

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

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

JS – 46/2021

1 January 2021

My Dear Confreres,

Cordial greetings from the Provincial House Guwahati.

THE DAWN OF THE NEW YEAR USHERING NEW HOPES

From the depth of my heart and with sincere good wishes and prayers, I wish everyone of you – Fathers, Brothers, Clerics and Novices, a very happy and prosperous New Year ahead. The year 2020, ridden with Covid-19 onslaught was faced squarely and subdued considerably by the indomitable human spirit and faith. Such efforts could continue even in the New Year. The collective success (though partial it may seem) in facing the pandemic has given us fresh hopes that good times are ahead for everyone. Melody Beattie amazingly puts a challenge to everyone of us, saying, “The New Year stands before us, like a chapter in a book, waiting to be written. We can help write that story by setting goals.”



I am uploading this circular letter of the brand new year, 2021, as I usually did, even before the previous month ends, with a very conscious desire and appeal to every confrere who reads this circular to go into silence and quietness for a brief while on the first day of the year, feel a strong connection with the Divine and design the objective of

the new year in front of Him who is the Lord and master of the future. I feel it will truly be an excellent start especially if done, in front of the Blessed Sacrament. We always say that anything which is begun well is already a work half done. Let us do it.

THE NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS IS PLANNING THE YEAR'S ROAD MAP

Jonathan Edwards' admirable plan of the year was "Resolution one: I will live for God. Resolution two, if no one else does, I still will."

Our future may be unknown to us but we have a God whom we have known and experienced. In the book of Deuteronomy we read, "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you. He will never leave you or forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (Deut 31:8).

In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, the Lord promises, "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (Gen 28:15).

Cyril Cusack succinctly put his objective for the year, saying, "If you asked me for my New Year Resolution, it would be to find out who I am."

Goran Persson invites us to keep thinking of our connectedness to one another by saying, "Let our New Year's resolution be this: we will be there for one another as fellow members of humanity, in the finest sense of the word." Our *Constitutions* is clear on this, "The Lord calls us and entrusts us with brothers to love," and "the Lord calls us and sends us as apostles of the young."

BEGIN WITH MOTHER MARY

Our Mother Church, through its liturgy commences the New Year by presenting Mary as the Mother of Jesus. Beginning the year, with the assured accompaniment of the Mother creates a feeling of motherly accompaniment, protection, hope, inspiration and guidance. She is truly our Mother. Near the cross of Jesus, at His dying moment, there stood Mary with a few other women. In the midst of excruciating pain and nearly breathing his last, Jesus spoke to her and John from the lofty cross, saying, "Behold



your son" and "Behold your mother." John then took her to his home. It fills us with optimism when we realize that Mary was there at the crucial moments of human history.

When the serpent tricked Adam and Eve to disobedience resulting in the loss of the state of grace, God told the creature,

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15).

Mary conceived the only son of God in her womb and gave him birth on Christmas day in a stable at Bethlehem. She was there for Jesus as he descended to the lowliness of human existence.

Mary stood at the foot of the cross and kept her son company when he breathed his last on the cross, bringing liberation from Satan's captivity.

Mary continues to be with us. She was with Don Bosco from the moment of his birth. His mother told him, "I consecrated you to the virgin Mary at the moment of your birth." She was with him all through his work, to the point of him saying that it was she who had done everything in his life. And he spoke from his experience saying, "Have devotion to Mary and you will see what miracles are." To the first missionaries, his strong advice was to spread devotion to our blessed Mother.

The apparitions of our Lady are indications that she continues to accompany human beings and through such apparitions, conveys her motherly advice and message to humanity. Let us therefore begin with Mother Mary. Let us surrender ourselves and all our activities to God through the maternal hands of Mary. Let her take charge of our lives and our mission, helping us to live our consecration to God to the fullest.

