campus. In 2025, Fr Joy Kachappilly was succeeded by Fr Thomas Kunnappillil, and Fr Romanus Barwa replaced Fr Anthony Dhason as the Warden in the Azara campus.

Br Benjamin Rosant Indwar was appointed Warden in the Tapesia campus.

The University continued to grow academically and infrastructurally. The University operates from three campuses - Tapesia (main campus), Azara, and Kharguli - with the Tapesia campus spanning 500 acres.

The University has achieved notable rankings, being ranked 64 overall by IIRF 2023 and 151 by NIRF Innovation 2023. It is recognised as the only University in the private sector with NAAC "A" accreditation in Assam and was the recipient of the Asia Pacific Award 2020 for the most engaged University of the year.

The Tapesia campus has evolved into an impressive educational complex with modern classrooms, libraries, research labs, and hostels, characterised by its lush vegetation and student-friendly environment. The campus features 4 Academic Blocks, 7 Hostels, various sports facilities including a Football ground, 2 Volleyball Courts, and 12 Badminton Courts, 7 water reservoirs, 30 Bachelors Quarters, 24 Family Quarters, a University Service Centre, and 2 Food Courts, totalling over 700,000 square feet of built-up area.



Inauguration of Block V

Environmental consciousness has been a priority, with about 20,000 trees of various types planted, intercropping with ginger and turmeric. The Tapesia Tea Garden, covering 122 acres, is registered with the Tea Board of India, and its operations have been outsourced to different companies over the years.

The University has also benefited from the collaboration of religious congregations and dedicated lay collaborators who have united with the Salesians. Among the notable religious personnel who have served are Sisters from various congregations, including the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, as well as priests from different dioceses and religious orders. The Holy Cross Sisters of Chavanod, the Holy Cross Sisters of Menzingen, the Mission Sisters of Ajmer, the Secular Sisters of Ancillae, the Congregation of the Mother Carmel Sisters, and the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians oversee the girls' hostels at the Azara and Tapesia campuses.

As Assam Don Bosco University advances towards 2026 and beyond, it comprises five schools and 26 departments. It offers

twenty-six undergraduate programmes, twenty-four postgraduate programmes, two integrated undergraduate-postgraduate programmes, and one diploma programme. Twenty-six departments of the University provide PhD programmes. The University has received UGC-DEB approval to establish a Centre for Distance and Online Education. Two postgraduate courses in Business Administration and Computer Applications are introduced from this year. On 4 November 2025, NCTE permitted the University to initiate a four-year B.A. B.Ed. and B.Sc. B.Ed. programmes with an intake of 50 students each. The 241 faculty members and 4579 students contribute to the university's vibrancy.

The University stands as a testament to the province's dedication to higher education, particularly for the youth of Northeast India and beyond. It continues to embody Don Bosco's vision of preparing young people to become leaders and agents of change. With its infrastructure and academic offerings, Assam Don Bosco University remains a beacon of hope and opportunity for generations of students who will shape the future of our nation and the world.

All in the Family:

Missionary Anecdotes from Fr Paul Kuttikaden

A Turning Point in My Missionary Life

It was 8.00 pm in 1982. Mr Urbanus, the touring catechist, and I were running down the hill through the village of Lakuti, Nagaland. We had finished all our visits and were eagerly heading to Don Bosco School, where we could enjoy a restful sleep for the night.

As we reached somewhere in the middle of the village, I noticed a faint light emanating from a thatched hut with a bamboo door. The bamboo strips were arranged in a way that allowed light and air to pass through. I was surprised to see that this was the only house with the light on (kerosene lamp). All around, darkness prevailed.

I called out to Mr Urbanus, who was ahead of me, and he stopped. I said, "Here, there is one hut with the light on; let us find out why." He came back, went near the door, and called out. He received a reply. Then, he slid the door to the side, and quietly, we entered. To our surprise, a five-year-old boy was lying across the path, sleeping soundly. We somehow managed to avoid stepping over the sleeping boy. I asked the mother why the boy was sleeping at the door. I almost stepped on him and wondered why only her house had light while the entire village was fast asleep. To all my questions, she answered by saying, "Father, please sit down; I shall explain everything."

Here is the shocking revelation. "I am a poor widow. Every day, I search for a job to earn something to feed my son and myself. This

morning, the two government schools of the village reopened.

My son went to one of the schools to get admission. But he was told by the headmaster that the admissions were complete. Then he ran to the second school. The headmaster told him that he had to pay two rupees for his admission. He eagerly ran back home and asked me for two rupees. But I told him that I did not have any money. He started to cry... I went to work in a house, and I got some paddy. I came late. When I returned, he cried again and fell asleep. I have thrashed the paddy, and now I am cooking. When the rice is ready, I will have to wake him up, feed him, and put him in his bed."

As I sat and listened to her sad story, tears rolled down my cheeks. I could hide them since it was quite dark. I pulled out my thin purse and handed over a twenty-rupee note to the lady, telling her to get the boy admitted the next day. I promised her I would help her son study. We then left the house to go to Don Bosco English Medium School, just half a kilometre away.

But my thoughts kept returning to that incident. I said to myself, "Here is a young, clever soldier of mine." He was lying on the floor. He has no father, no two rupees, but only tears. I resolved to find a solution for all "our poor" Catholic children. After much





reflection, I devised a plan whereby every poor Catholic boy or girl could complete at least class seven education. Everyone has a basic right to education. When I became the parish priest, I implemented my plan, and it was a success.

A Rumour Solved a Discipline Problem

It happened in the late 1960s at Don Bosco Technical and High Schools in Phuentsholing, Bhutan. We had about 300 boys in the hostel, and they slept in five barrack-style dormitories. Although each dormitory had a teacher to supervise, some boys would slip away and go to the nearby town of Phuentsholing for the second show at the cinema theatre. Their companions would adjust their beds and mosquito nets to avoid suspicion of their absence. But many times, they were caught. Often, I had to wait until late at night to catch them red-handed on their return.

But one day, a rumour spread. A group of head-hunters arrived in the town, and they operate at night. Our simple boys believed it, and no one dared venture out after dark. Some of them kept empty bottles for emergencies, as their toilets were built outside.

I took the opportunity to reassure all the boys that they could sleep peacefully because I would personally patrol the dormitories by walking around them. As soon as the lights went out, all the doors were bolted from the inside. I decided to go to bed early, which allowed me to enjoy longer sleep for several days.

A Makeshift School at Wakro, Arunachal Pradesh

With the assistance of four Catholic families from Tezu, we constructed a temporary shed measuring 40 feet by 18 feet at Wakro. The roof was made of sheets, but the walls were of bamboo, and the ground was made of clay. The land belonged to a local family. I agreed to pay Rs 500 per month as rent. All around, there was a forest.

