

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

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

JS – 76/2023

1 June 2023

My dear Confreres,

Greetings from Don Bosco Provincial House, Guwahati.

HEART OF JESUS, MAKE MY HEART LIKE UNTO THINE

On 16 June 2023, we will celebrate the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Our formation houses are dedicated to the Heart of Jesus. We, Salesians, aim to model our hearts after the heart of the good Shepherd who goes in search of the lost and bring succour to them. While involved in public ministry, Jesus' words, life and action often reflected the quality of his heart. Looking at the crowd, he felt compassion for them as they were like sheep without a shepherd. One day, while exhausted on account of preaching and healing ministry, he sensed that his listeners were hungry; and his heart went out to them in compassion. He mobilized the apostles and multiplied the few loaves of bread and the few fish for the crowd.



While hanging on the cross, a soldier pierced his heart with a lance. There flowed blood and water which indicated the fountain of sacramental graces. At death too, his heart became the source of our spiritual strength and sanctity.

Most people have healthy hearts, yet distinguishing unhealthy hearts is not a challenging task. Our lives, actions, and particularly the words we utter, especially towards those who are defenseless and impoverished, serve as indicators of the condition of our hearts—whether they are healthy or unhealthy. When we engage in meditating on Jesus' Heart, we earnestly pray, “Make our hearts like unto thine, O Lord”. In doing so, we desire to cultivate hearts that are pure and compassionate, mirroring the qualities exemplified by Jesus.

THANK YOU, FR GEORGE CHALISSERY FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY VISITATION OF THE PROVINCE

As Greek philosopher Socrates rightly said that “an unexamined life is not worth living”, for individuals and organizations, secular or religious, self-knowledge, self-discovery, and self-examination are **sine qua non** for greater progress or change of direction in life. Our beautiful province was privileged to avail a four-month long internal journey

towards greater self-awareness and discovery from February to May 2023. Such an exercise, mandated by the Congregation is an indication that the Congregation loves the province and that it provides such opportunity to ensure that the province remains faithful to the charism and the religious commitments.

Appointed and sent by the Rector Major, Rev. Fr Angel Fernandez Artime, to carry out the extraordinary visitation in his name, Fr George Chalissery began the exercise on 31 January 2023 and completed it well on 29 May 2023. On 29 May, he presented a comprehensive report of the extraordinary visitation in the Provincial House. It was well attended by a large number of confreres from different parts of the province. He was able to compile his observations after meeting confreres in all our communities in the province but also in Rome, Shillong, Dimapur and Sonada.

Fr George will now submit the report to the Rector Major who along with the General Council will study it and send the views recommendations by indicating the way forward to us. Once it comes back, I along with the Provincial Council will organise the study of the report and chalk out the programme of implementation



The province is grateful to the Rector Major especially his delegate, Fr George Chalissery for this spiritual exercise. The Extraordinary Visitor endeared himself to the confreres by his simple and unassuming ways, his approachable nature, prayer and strong interior life, while at the same time showing great focus in listening, and diagnosing the strengths and areas of concern of the province.

While waiting for the final report, I will cull out a few vital points from the report of the Extraordinary visitation for our consideration and reflection.

1. Our prayer life (personal and communitarian) and the prayerful celebration of the Sacraments especially the Holy Eucharist are the true sources of fidelity and effectiveness in life and ministry. We could animate them still better. Let us not compromise on our time with the Lord. Any compromise on the practices of piety and devotions will be the beginning of our downfall. Let the meditation be, without failure, for 30 minutes (*Regulations 71*).

2. The House Council facilitates community building. It is important to organise the House Council and other community meetings regularly and after proper preparation to plan our ministry and bring the confreres together. It need not be only for business matters but also to share our experiences in the our ministry and the apostolate, which hopefully could create empathy to one another.

3. Whether one is young or old, it is important to have a personal plan of life and an accompaniment in spiritual life (Spiritual Direction). Those who are in initial formation will need to strive to become proficient in English, beginning from the pre-novitiate stage. People expect that we as leaders and educators, communicate effectively, both in local languages as well as in English.

4. In some, there is a grave and urgent need to be transparent, honest and sincere as regards finance. Personal bank accounts, without the knowledge of the Superiors is a serious aberration of religious discipline.

The Province (as has been done) will appoint an administrator in each community, who together with the Rector will administer the money. Allocation of funds to different sectors will be done in the House council. Income and expenditure report will have to be sent to the Economer's office every three months.

On transfers, handing over needs to be done in black and white and must be in the presence of the Rector, the Provincial delegate and the Economer. Money is of the community and there should be co-responsibility, transparency and accountability in its administration.