EVERYDAY CHRISTMAS AND EASTER IN 2021

While doing my practical training at Bosco Mount in 1990-1991, I used to enter the room of Lt Fr Henry Frassy for some work or the other. In the era of tape recorders, he used to play almost daily the Boney M Christmas songs throughout the year during the morning job time of the boys. One day, out of sheer curiosity, I asked Fr Frassy why he played the Christmas songs throughout the year. He then replied to me that if Christ is in our heart, every day is Christmas or Easter. Christ is present always. He is available always. It is always up to us to allow his birth in our hearts every day. It is always up to us to allow his rising in our hearts every day. Every day it's Christmas! Every day it's Easter!

Let the spirit of joy, celebration, repentence, holiness and peace of Christmas accompany us throughout the New Year. Many confreres reported that the celebration of Christmas was prayerful and attended devoutly by many faithful. But we know that many people ran the risk of celebrating Christmas without Christ—by focusing only on the external celebrations. The message of Christmas or "everyday Christmas/Easter" as impressed upon us by Fr Frassy could become our programme of life for every single day of 2021.

GOD-CENTRIC LIFE

At Christmas, God was the centre or the focus of our contemplation. God the Father did

not give up on straying humanity. He prepared humankind to receive the Messiah through the prophets, judges and kings. Finally he sent John the Baptist as the precursor. And as the author of the Hebrews put it, “In the last days, he spoke to us through His Son.” God the Father was the protagonist of incarnation and redemption.

FAMILY- OR COMMUNITY-CENTRIC LIFE

At Christmas, our attention was also drawn to the Holy Family. Jesus, Mary and Joseph teach us obedience, faithfulness and commitment. Jesus was the fulfilment of all the prophesies; his strong point was obedience to the Father; he humbled himself so much even to the point of taking the form of a servant, yet God raised him to the heights. Jesus in his teachings also said, “No greater love a man has than to lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13). Mary is an epitome of succour and fiat, and Joseph is the just man, who readily obeys God’s word given to him through a vision. They are true models in our day to day life. They teach us to live a family-centred life; they teach us to live a community-centred life.

OTHER- OR POOR-CENTRIC LIFE

During the celebration of Christmas, we also focused on the shepherds in the open field who became the first recipients of the good news. Their unanimous refrain “O come, let us go to Bethlehem and search for Him” has become one of the most popular Christmas hymns down the years. Besides, the appearance of the hosts of angels to the shepherd reveals the mind of God that he came to the marginalised, the humble and the poor in spirit and in reality and those who need to be uplifted. It is heartening to know that many communities paid special attention to the poor in their neighbourhood during the recent Christmas.



LOVE-CENTRIC LIFE

Soon after Christmas, we celebrated the feast days of the three martyrs – St Stephen, the Holy Innocents and St Thomas Becket. They all experienced martyrdom for the sake of Christ. They believed and lived the sacrifice of Christ through their own sacrifice of life. They lived love that came down at Christmas. John in his gospel writes, “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (3:16). Jesus is love incarnate and correspondingly, the martyrs preferred to die for Him due to their love for him in return.

The first readings, soon after the Chrismas are taken from the letters of St John, the apostle of love, wherein he speaks much about love. He writes, “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen” (1 Jn 4:20).

St Paul also says that even if one can speak all languages, has varied gifts and can excel in all activities, but has not love, he/she is nothing but emptiness.

My prayer then is that throughout 2021, our life as consecrated people could be strongly God-centred, family/community-centred, and other-centred which includes the youth and other people who are marginalised, exploited, poor in all senses and those denied justice and equality. In other words, let our lives be love-centric. Let love become the purpose and energy of our life and mission.

STRENNNA OF THE RECTOR MAJOR - 2021

Moved by hope: "See, I am making all things new" (Rev 21:5).



Our Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, has chosen the above message as his Strenna (Gift) for the year 2021. In the background of a pandemic that has devastated the world, the Rector Major calls for hope that is born of a faith through which our Lord Jesus assures of his presence and his power to make all things new. Our great challenge, as one Salesian Family, is simply to be a sign of hope, to put light and colour, to look with understanding, to continue to heal and accompany what this pandemic has hurt, to continue to be attentive to the needs of others, as Mother Mazzarello and Don Bosco have taught us.