Sixteen of us – two Naga lady teachers, thirteen class four boys and girls, and I moved into our new home. Our house served as a study hall, classroom, refectory, storeroom, and kitchen during the day, and at night it transformed into a dormitory. Our kitchen stove was made of a kerosene oil tin. We had plenty of firewood that we collected from the forest regularly.

Below the floor, many of our uninvited guests, like rats, made their home. They shared our meals and our books. Some of them even tried to get into the baptism register. Since we had no steel trunks, they had full freedom. Wild animals and snakes did not trouble us; they lived as neighbours.

One day, one of the teachers came to me to complain about the girls. She brought a girl to me, and I told her, “You are disturbing other students in the dormitory, and I am giving you this punishment. Learn by heart the litany of the Blessed Virgin.” To my great surprise, she returned after an hour and recited the entire litany by heart. What a memory!

She is currently working as an effective teacher at a government high school.

Saint Maria Troncatti: A Model of Humble Service for the Salesian Family

Fr Lukose Cheruvalel

Saint Maria Troncatti, canonised on 19 October 2025, exemplifies the Salesian charism through her 43 years of humble service as a nurse and educator among the Shuar indigenous people in the Ecuadorian Amazon, living Don Bosco's preventive system through loving presence, transforming daily work into prayer, and maintaining joy amid hardship until her death in 1969 following a plane crash while responding to a medical emergency. Her witness offers contemporary Salesians a model of cultural humility, hidden fidelity, integration of action and contemplation, and perseverance through difficulty, demonstrating that holiness is achieved not through extraordinary mystical experiences but through ordinary service lived with extraordinary love and complete self-gift to the young and the poor.

On 19 October 2025, the Catholic Church celebrated the canonisation of Blessed Maria Troncatti, a daughter of Mary Help of Christians who spent over half a century serving the indigenous peoples of Ecuador. Her life exemplifies the Salesian charism lived with extraordinary fidelity in the most ordinary circumstances. Maria Troncatti never sought recognition, yet her witness of love, sacrifice, and dedication continues to inspire the Salesian Family worldwide. As she is proclaimed a saint, we find in her life a profound model of what it means to live the Salesian spirit with authenticity and joy.

1. From Corteno to Ecuador: A Journey of Generous Response

Maria Troncatti was born on 16 February 1883 in Corteno Golgi, a small mountain village in northern Italy. Growing up in a devout Catholic family, she received the same upbringing that shaped many young Italians of her time—parish catechesis, daily work, and simple faith. What set Maria apart was not any extraordinary mystical



St Maria Troncatti

experience, but rather her steady willingness to follow God's will and her practical way of showing love through service.

Before joining the Salesian Sisters, Maria worked as a nurse, caring for wounded



soldiers during World War I with dedication and compassion. This experience of tending to suffering humanity would prove fundamental for her missionary vocation. In 1922, at the age of 39—an age when many might consider their life path settled—Maria entered the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. She took her religious vows in 1925 and immediately volunteered for the missions in Ecuador.

The arrival of Sr Maria in the Ecuadorian Amazon marked the start of a remarkable 43-year ministry among the Shuar people, an indigenous community in one of the most remote and challenging regions of South America. Maria mainly served at the mission of Sucúa and later at Méndez, working as a nurse, teacher, and maternal presence to numerous indigenous children and families.

2. Living the Salesian Charism: Simplicity, Work, and Love

St Maria Troncatti exemplified the core aspects of Salesian spirituality in a way that strongly resonates with modern members of the Salesian Family. Her life demonstrates how Don Bosco's vision can be genuinely lived in any environment, no matter how remote or challenging.

The Spirit of Family and Presence

Don Bosco's preventive system was founded on the principle of loving presence—the *assistenza* that fosters a family spirit. Maria lived this principle daily among the Shuar people. She learned their language, understood their customs, and respected their culture while sharing the Gospel message. Her medical dispensary became a place where indigenous people felt

welcomed, valued, and loved. She did not merely treat their physical ailments; she accompanied them in their joys and sorrows, celebrated their significant moments, and mourned with them during their losses.

This affectionate presence was especially aimed at children and young people, the privileged beneficiaries of Salesian care. Maria taught catechism, prepared children for the sacraments, and created an environment where young Shuar individuals could meet Christ through genuine relationships. She embodied Don Bosco's belief that education is a matter of the heart—that young people need to feel loved before they can be taught.

Work as Prayer and Sanctification

The Salesian tradition emphasises that holiness is achieved not by fleeing the world but by transforming daily work into prayer. Maria Troncatti's typical day included tending to the sick, teaching classes, preparing medicines, maintaining the mission facilities, and responding to numerous unexpected needs. She faced tropical diseases, limited resources, difficult communication, and the physical demands of mission life. Yet she approached each task with the same spirit of availability that characterised Don Bosco.

Her nursing work vividly illustrates this harmony of action and contemplation. Every patient became Christ to be served, and each wound dressed was an act of love. Maria saw no separation between her prayer before the Blessed Sacrament and her presence at a suffering person's bedside. Both were expressions of the same love, the same gift of self.

Joy in Sacrifice

One of the most notable aspects of Salesian spirituality is the emphasis on joy—not superficial happiness, but the deep joy that comes from recognising oneself as loved by God and living in accordance with His will. Maria's letters and the testimonies of those who knew her consistently showcase her cheerfulness despite facing hardships.

The Salesian commitment to joy does not mean denying suffering or pretending difficulties do not exist. Instead, it involves recognising God's presence in every situation and holding onto hope even in darkness. Maria faced loneliness, cultural isolation, physical exhaustion, and the frustration of limited means to assist those in need. She saw suffering she could not relieve and said farewell to missionaries who returned to Italy while she remained. Yet, her fundamental attitude remained one of gratitude and trust.

3. Death and Funeral: A Final Testimony of Self-Gift

On 25 August 1969, Sister Maria Troncatti undertook what would be her final act of mercy. At 86 years old, despite her advanced age and frail health, she boarded a small missionary plane to visit a critically ill woman in a remote village, once again demonstrating her unwavering dedication to serving those in need. The aircraft crashed in the dense Ecuadorian jungle, leaving both Maria and the pilot severely injured among the wreckage. Faithful to the values she had lived by, Maria refused treatment for herself and insisted the pilot be attended to first, as he had a family waiting for him.



Sr Maria died from her injuries on 26 August; her final act of charity was a perfect reflection of a life spent putting others before herself. News of her death spread rapidly across the Ecuadorian missions and beyond, and her funeral became a profound testament to the love she had inspired. Hundreds of Shuar people, many travelling for days through difficult terrain, came to pay their respects to the woman they called "Madre" (Mother).

The funeral of Sr Maria at the mission in Méndez was attended by Indigenous families, missionaries, and local residents, who expressed their devotion through tears and prayers. The Shuar mourned her as one of their own—a woman who had given them not just medicine and education, but true



love and respect. She was laid to rest in the mission cemetery at Méndez, where her tomb quickly became a site of pilgrimage, and where many testimonies of her intercession and the graces received through her prayers began to accumulate, ultimately leading to her beatification in 1969.