Pope Francis invited the world to be infected with “the necessary antibodies of justice, charity and solidarity” for reconstruction after the days of the pandemic. It is undeniable



how much pain is being experienced in the world right now. It is undeniable how many millions of poor people have been infected and lost their lives. If we are invited to keep a safe distance, how can we imagine that the occupants amassed in the slums, near the dumps, can respect social distancing? The loss of work is affecting millions of families; the mourning that could not be done leaves millions of hearts in pain; the poverty that looms (sometimes hunger) affects, disorients, paralyses and threatens to bury all hope. In this context and in the face of this harsh and painful reality with its heavy consequences, the Strenna underlines and reaffirms that we need to continue to express the certainty of being moved by hope: because God in His Spirit continues to make “all things new.”

CONGREGATION'S DIRECTION IN THE NEXT SIX YEARS - 2020 to 2026

Very briefly, I present to you the objectives that the Congregation would like to achieve after six years. The Acts of the General Council, n. 433 which contains the ***Post Chapter Reflection*** will reach every confrere soon (in hard copies). I invite you all to read them personally and as a community. Later, each community will meet together and chalk out a plan of action in detail. Here are the salient points:

1. TO GROW MORE VISIBLE IN OUR SALESIAN IDENTITY

Salesians are consecrated religious and so we cannot but be focused on God. Becoming more visibly mystics in the Spirit, God-like and holy is what we need to be. People especially the young must see us as ***alter Christus***. They must experience Christ in our way of life as individuals and as a community and in the gentle, loving, uplifting and forgiving way we deal with them. Without Christ at the centre of our being, life and activity, we have no future and we cannot offer anything significant. Our identity will become clearer if we are experts in youth affairs and in the professional way in which we go to the youth and lead them to Christ.

2. TO UNDERSTAND THE ASPECT OF THE SOUL, GIVING IT TOP ATTENTION IN OUR SERVICE TO YOUTH

Our youth activities are gigantic and they are required for saving the entire person.

Holistic approach however should include the aspect of the soul. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but suffers the loss of his soul.

3. THE SACRAMENT OF PRESENCE OF SALESIANS WITH THE YOUNG

We Salesians have the legacy of Don Bosco who said that “I have promised God that I will give myself to my last breathe to my poor boys.” Knowing that our presence is educative and preventive, we guard and propagate it and ensure that it does not go out of practice. The young need us and they beckon to us. Our presence is so sacred and divinely that it is truly a sacrament.

4. THE NEED TO FORM SALESIANS AS PASTORS

The Good Shepherd is our model. The genuine and dedicated shepherd is so close to the sheep that he is able to distinctly identify each individual sheep by its smell. He goes in search of the lost sheep, bandages the wounded and carries it on his shoulder. Pastoral approach to the mission needs to be professional as any organizations of today.

Planning and always having a planning mentality to lead the sheep to greener pastures should be our objective. We are not formed for the missions but we are formed in the missions to love the mission passionately. Formation of the mind and formation to be pastors rather than administrators is what we are being asked for.

5. ABSOLUTE PRIORITY OF THE YOUNG, THE POOREST, THE MOST ABANDONED AND DEFENCELESS

Obviously this does not need any explanation. However if the Rector Major and his council, after having done the visitations of the provinces in these years and after having gone through the report of the Provincial Chapters are using the word “absolute”, then there might be some digressions in these. Covid-19 times seemed to have made the rich richer and the poor poorer. The divide between the rich and the poor could become wider. The poor need us and are beckoning us. It may be easier and financially remunerating to work for the rich, but if we want to be faithful to our roots and to our charism, we have to be the champions of the poorest.

6. CONSCIOUS SHARING OF OUR CHARISM WITH THE LAY COLLABORATORS

Our laity have the responsibility and the right to collaborate with us in promoting human growth and development. Formation of the laity and sharing our charism with them will enrich the Congregation and the Province. There are so many learned and qualified lay people who wish to be part of the Salesian Family and we need to respond to their desire to work for the betterment of human society especially for the formation of youth.

7. PROMOTE MISSIONARIES AD GENTES FROM THE PROVINCE

Generosity with the Church and the Congregation has been the hallmark of Don Bosco's style of life since the beginning. Both Don Bosco and Don Rua showed us the shining example of being generous to the missions. Our missions have grown in leaps and bounds due to the generosity of the Congregation towards the missions in personnel and in finance.

Thanks be to God, our Province has contributed much in this regard but it could be accelerated especially because we have one of the missionary aspirantates of South Asia in our Province and that we are celebrating the centenary of the arrival of Salesians in the North East in 2022.

8. WORK TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE YOUNG

The holistic development of the young will entail that we visualize and operationalise systems of youth development which will ensure that there is a sustainability in the development of the young. In our Province, many migrants and jobless youth have returned home due to Covid-19. In the national level, some response to get back the youth into jobs and sustainability have started. Green Skill Training at Joropara (under BRO, Guwahati) could go a long way in moving positively towards this goal.

SALESIAN FEASTS AND COMMEMORATIONS OF JANUARY

January is a special month with a number of Salesian feasts and commemorations. On 12 January 2021, we shall commemorate the 99th anniversary of the arrival of Salesians in North East India. As we prepare ourselves to celebrate the centenary, let us make the following occasions a celebration of God's boundless love for us all.

- Blessed Titus Zeman, *priest and martyr* (8 January)
- Commemoration of the arrival of Salesians to North East (12 January)
- Blessed Louis Variara, *Founder of the Institute of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary* (15 January)
- Blessed Laura Vicuña, *youth* (22 January)
- St Francis of Sales, *Bishop & Doctor of the Church, Titular and Patron of our Society* (24 January)
- Blessed Bronislaus Markiewicz, *Founder of the Congregations of Saint Michael the Archangel* (30 January)
- St John Bosco, *our Father and Founder* (31 January)
- Commemoration of all deceased Salesian confreres (1 February).

ST FRANCIS DE SALES

Francis was born on 21 August 1567 in the family castle of Sales, in Thorens in the duchy of upper Savoy. He was the firstborn child of Francis and Frances De Boisy. His father

was forty-four, and his mother fifteen. There were twelve children born to the family, five of whom died soon after their birth. Francis' studies were lengthy and were accomplished in three stages: college studies at la Roche and Annecy (where his priestly vocation was born); then at the Jesuit college in Paris; and finally at Padua, where in 1591 he obtained his doctorate in civil and canon law. During these years he also studied theology.

Francis was ordained bishop on 8 December 1602 and became the good shepherd amongst his people. He was tireless in visiting his 450 parishes; he organised the further formation of his clergy, proclaiming that learning was the eighth sacrament for a priest. In him we find a marvellous fusion of two characteristics that are rarely seen together: astute thought and intense activity, all inspired by a spiritual life of extraordinary distinction. He founded a new kind of Congregation, the Contemplative Order of the Visitation Sisters, on 6 June 1610, that would include the care of girls and widows, and be permitted to leave the convent to visit the sick and the poor.

Francis expressed the best of his teaching in three remarkable and practical spiritual books: *Introduction to the Devout Life* (or *Philothea*, 1608, definitive edition 1619); *Treatise on the Love of God* (or *Theotimus* 1616); and the posthumous *Spiritual Discussions*. Francis died of a stroke on 28 December 1622.

ST JOHN BOSCO

John Bosco was born in Castelnuovo d'Asti on 16 August 1815 of a peasant family. His father, Francesco Bosco, passed away leaving him an orphan at the age of two, and Margherita Occhiena found herself raising Anthony, Joseph and young John on her own. Margaret, a wise educator, made her family a domestic church by exercising a gentle firmness combined with boundless faith.

John began to feel the desire to become a priest from an early age. He had a decisive and programmatic dream at nine years of age which revealed his mission to him: "Make yourself humble, strong and energetic," a woman dressed resplendently told him. "I will teach you. In time, you will understand everything." The elderly Fr Calosso started him out on his priestly studies, which he had to accomplish with great difficulty.

As a seminarian in Chieri, John started the Society for a Good Time (Società d'Allegria), which gathered some of the young people of the town. In June 1841 he was ordained a priest. His spiritual director, Fr Cafasso, advised him to perfect his studies in the Pastoral Institute (Convitto ecclesiastico).