4. A Model for Today's Salesian Family

As the Salesian Family prepares to celebrate Maria Troncatti's canonisation, her witness offers particular relevance for contemporary challenges facing those who seek to live Don Bosco's charism.

Responding to Cultural Diversity

Today's globalised world demands the ability to connect with people across cultural boundaries with respect and love. Maria's approach to the Shuar people—learning their language, honouring their traditions while sharing faith, seeing their dignity before their needs—demonstrates an inculturation that respects both the universality of the Gospel and the particularity of cultures. In an era when the Salesian Family serves youth on every continent, Maria's example of cultural humility and genuine dialogue becomes increasingly vital.

Fidelity in Hidden Service

Contemporary culture often emphasises visibility, recognition, and measurable impact. Maria Troncatti spent four decades serving in a place few people had heard of, doing work that rarely made headlines. She kept no count of patients treated or children taught. Her sanctity developed not through dramatic moments but through faithful presence, day after day, year after year. For

Salesians, lay and religious alike, who serve in classrooms, youth centres, parishes, and social works far from public attention, Maria confirms that hidden fidelity bears eternal fruit.

Integration of Action and Contemplation

One of the ongoing challenges in active religious life and lay mission is maintaining spiritual depth while engaged in demanding apostolic work. Maria never separated her nursing from her prayer, her service from her spirituality. She found God in the faces of the suffering and encountered Christ in the indigenous children she taught. Her life suggests that the Salesian vocation doesn't require balancing two separate spheres — spiritual life and apostolic work — but rather discovering how they interpenetrate and nourish each other.

Perseverance Through Difficulty

Mission work, youth ministry, and educational apostolates face unavoidable setbacks, limited resources, and moments when progress seems unseen. Maria served amid conditions of material poverty, geographical remoteness, and chronic understaffing. She witnessed some converts revert to previous practices, observed children she had taught leave the faith, and confronted the everyday frustrations of human limitations. Yet she persisted, serving with consistency and love. Her perseverance encourages all who encounter discouragement in their Salesian mission.

5. Following Her Example

The canonisation of Maria Troncatti offers the Salesian Family both a celebration and a



challenge. We praise her life as proof that Don Bosco's approach to holiness remains relevant and effective across all eras and locations. We are called to reflect on our own way of living the Salesian charism: Do we serve with her generosity? Do we stay consistently present as she did? Do we love with her selflessness?

St Maria Troncatti did nothing that any member of the Salesian Family could not do. She did not perform public miracles or write theological treatises. She loved as Don Bosco

taught, served as Mary Help of Christians inspires, and dedicated herself entirely to the young and the poor. Her simple life, transformed by extraordinary love, reminds us that holiness is always attainable for those willing to say yes to God's invitation.

May St Maria Troncatti intercede for the entire Salesian Family—that we might serve with her dedication, love with her generosity, and witness with her joy to the transforming power of the Gospel lived according to Don Bosco's spirit!

Pope Leo XIV's Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi Te*: Church's Call to Love the Poor

Fr Sanjay Aind

Pope Leo XIV's Apostolic Exhortation Dilexi Te (I Have Loved You), issued on 4 October 2025, offers a comprehensive teaching on the Church's essential commitment to the poor, tracing this preferential option from apostolic times through the Church Fathers and medieval monasticism to modern social doctrine, while confronting contemporary structures of sin and economic inequality. The document emphasises that care for the poor is not optional charity but a theological necessity at the centre of Christian faith, urging the Church to see people experiencing poverty as active subjects rather than passive objects, to undertake tangible acts of solidarity and structural reform, and to recognise Christ's presence in the marginalised as the true measure of ecclesial fidelity.

In a comprehensive Apostolic Exhortation titled *Dilexi Te* ("I Have Loved You"), Pope Leo XIV has issued one of the most thorough teachings on the Church's relationship with the poor in recent history. Released at the start of his pontificate on 4 October 2025, the feast of St Francis of Assisi, this document continues and builds upon the work begun by his predecessor, Pope Francis, reaffirming the Church's ancient yet often overlooked commitment to prioritising the needs of society's most vulnerable.



Pope Leo XIV Signs the Apostolic Exhortation



The 121-paragraph document takes its title from the Book of Revelation, where Christ speaks words of love to a Christian community that had little power or resources. Pope Leo XIV emphasises that this divine declaration of love extends to all who are marginalised, poor, and powerless today. He states that for Christians, “the problem of the poor leads to the very heart of our faith,” taking care for the poor not merely a charitable option but an essential part of authentic Christianity.

A Two-Thousand-Year Tradition

Pope Leo XIV bases his teaching on a thorough historical review of the Church’s engagement with poverty, showing that concern for the poor has been a key part of the Church’s mission since apostolic times. He recalls Jesus’s own poverty, noting that Christ “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” and faced the same exclusion that afflicts the poor and outcasts of society. The document emphasises that Jesus presented himself not only as a poor Messiah but as “the Messiah of and for the poor.”

The exhortation traces this preferential love through the centuries, highlighting the witness of the Church Fathers. St John Chrysostom famously taught that Christians should not honour Christ with golden vessels in church while neglecting him in the poor outside its doors. St Augustine viewed the poor as the sacramental presence of the Lord, while St Ambrose declared that giving to the poor is not charity but justice restored, since “what you give to the poor is not your property, but theirs.”

Medieval monasticism carried on this tradition through radical hospitality. St

Benedict’s Rule instructed that “the poor and pilgrims are to be received with all care and hospitality, for it is in them that Christ is received.” During periods of plague and war, monasteries became refuges where people in need found not only bread and medicine but also dignity and education. The mendicant orders of the thirteenth century, especially the Franciscans and Dominicans, transformed Christian witness by not merely serving the poor but becoming poor themselves, choosing to live in solidarity with society’s margins.

Modern Challenges and Structural Sin

While honouring this rich tradition, Pope Leo XIV confronts contemporary realities with unwavering honesty. He recognises that despite technological and economic advancement, poverty threatens to assume “massive proportions” in our time. The document criticises what he calls a “culture that discards others” and observes that “in a world where the poor are increasingly numerous, we paradoxically see the growth of a wealthy elite, living in a bubble of comfort and luxury, almost in another world compared to ordinary people.”

The Pope directly confronts ideological prejudices that blame the poor for their own poverty or suggest that market forces alone will resolve the issue. He states: “The poor are not there by chance or by blind and cruel fate. Nor, for most of them, is poverty a choice.” He challenges both secular economic theories and certain Christian attitudes that dismiss charitable works as outdated or insufficient, insisting that “the preferential choice for the poor is a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society.”

Building on the social teachings of his predecessors, especially through Latin American Episcopal Conferences at Medellín, Puebla, and Aparecida, Pope Leo XIV highlights the concept of “structures of sin” that sustain poverty and inequality. He condemns the “dictatorship of an economy that kills” and urges action to address “the structural causes of poverty” with urgency. The document emphasises that inequality “is the root of social ills” and that welfare programmes, although necessary, “should be considered merely provisional responses” that must be supported by fundamental economic and social reforms.

The Poor as Subjects, Not Objects

One of the document’s most significant contributions is its insistence on treating people experiencing poverty as active subjects rather than passive objects of charity. Pope Leo XIV draws on the Aparecida Conference’s teaching that marginalised communities “have the right to embrace the Gospel and to celebrate and communicate their faith in accord with the values present within their own cultures.” He emphasises that the poor possess unique insights about reality that others cannot see, and therefore, society and the Church must listen to them rather than merely helping them.

The Exhortation emphasises the importance of popular movements led by laypeople who fight for justice and structural change. These movements, the Pope writes, “invite us to go beyond the idea of social policies being just for the poor, but never with or of the poor.” He stresses that genuine democracy involves including these voices in shaping the common good, and that the same principle



Pope Leo XIV with Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, Substitute for General Affairs of the Secretariat of State, at the Signing Ceremony

applies to Church institutions.

This perspective also involves recognising that “we must let ourselves be evangelised by the poor” and acknowledging “the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.” Growing up in precarious circumstances and learning to survive in adverse conditions, people experiencing poverty have developed insights and virtues that those in comfort might lack. Their witness can challenge the comfortable to simplify their lives and confront their own spiritual poverty.

Concrete Love in Action

Throughout history, the Church’s love for the poor has taken numerous practical forms, and Pope Leo XIV celebrates this diverse witness. He recalls the dedicated care of the sick pioneered by Saints like John of God and Camillus de Lellis, whose orders brought “motherly affection” to suffering patients. He honours the religious congregations, especially of women, who built hospitals, schools, and orphanages in areas lacking social services, providing not only material aid but also human dignity and gentle presence.



The document particularly emphasises education as an expression of love for people with low incomes. St Joseph Calasanx, St John Baptist de La Salle, and St John Bosco established educational systems specifically aimed at helping children from working-class families, recognising that “knowledge liberates, gives dignity, and brings us closer to the truth.” Catholic schools, when true to their mission, become “places of inclusion, holistic formation, and human development.”

Pope Leo XIV also addresses modern concerns, including migration, citing the witness of Saints John Baptist Scalabrini and Frances Xavier Cabrini, who supported migrants with spiritual, legal, and material aid. He recalls Pope Francis’s teaching that the Church’s response to migrants can be summarised with four verbs: “welcome, protect, promote and integrate,” principles applicable to all those living on the peripheries of society.

The Parable That Never Ages

Returning repeatedly to the parable of the Good Samaritan, Pope Leo XIV urges Christians to reflect on their own responses to suffering. He questions sharply: “If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him or her as an annoyance, an idler, an obstacle in my path, a troubling sight, a problem for politicians to resolve, or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. Or I can respond with faith and charity, and see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own, a creature infinitely loved by the Father, an image of God, a brother or sister redeemed by Jesus Christ.”

The document cautions against various forms of indifference that have become normalised in modern society. These include not only obvious neglect but also subtle ways in which Christians avoid genuine engagement with poverty, such as claiming that prayer and doctrine are sufficient without concrete action or arguing that assisting the poor is mainly the government’s responsibility or directing pastoral efforts towards the wealthy and influential rather than the marginalised.

Even the practice of almsgiving, which some modern Christians dismiss as outdated, is defended by the Pope as an important means of encounter and solidarity. While recognising that helping people find dignity through work is the ultimate aim, he insists that almsgiving remains necessary and valuable. It offers “a chance to halt before the poor, to look into their eyes, to touch them and to share something of ourselves with them.” Drawing on Scripture and the Church Fathers, he affirms that almsgiving “is the wing of prayer” and that without concrete acts of charity, even the most cherished spiritual convictions will “weaken and fade away.”

A Church That Must Change

The exhortation ends with a strong plea for the Church to reflect on her commitment to the poor. Pope Leo XIV warns that “any Church community, if it thinks it can comfortably go its own way without creative concern and effective cooperation in helping the poor to live with dignity and reaching out to everyone, will also risk breaking down, however much it may talk about social issues or criticise governments.”



The Pope urges Christian communities to avoid “spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings, and empty talk.” He emphasises that the true measure of the Church’s fidelity lies in tangible solidarity with those who suffer. Quoting his predecessor, Pope Francis, he states: “In this call to recognise him in the poor and the suffering, we see revealed the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices, which every saint seeks to imitate.”

The document stresses that this preferential option for the poor arises directly from faith in Christ, who “became poor for us, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” It is not merely a social or political stance but a theological imperative. As Pope Leo XIV states: “There is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor.” For Christians, serving the poor is not optional;

it is an encounter with Christ himself, who promised that whatever we do for the least among us, we do for him.

Dilexi Te concludes with a personal and pastoral tone, assuring each poor person that Christ’s words are addressed to them individually: “I have loved you.” This ancient declaration of divine love, the Pope insists, must be made tangible through the Church’s witness in every generation. Only a Church that “sets no limits to love, that knows no enemies to fight but only men and women to love,” he concludes, “is the Church that the world needs today.” With this comprehensive teaching, Pope Leo XIV has challenged every Christian to examine their relationship with the poor and to embrace anew the Gospel’s radical call to solidarity, justice, and sacrificial love.

Strenna 2026: “Do Whatever He Tells You, Believers, Free To Serve”

Fr Joy Kachappilly

Strenna 2026, with the theme “Do Whatever He Tells You, Believers, Free To Serve,” draws on Mary’s words at Cana to outline a spiritual journey where faith in Christ fosters genuine freedom that leads to generous service. This journey advances by recognising the signs of the times, being grounded in faith through encountering God’s Word, experiencing the liberating freedom of God’s children, and expressing this through total cooperation in God’s work with boldness and joy. This pastoral framework, coinciding with the 150th anniversary of the Salesian Co-operators, encourages the entire Salesian Family to move beyond passive commentary towards active engagement with young people and the marginalised, transforming faith into tangible service that helps build a fairer society through the integral education embodying Don Bosco’s charism.

As we conclude our reflection on Strenna 2025, ‘Anchored in Hope, Pilgrims with Young People,’ we now turn our focus towards Strenna 2026, which calls us to

deepen the very foundation of that hope: our faith in Jesus Christ. The celebration of the 150th anniversary of the first Salesian



missionary expedition has reminded us that hope was the driving force behind Don Bosco's pastoral heart. This hope, firmly rooted in faith, allowed him to interpret the signs of the times and discern God's plan with courage and dedication.

The World Salesian Family Consultation meeting held in June 2025 highlighted a vital insight. If the strength of hope is rooted in faith, then a life genuinely full of hope guides us towards a deeper and more authentic relationship with Jesus. This understanding underpins our new Strenna theme, drawn from Mary's words at the wedding feast of Cana: "Do whatever he tells you."