Meanwhile, Don Bosco was gathering the first boys around him, and organised a festive (weekend) oratory, which was initially a wandering oratory and then established itself at Valdocco. Margaret, now an older woman, agreed to come to Turin to help him, and became "Mamma Margaret" for the boys. Don Bosco began to provide shelter to

homeless orphans, teaching them a trade and to love the Lord. He would sing, play and pray with them.

His first co-workers also came from these first boys. Thus his educational method developed, the famous “Preventive System.” Over time these early co-workers, thanks also to the help of Pope Pius IX, became a Congregation that aims at the salvation of youth, fighting all poverty, with the motto, “Give me souls, and take away the rest.”

The young Dominic Savio is the first of the fruits of the preventive system. Mary Help of Christians, who always supported Don Bosco in his work, obtained numerous graces, including extraordinary ones, and the money needed for all his enterprises. She also helped him build the Basilica named after her.

With the help of St Mary Domenica Mazzarello, Don Bosco founded the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Together with his benefactors and committed lay people he created the Salesian Cooperators.

Don Bosco died at the age of 72 years, on 31 January 1888. Today the Salesians are present throughout the world, and Don Bosco has been recognised by the Church as the “father and teacher of the young.” Pius XI, who had known him, beatified him in 1929, and canonised him on Easter Sunday, 1 April 1934.

FIFTH ANNUAL RETREAT

The fifth annual spiritual retreat of our Province was held in the Provincial House, Guwahati, 9-14 December 2020. The retreat was on the theme of Salesian Spirit preached by Fr Jose Varickasseril (INS) entitled “Recapturing the Salesian Heritage.” Fr Varicka based the retreat on his summary of the 7 volumes of Fr Arthur Lenti, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*. 26 confreres participated in the retreat, and were very appreciative of Fr Varicka’s painstaking work in summarizing Lenti’s work, and presenting it for our reflection and prayer in order to grow in our love for Christ and for Don Bosco. I sincerely thank Fr Varicka, especially for his relevant and timely reflections to help us prepare for the 2022 Centenary. May God bless him and all his intentions!

NEW PRIESTS’ DAY



The New Priests’ Day was celebrated in the Provincial House on 15 December 2020.

Because of some compelling reasons, the celebration had been postponed a few times, and eventually we as a Provincial Community were able to gather around the New Priests who were ordained last year, 2020: Fr John Paul Tirkey, Fr Francis Xavier Kujur, Fr Kishor Moshahary, Fr Amit Tete, Fr Klisterwel Songthiang, and Fr Antony Dhason. Fr Antony Dhason was not able to be present as he was down with fever and cough. Once again we congratulate these confreres for their generosity and availability, and pray that they model themselves on the compassionate heart of Jesus, the Good Shepherd and the Good Samaritan. May God bless their priestly ministries

BISHOP VICTOR APPOINTED ARCHBISHOP OF SHILLONG

His Holiness Pope Francis has appointed *Most Rev. Victor Lyngdoh* (64), currently Bishop of Jowai, as Archbishop of Shillong. We congratulate Bishop Victor and wish him God's abundant blessings for his episcopal ministry at the Archdiocese of Shillong. He was Bishop of Nongstoin from 2006 to 2016; and was transferred to the See of Jowai in 2016. He succeeds Lt Archbishop Dominic Jala SDB, who tragically and suddenly passed away in a road accident on 10 October 2019, in Colusa County, California, USA.

FOUNDATION STONE LAID FOR THE GREEN SKILLS TRAINING AT JOROPARA



Raising my heart in gratitude to God and in the name of the confreres of the Province and especially the beneficiaries particularly the youth, I laid the foundation stone of the Green Skills Training Centre at Joropara, Mendal on 28 December 2020. Present on the august occasion was Fr Joseph Teron, Vice Provincial, Fr Charles Ch Sangma, Regional Councillor, Fr Jayaprakash, Executive Director, BRO, Fr CV Raphael, Deputy Director and a host of Fathers, Brothers, Sisters and BRO office staff. A huge number who were already the beneficiaries of BRO initiatives attended the programme. Fr Jayaprakash informed the gathering that the training would include solar related training, bio-gas systems training, training on forest, land, water and waste management, organic agriculture, livestock farming and cattle breeding, mushroom growing and bee keeping. The training would propagate tapping the solar energy. We thank Don Bosco Mondo, German Government BMZ and Green Foundation, our sponsors; and wish Fr Jayaprakash and his team all the best in implementing the project successfully.