The Call to Listen: Mary's Pedagogy at Cana

The Gospel account of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) offers us more than a biblical story—it provides a spiritual and pastoral blueprint for our times. When the wine ran out at the celebration, Mary's response to the servants was neither a command for passive obedience nor a simple instruction. Instead,

she urged them towards personal, active, and proactive listening: "Do whatever he tells you."

This invitation embodies profound pedagogy. Mary encourages the servants to trust in the person of Christ—a trust that becomes an act of responsibility and promotes true freedom. She does not merely say "obey," but invites a relationship of attentiveness and willingness to respond.

The subtitle of our Strenna, "Believers, free to serve," completes this picture by illustrating an existential journey: faith leads to freedom, and from that freedom, service emerges. This is not a simple chronological sequence but a vital dynamic where each element supports and sustains the others. Being a believer means risking everything, going beyond the comfort of merely commenting on history. To believe becomes an experience that fosters and helps build a more just society — it transforms into an energy that propels progress towards a better humanity.

A Path Toward Generative Faith

The Strenna proposal follows a progression that reflects the Christian process of discernment: recognise – interpret – choose. This journey encourages us to move in the direction that unfolds when we accept the invitation of the Word with faith, characterised by trust and responsibility. It embodies the best of Salesian tradition: supporting young people to build confidence, accompanying them, and guiding them to make empowering choices aimed at becoming "good Christians and upright citizens."

1. Welcoming the Signs of the Times

We must first consider the urgency of recognising time and history. The history we

live through, with all its challenges, must be approached with empathy—an active love for the reality around us. As committed educators and pastors, we refuse to fall into the trap of inaction that causes us to endure events passively. Our calling is to “recognise” challenges with spiritual intelligence, which results from discernment and the ability to interpret what happens in depth.

For those involved in educational and pastoral efforts, history becomes a treasure chest that holds and reveals God’s actions. Like Don Bosco, who recognised the divine intervention in even the most complicated stories and difficult circumstances, we are called to turn every perceived obstacle into opportunities for the holistic development of young people and the extension of God’s Kingdom.

2. Being Rooted in Faith

This movement directly engages with the core of Christian experience. Interpreting events through the lens of Christ is a fundamental choice that develops through ongoing commitment. Jesus Christ is not merely an “object” of faith but the logos—the standard that helps us grasp reality. This approach, guided by the Holy Spirit, transcends all forms of dualism between the sacred and the profane.

Only this healthy relationship with Christ can unveil the divine within the human to our minds and hearts. God not only speaks through Scripture and the Magisterium but—touching deeply on our vocation—also meets us through the tangible history of young people and those we encounter on our journey. Their stories are a continual revelation of God’s presence and call.

Central to this discernment is our encounter with the Word. Through systematic contact



with Scripture, we grow healthily. When we truly listen—ob-audire—the Word does not merely inform us but shapes and transforms us. It becomes spiritual food and light for our daily journey.

3. The Freedom of the Call

The third passage explores the sensitive issue of Christian freedom within our complex cultural landscape. Only through “free listening” do we experience the liberating power of the Good News. Listening compelled by fear or driven by self-interest has no effect and can even be harmful. Free listening becomes a joyful acceptance of divine will—the freedom of God’s children that guides us away from dangerous arbitrariness in pastoral work.

When every action is guided by the Word and lived out, the contours of integral spirituality become clear, with no separation between prayer and action, or between spiritual life and worldly commitment.

The Cana experience warns us to be cautious of self-referential faith, which is influenced solely by our own reason—a faith based only on “what I think” or “in my opinion.” In the Salesian context, faith and reason are allies, pursued with an awareness that maintaining the necessary balance is a delicate and urgent



task. It is not about undermining reason but about preventing it from becoming the sole criterion for judgment, thereby obscuring the dimensions of mystery and grace that are essential for holistic education.

4. Generous Service

The fourth movement leads to the culmination: service. “Rooted and free—we serve.” This reflects the natural growth of the love we have received. The invitation to “cooperate fully” resonates powerfully for all believers. The word “fully” emphasises completeness, without reservation — the language of every genuine journey of faith where believers see themselves as active partners in God’s work.

This leads us to the “boldness of faith,” echoing Pope Francis’s favourite expressions. Genuine faith is not timid but daring, willing to take risks for the Kingdom. It is the courage of those who depend not on their own strength but on God’s power.

The Cana event concludes with “the joy of sharing,” a distinctive trait of the Salesian charism. This is not superficial or fleeting happiness but genuine, profound joy that arises from authentic sharing, reinforcing the sense of being part of a larger plan—God’s design.

The 150th Anniversary of the Salesian Cooperators

The reference to this anniversary not only emphasises a celebration but also aligns with our programme, focusing on what the Lord continues to ask of us. Don Bosco’s prophetic dream remains pertinent today, recalling both the vision he shared and our ongoing responsibility as inheritors and advocates of his charism.

This will be a year to study, reflect on, thank God for, and celebrate the experience of the Salesian Cooperators, who continue to embody a moment of grace. As we thank the Lord for His providence for the Salesian Cooperators Association and all Groups of the Salesian Family, let us deepen our understanding of the charismatic dimension that the Spirit fostered through Don Bosco. The past is a beautiful legacy, guiding us towards a future where we are even more active as believers, free to serve worthily in the cause of God’s Kingdom.

Our Compass for the Future

In this period of significant change, challenges, and unprecedented opportunities, STRENNA 2026 aims to be a spiritual journey that offers a compass for personal growth in faith and pastoral experience within the community. As groups of the Salesian Family and local communities, we are called to begin by listening to reality, rooted in faith in Christ. In this way, we live our calling with authentic freedom—a freedom that encourages us to make choices in favour of young people and all those lacking the “wine” of hope, a freedom that guides us to strengthen our commitment to holistic human development.

From the outset, Don Bosco imagined a wide movement of people who, alongside him and like-minded individuals, could contribute to the welfare of youth. This vision remains alive today. Celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Salesian Cooperators strengthens our commitment to serve young people facing contemporary challenges. This commitment demonstrates our faithful and generous response to the words Mary addresses to us today: “Do whatever he tells you.”

The Initial Formation in the Province

— Fr Bivan Rodrigues Mukhim

The article outlines the initial formation process for Salesian candidates in the Province of Guwahati, detailing the progressive stages from novitiate through post-novitiate, practical training, and specific formation leading to either perpetual profession as Salesian Brothers or priestly ordination. The formation emphasises mission-oriented training through direct engagement with marginalised youth, integration of faith and culture, and the development of authentic Salesian educators and pastors who embody the Preventive System and Don Bosco's charism. Currently, the Province has 15 novices, 48 post-novitiate students pursuing various philosophical and academic programmes across multiple institutions, 4 Salesians pursuing technical education, 25 young Salesians in practical training, and 19 candidates in theological formation. All formees are trained in formation houses outside the Province in collaboration with other Salesian Provinces.

The initial stages of Salesian formation focus on mission-driven training through direct engagement with young people, especially those who are poor and marginalised. This process is characterised by accompaniment, collaborative training with lay mission partners, and the integration of faith, culture, and life within the framework of the Salesian educative and pastoral mission. The Province of Guwahati does not have its own formation houses and consequently sends candidates to formation houses in other provinces. The different stages of initial formation are as follows:

Novitiate

The novitiate is a crucial stage in entering Salesian religious life, marking an important period of discernment before the first profession. During these twelve months, novices deepen their understanding of Christ's call to follow Him more closely in accordance with the Salesian Constitutions. The formation team, led by the novice master, is committed to supporting the novitiate's goals while encouraging novices



Novices at Sunnyside

to take active roles in their formation. Key aims include strengthening the sense of God's call, preparing for Salesian consecrated life, internalising the values of Salesian spirituality, and adopting a conscious, responsible attitude towards their development journey. The novitiate experience encompasses human and fraternal aspects through community life, the spiritual aspect focuses on personal encounter with Jesus Christ, the intellectual aspect aims at deepening faith and a loving knowledge of God, and the educative and



Novices at Zubza with Vice Provincial

pastoral aspects involve direct contact with young people. An essential part involves discernment regarding the specific form of Salesian vocation, as novices must decide between the lay brother vocation and preparation for the priesthood before making their first profession.

In 2025-2026, the province has fifteen novices. They are making their novitiate at both Sunnyside, Shillong, and Emmaus Salesian Novitiate in Zubza. The six novices in Zubza are James Brahma, Jilion Daimary, Jastin Lakra, Menson N Marak, Rakshan R. Marak and Salseng Marak. The nine novices at Sunnyside are Abraham Daimari, Birjon Narzary, Lakbin Ch. Marak, Manish Xaxa, Michael S. Sangma, Rahul Don Bosco Rabha, Romio Rabha, Sumuel Marak and Santosh Tirkey.

Post-novitiate

The post-novitiate phase continues the formative process of the novitiate while

preparing individuals for practical training. This stage is closely connected to earlier and later phases, aiming to gradually integrate faith, culture, and life through suitable philosophical, pedagogical, and catechetical preparation in dialogue with the prevailing culture. Both future priests and brothers usually live together within the same formation community during this phase, following similar curricula with variations based on their specific vocation, personal gifts, and apostolic responsibilities. The intellectual formation, which characterises this stage, is aligned with and influenced by the Salesian mission, emphasising the Salesian identity, a contextualised interaction between theory and practice, unity and comprehensiveness, continuity, and inculturation. Studies include philosophy, human sciences, pedagogical training, education in faith and catechetics, and Salesian studies. The post-novitiate also offers opportunities for pastoral experiences appropriate to the stage of formation, which are essential for discerning the Salesian priestly vocation and must be conducted within a Salesian Educative and Pastoral Community. Some of the studentates of Philosophy offer the candidates the possibilities of pursuing their graduate studies.



Philosophy Students at Sonada with the Provincial



Philosophy Students at Nashik with Vice Provincial

After the novitiate, the young Salesians are assigned to various studentates of philosophy across different provinces. At Salesian College, Sonda, Cl. William Orea, Cl. Ambruse Iawphniaw, Cl. Waldius Myrthong, Cl. Wis Ronghang, and Cl. Samsing Senar continue their philosophical studies alongside their graduation. At Salesian College, Dimapur, Cl. Jerome Bhuyan, Cl. Timash N. Marak, Cl. Dominic M. Sangma, Cl. Joy Pantora T. Sangma, Cl. Sajilson D. Sangma, Cl. Abhishek Baxla, Cl. Emmanuel Mynsong, and Cl. John Paul Ronghang pursue their post-novitiate formation. At Divyadaan, Nashik, Cl. Augustine Hemrom, Cl. Angelus A. Sangma, Cl. Anthony D. Shira, Cl. Profil Champramary, and Cl. Rohit Kujur are undertaking their philosophical studies. Finally, at Don Bosco Philosophate, Aluva, Cl. Johnny Bosco Mardi, Cl. Emil Jose Surin, and Cl. Aliver A. Sangma are pursuing their philosophical studies.

Several young Salesians are pursuing higher studies after their philosophical formation. Cl. Victor Lucas Topno is pursuing his Master's in Philosophy at Divyadaan, Nashik. Cl. Silbison Borgoyary and Cl. Henry A. Sangma are completing their ITI at Don Bosco Liluah, Kolkata. Br Philip

Amsong and Cl. Nicholas Marak are residing at Don Bosco Technical School, Shillong and doing their ITI course.

We have our MA students at ADBU, Tapesia, namely Cl. Bipul Benedict Rabha and Cl. Damian Surin; B.Ed. students at DBCTE, Tura, are Cl. Sunit Ekka, Cl. Anand Purti and Cl. Ojoy M. Sangma. BA students at ADBU, Tapesia, are Cl. Ashish Kongadi and Cl. Sunit Soren; BCA student at ADBU, Azara, is Br Athanasius Kerketta; BA students at Don Bosco College, Tura, are Cl. Jicky Basumatary, Cl. Essak Hereh, Cl. Umesh Kujur, Cl. Themus Lugun, Br Peter Mark, Cl. Hritik Roshan Lugun, Cl. Chugan R. Marak, Cl. Junas Bara, Cl. Jwakim Basumatary, Cl. Albinus Induar, and Cl. Shembhalang Marshillong Lyngdoh; BCom student at Don Bosco College, Tura, is Br Sanjit Topno; BSc student at Don Bosco College, Tura, is Cl. Aseet Minj and BA students at Don Bosco College, Chapaguri, are Cl. Bishal Tigga and Cl. Tengsua P. Marak.

Practical Training

Practical training marks the most distinctive stage of Salesian initial formation, inspired by Don Bosco's experience with young people at the first Oratory. During this period, young confreres practice the Preventive System, particularly Salesian assistance, while aligning their activities with the core values of their vocation under the guidance of the rector and community.

The three main aims are to foster growth in the Salesian vocation through integrating activity and core values, to assess vocational suitability via personal and community experiences of the Salesian mission upon perpetual profession, and to develop in mission through reflection on educative and



Practical Training and Student Brothers with Provincial and Vice Provincial

pastoral experiences, while enhancing collaboration with Salesians and lay partners in shared mission.

This phase emphasises direct engagement with the Salesian educative and pastoral mission within an Educative and Pastoral Community, providing a unique opportunity to strengthen and develop personal qualities in harmony with the Salesian charism. The practical training includes personality development through immersion in mission, learning to balance work and temperance as inspired by Don Bosco's motto, and growing in the ability to relate through intergenerational dialogue within the Salesian community and with lay mission partners and young people.