CONGRATULATIONS

The Rector Major has appointed *Fr Jose Koyickal* as the Provincial of the Sacred Heart Province of Bangalore (INK) and *Fr Davis Maniparamben* as the Provincial of the Salesian Province of Jesus the Good Shepherd, New Delhi (INN) for the six-year term 2021-2027. Fr Davis will assume office on 8 February 2021 at the end of the mandate of Fr Jose Mathew Koorappallil; and Fr Jose Koyickal will assume office on 11 February 2021 as Fr Mathew (Joyce) Thonikuzhiyil completes his term as Provincial of Bangalore. We thank the outgoing Provincials for their service rendered to the confreres and the Salesian Family in their Provinces, to the South Asia Region, and to the Congregation. May God bless their generosity and sacrifices. We also congratulate the New Provincials-Designate and pray for their leadership ministry.

CONDOLENCES

Fr Felix Koikara, of the Province of Madras (INM), passed away in Chennai on 25 December 2020. He was 83 years old. May his soul rest in peace! We offer our condolences to the Provincial and confreres of INM, and to all the family members, especially Mr Basil Koikara, the nephew of Late Fr Felix.

CONCLUSION

I feel happy to have visited and celebrated the Christmas with the aspirants at Sirajuli and with the Prenovices at Dotma. On the New Year's day, I will be with the apostolic boys at Bosco Mount for the celebration. Earlier the Vice Provincial and the Economer too was present with the aspirants for other occasions. The Bosco Mount boys have returned to the aspirantate after a prolonged absence due to the pandemic lockdown mainly; they had lost many class days due to the lockdown. Their parents are happy with the arrangements; and our presence with them on the festive occasions will make some difference for them who could have missed their parents and celebrations at home. We are grateful to the superiors of these communities for having risen to the occasion and making the arrangements in view of the greater good.

May God bless you all! Once again, a Happy and Joyful New Year to you all!

Yours affectionately in the Lord,



Fr Januarius S Sangma, SDB
Provincial

MONTHLY CALENDAR – JANUARY 2021

PROVINCIAL

1	Fri	Tura: Bosco Mount
2	Sat	Tura >> Garobadha
3	Sun	Garobadha
4	Mon	Tura: Thanksgiving Mass of Sr Rikme M Sangma FMA
5	Tue	Tura >> Guwahati >> Online Meeting of DB Tech
6	Wed	Tangla: Inauguration of the Perpetual Profession Preparation Course
7	Thu	Tangla
8	Fri	Tangla >> Guwahati
9	Sat	Guwahati
10	Sun	Satgaon: Chapel Blessing
11	Mon	Sojong: Visitation of the Community
12	Tue	Satgaon (Sojong) & Baithalangso: Visitation
13	Wed	Guwahati: Wedding of Mr Patrick Sangma
14	Thu	Guwahati
15	Fri	Reserved for Visitation (to be arranged in consultation with the communities)
16	Sat	Reserved for Visitation
17	Sun	Reserved for Visitation
18	Mon	Reserved for Visitation
19	Tue	Reserved for Visitation
20	Wed	Guwahati: Salesian Family Study of the Strenna 2021: Provincial House
21	Thu	Guwahati
22	Fri	Guwahati
23	Sat	Guwahati: Provincial Council Meeting
24	Sun	Gojapara: First Holy Communion
25	Mon	Gojapara: Visitation of the Community
26	Tue	Guwahati
27	Wed	Guwahati: Meeting of Rectors and Leaders of Communities
28	Thu	Reserved for Visitation
29	Fri	Reserved for Visitation
30	Sat	Reserved for Visitation
31	Sun	Guwahati: Feast of St John Bosco