The twenty-five young Salesians, who are engaged in practical training in the Province, are Cl. Rupam Kindo, Cl. Rockenjoy Hasda, Cl. Dominic Dipka Marak, Cl. Timothy Hembrom, Cl. Harwish A. Sangma, Cl. Siprian Surin, Cl. Sengwil N. Sangma, Cl. Alexander Dodrai, Cl. Rakesh Niranjan Kujur, Cl. Hardy A. Sangma, Cl. Alphar Beck, Cl. Johnystar Khardewsaw, Cl. Arkystar M. Chyme, Cl. Santrius Ekka, Cl. Alex Champramary, Cl. Petrush Maukal, Cl. Marius Barjo, Cl. Rohit Minj, Cl. Yacub Lakra, Cl. Prabhat Bara, Cl. Rasal Kujur, Cl. Khairus N. Sangma, Cl. Nestor Lathin R. Marak, Cl. Amrit Tirkey and Cl. Rajib Kujur.

Specific Formation: Divergent Paths

Following practical training, the formation paths diverge according to the specific vocation selected. Salesian

Brothers engage in a specific formation lasting generally two years, designed to provide deeper knowledge of the Congregation's spiritual heritage, suitable theological preparation aligned with their consecrated lay status, and completion of formation for educational and apostolic work. This formation includes rigorous theological, Salesian, and pedagogical preparation, with an emphasis on the lay dimension of their consecrated vocation and their role as icons of communion and fraternity. Meanwhile, candidates for the priesthood follow specific formation in accordance with Church norms and Congregation directives, lasting four years and aimed at preparing priests as Salesian pastors and educators. This theological formation encompasses comprehensive studies in Scripture, systematic theology, moral theology, liturgy, canon law, and pastoral theology, all focused on the Salesian mission to young people. Both paths preserve the essential Salesian



Theology Students at KJC



Theology Students at SHTC



character while preparing religious for their particular roles within the unified Salesian consecrated vocation.

Cl. Marcus Kurbah, Cl. Arpan Tigga, Cl. Henry Langngaikhama and Cl. Godwin Sapphireson Kharkongor study theology at Kristu Jyoti, Bangalore. Deacon Sebastian Basumatary, Deacon John Ngouning, Deacon Vincent Rabha, Deacon Peter Canisius Sangma, Deacon Sanjosh D. Sangma, Deacon Wilson Topno, Cl. Haisuilube Npenme, Cl. Dominic Soren, Cl. Phabian Baglari, Cl. Jonathan Dung Dung, Cl. Jeniberth Sangma, Cl. Jeevan Chandra Kerketta, Cl. Lebanus Kullu and Cl. Sanjay Xalxo are pursuing their theological studies at Sacred Heart Theological College, Mawlai. Br Benedict D. Sangma is undertaking his two-year theology course at Salesian Brothers' Formation House in the Philippines.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the entire initial formation process, which usually lasts several years, concludes with perpetual profession, typically made six years after the first profession for the Salesian Brothers, and with Priestly Ordination for the Clerics. This definitive commitment marks the completion of initial formation and the beginning of lifelong ongoing formation, which is specialised according to mission needs and dedicated to serving young people in the spirit of Don Bosco. Throughout all phases, the formation process emphasises accompaniment, discernment, and the integration of all aspects of human development within the context of the Salesian mission to cultivate authentic educators and pastors for today's youth. The Vice Provincial, with the help of formation personnel, follows up on all the candidates through personal meetings and animation programmes.

Artificial Intelligence in Salesian Ministry

Fr Charles Deepen Lakra

The article examines the opportunities and challenges that Artificial Intelligence presents for Salesian pastoral ministry, emphasising that while AI can enhance catechetical preparation, multilingual outreach, administrative efficiency, and digital evangelisation, it must never replace the vital human encounter at the core of pastoral care. The author warns that AI systems lack authentic understanding, spiritual insight, and moral discernment, and may reflect biases incompatible with Catholic teachings, making them unsuitable for sacramental ministry, spiritual direction, or sensitive pastoral counselling. It concludes with practical guidelines for responsible AI use that uphold human dignity, maintain pastoral authenticity, and ensure technology supports rather than replaces the Salesians' fundamental mission to bring people closer to Christ through personal presence and sacramental ministry.

As Salesians in this digital age, we must carefully evaluate how emerging technologies can support our pastoral mission while remaining true to the Gospel. Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents both unprecedented opportunities and significant challenges for pastoral ministry. As Scripture reminds us, “Test everything; hold fast to what is good” (1 Thes 5:21).

The Second Vatican Council’s *Gaudium et Spes* reminds us that “the Church has always had the duty of scrutinising the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (GS 4). AI is one such significant sign requiring careful pastoral discernment. Pope Francis, in *Fratelli Tutti*, discusses technology as potentially enhancing “the quality of human life” while warning it can also “limit and condition freedom” (FT 105).

We encounter AI daily through smartphones, social media, and digital services. As pastors, we must understand these tools not merely as external phenomena but as instruments that can either support or impede genuine human growth central to our mission. The Compendium of Social Doctrine reminds us that “technological development must be

guided by respect for human dignity” (CSDC 458).

Understanding Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence refers to computer systems designed to perform tasks usually requiring human intelligence: learning, reasoning, problem-solving, and language understanding. These systems analyse vast amounts of data, generate human-like text, translate languages, and help with communication and decision-making. Modern AI, especially large language models, shows impressive abilities in understanding context and producing coherent responses.

However, we must understand AI’s fundamental nature and limitations. These systems operate through statistical patterns





and mathematical algorithms, not genuine understanding or consciousness. They lack the divine spark of human consciousness, capacity for authentic love, moral reasoning, spiritual experience, and ability to encounter the transcendent. As the Catechism teaches, humans are created “in the image of God” (CCC 1702), possessing dignity no machine can replicate.

AI systems mirror the intentions, biases, and limitations of their creators and training data. They can reinforce inequalities, reflect secular worldviews contradicting Catholic teaching, and operate without considering the supernatural dimension of human existence. Recognising these limitations is vital for responsible pastoral application.

Opportunities in Pastoral Ministry

Enhanced Catechetical Preparation: AI tools can greatly assist in creating catechetical materials, homilies, and educational content. These systems excel at research, aiding in gathering Biblical passages, patristic sources, and theological insights from Catholic tradition. When preparing homilies, AI can compile relevant commentaries from Church Fathers, papal documents, and contemporary theology, providing a comprehensive background for prayerful reflection.

AI can create age-appropriate explanations of complex theological ideas for different audiences, generate discussion questions, suggest practical Gospel applications, and assist in organising catechetical content pedagogically. However, all material must be carefully checked against authentic Catholic teaching and complemented with personal prayer and study of authoritative sources.

Multilingual Ministry and Cultural Sensitivity: In our diverse province, where languages are spoken, AI translation tools can assist with basic communication and help

make pastoral resources accessible across linguistic barriers. These tools can translate pastoral letters, prayer resources, catechetical materials, and announcements, ensuring all members of the community have access to important parish information.

AI can assist in understanding cultural nuances when ministering to diverse families, especially in marriage preparation for couples from different backgrounds. It can help develop culturally appropriate liturgical materials that honour diversity while upholding doctrinal integrity—particularly relevant in our Syro-Malabar context, celebrating our tradition whilst remaining in universal communion.

Administrative Efficiency: AI can streamline administrative tasks that take up significant pastoral time, such as scheduling, organising records, managing communications, creating newsletters, and coordinating parish activities. This allows for greater focus on core responsibilities: celebrating sacraments, preaching, and caring for souls.

The technology can analyse parish patterns—attendance trends, sacramental participation, programme engagement—offering insights for pastoral planning. AI assists in managing charity work by monitoring community needs, organising volunteers, and ensuring efficient resource distribution, aligning with our preferential option for the poor.

Evangelisation and Digital Outreach: Many people, especially young adults, spend considerable time online, and AI-enhanced platforms support evangelisation and re-engagement initiatives. These tools help in creating engaging social media content, analysing spiritual questions posed by individuals, and identifying outreach opportunities.



AI can support online retreats, virtual prayer groups, and remote spiritual guidance—valuable for homebound parishioners or those in distant areas. However, digital ministry should always complement rather than replace sacramental life and communal worship, which are essential to Catholic growth.

Serious Concerns and Limitations

Irreplaceable Human Pastoral Care: The main concern is AI's inability to substitute for the genuine human encounter at the heart of salvation work. Pastoral ministry's core is the personal relationship between the pastor and the faithful, modelled on Christ's ministry. Pope Benedict XVI wrote: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person" (Deus Caritas Est 1).

Sacramental life depends on human priests acting in persona Christi. No AI can absolve sins, consecrate the Eucharist, or confer sacramental grace through ordained ministry. Beyond sacraments, consolation, spiritual direction, and pastoral counselling require human empathy, personal faith experience, and the ability to recognise the Holy Spirit's movements in souls.

Moral and Doctrinal Concerns: Many AI systems are trained on data that includes content opposed to Catholic moral teaching. They may generate responses that conflict with Church doctrine on sexuality, bioethics, marriage, social justice, and human nature. These systems often reflect moral relativism and secular humanism, which could lead authentic individuals away from true teachings.

AI cannot differentiate between authoritative Church teaching and theological opinions, potentially presenting speculative or heretical ideas as equally valid alongside definitive

doctrinal statements. They cannot recognise the hierarchy of truths within doctrines or comprehend doctrinal development within unchanging principles. We must never rely solely on AI for moral questions or spiritual guidance.

Privacy and Confidentiality Concerns: The use of AI raises significant data privacy issues, particularly in pastoral contexts where sensitive information is exchanged. The Church's commitment to pastoral confidentiality, especially the sacred seal of confession, must never be compromised by technological tools that store, analyse, or risk exposing confidential information.

Many AI systems store conversation data and may be accessed by developers or government bodies. Information shared with AI often lacks the legal and moral protections found in traditional pastoral relationships. We must be very careful about inputting personal parishioner information into AI systems.

Dependency and Genuine Development: Overreliance on AI risks hindering priests' intellectual and spiritual growth. Scripture study, theology, and Church teaching require personal engagement and prayerful reflection that cannot be delegated. As St Paul reminds us: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

Authentic spiritual leadership demands personal holiness, continual conversion, and lived Gospel experience, growing only through persistent prayer, discipline, and personal encounters with Christ. Salesians whose ministry becomes excessively AI-mediated may find themselves detached from the spiritual realities they are called to proclaim.



Practical Guidelines for Implementation

Fundamental Principles: Any AI use must uphold genuine human dignity rather than diminish it, ensuring technology supports rather than replaces authentic human interaction. Be transparent with communities about when and how you employ AI tools. Never use AI for tasks that require sacramental priesthood or intimate pastoral counselling. Always verify AI-generated content against authentic Church teachings before sharing.

Use AI as a research aid and initial resource, but never replace personal study, prayer, and reflection. When preparing homilies, utilise AI to gather information and ideas, but ensure your final message is rooted in prayerful Scripture engagement and genuine personal witness.

Specific Safety Protocols: Clearly define boundaries regarding confidential information. Never input personal parishioner details, pastoral counselling data, or sensitive parish matters into AI systems. For administrative tasks, anonymise data where possible and remain mindful of privacy implications associated with cloud-based systems.

Ensure consistent reviews of AI usage patterns. Evaluate whether tools genuinely support the desired improvement of the ministry without compromising pastoral authenticity. Be alert to signs of overreliance, such as difficulty preparing content without AI or hesitation to engage in traditional study methods. Consider scheduling regular “digital fasting” periods to promote ongoing development of personal theological skills.

Integration with Traditional Formation: AI should enhance, not supplant, traditional priestly formation methods. Maintain regular Scripture study through *lectio divina*, engage with classical theological texts and contemporary magisterial documents, and

pursue ongoing education to deepen Catholic understanding and pastoral practice.

Develop balanced approaches using AI for appropriate tasks while safeguarding time for contemplative priestly activities that cannot be improved by technology: personal prayer, spiritual reading, pastoral reflection, and virtue cultivation, which define authentic leadership. Tools should liberate time for these essential practices rather than diminish them.

Conclusion

Our core calling remains unchanged: to be faithful shepherds guiding people closer to Christ through word, sacrament, presence, and pastoral charity. While technology, including AI, can support this mission when used wisely, it can never replace genuine human presence, spiritual wisdom, and sacramental ministry, which define our vocation.

The words of our Lord guide us: “Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Mt 10:16). This wisdom urges us to support valid technological advancements, enhance pastoral effectiveness while maintaining innocence, preserve the authenticity of ministry, and protect spiritual integrity.

The Church has always engaged thoughtfully with the signs of the times while remaining rooted in unchanging Gospel truths. AI represents one such sign—a powerful tool reflecting human creativity while raising fundamental questions about intelligence, wisdom, and authentic relationships.

Our response must reflect a typical Catholic approach: neither blindly rejecting nor fully accepting, but carefully discerning guided by faith, Church tradition, wisdom, and genuine concern for our people’s spiritual well-being. Let us use these tools to serve human dignity, strengthen pastoral ministry, and ultimately bring ourselves and our people closer to Christ.



ING Newsline Congratulates our New Priests



Deacon Wilson Topno
Date: 10 January 2026
Place: Dibrugarh, Assam



Deacon John Ngouning
Date: 15 January 2026
Place: Maram, Manipur



Deacon Francis Xavier Minj
Date: 15 January 2026
Place: Noadih Parish Gumla, Jharkhand



Deacon Sanjosh Sangma
Date: 17 January 2026
Place: Gojapara, Assam



Deacon Peter Canisius A. Sangma
Date: 24 January 2026
Place: Dalu, Meghalaya



Deacon Sebastian Basumatary
Date: 14 April 2026
Place: Udalguri, Assam