5. Each institution will open up the community infrastructure for the youth of the locality especially for the **ORATORY**, such as recreation, value education, coaching classes, etc. It is recommended that the Salesian Co-operators and Past Pupils could be invited to assist us in this.

6. Our hostels need a huge revamp. The wholesome food, cleanliness of the place, closer follow up of the boys and girls especially **OUR PRESENCE** among them etc. are the need of the hour.

7. It is imperative that we enhance the humane aspect in our interactions with our collaborators, particularly the Sisters. We must strive to improve how we offer criticism, observations and feedback, make payments, and attend to their spiritual needs. Additionally, it is crucial to recognize that some of our support staff may require more substantial and sustainable support from our community, ensuring their livelihoods are adequately cared for.

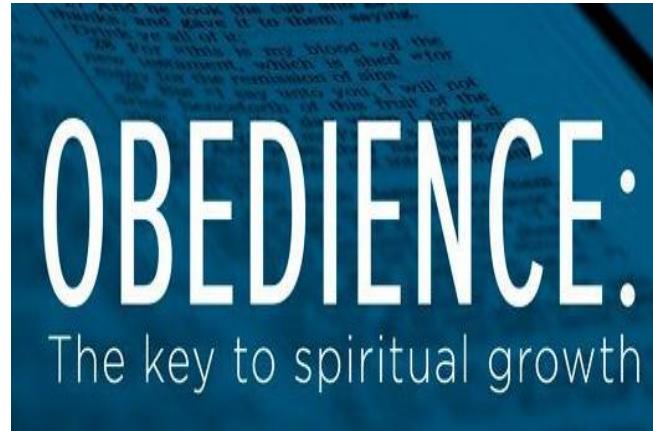
8. There is a need to take timely and effective disciplinary measures against those who trespass against religious norms at the local and Provincial levels.

I place on record my deep affection and appreciation to Fr George for the visitation and also for his comprehensive and factual report. The confreres felt at ease and at home in his company, as much as we felt that he too felt at home in all the communities of the province. We assure him of our prayers especially for his mission in Africa.

We are grateful to Fr Thomas John and Mr Andreas Murmu who accompanied him and took great care of him. Fr Thomas John assisted him in the collection of relevant data. May God bless them for their sacrifice and generosity.

“YOUR WILL BE DONE” - APOSTOLIC ASSIGNMENTS 2023-24

In the Marian month, the month of May every year, we effect transfers, changes in placements and assignments. We also call them OBEDIENCES. Obedience, as we know, is not an occasional virtue that we practise. Every day, every moment we are asked to obey God in our religious and Christian lives. I would like to reflect with you on this important topic of obedience, even as we prepare for the new placements.



As **Fr Juan Vecchi** once wrote, “It is not easy nowadays to speak about obedience. A change is taking place in the very concept, and it would be naïve to ignore it. It is a price we have to pay for the continuing development of democratic principles and, in many ways, from the individualistic vision of life, such as leaving everything to authority, to more mature ways of collaborating for the common good, and from the belittling of authority to giving it a more humble foundation against a background of faith” (Fr Juan Vecchi, “I have come to do your will,” *Letters of the Rector Major*).

Fr Vecchi is pointing to the issues related to obediences and transfers, but also to the aspect of faith that we need to have in this context. Obedience is possible only in an attitude of faith. It is God who calls us and sends us into communities and into the various mission fields that we find ourselves in. We did not choose to follow Christ, but it is Christ himself who chooses us as his followers. “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (Jn 15:16).

St Faustina writes in her *Diary*, “We should obey and respect the Superior, not because she is good, holy or prudent, but solely because she represents God, and by obeying her we are obeying God Himself” (St Faustina, *Divine Mercy in My Soul*, n. 567).

By obeying the lawful Superior, we obey God himself. By following the instructions given by our authorities, we obey God himself. Even if the Superior seems to be motivated by wrong or unjust reasons, the confrere is asked to obey him in a spirit of faith. Jesus, instructing the people even with regard to the commands of the Pharisees and scribes, asks them, “Do and observe whatever they tell you” (Mt 23:3). The confrere is answerable to God with regard to obedience, and the Superior is answerable to God with regard to justice. Therefore, it is always safe and necessary to obey the Superior, even when our own wishes have not prevailed.

The Superiors become the day by day interpreters of God’s will, as our *Constitutions* affirm. “By professing obedience we offer our will to God and by carrying out the mission entrusted to us we relive in the Church and in the Congregation Christ’s own obedience. Docile to the Spirit and attentive to the signs he gives us in the events of each day, we take the gospel as our supreme rule of life, the Constitutions as a sure path to follow, and the superiors and the community as day by day interpreters of God’s will” (C. 64). We cannot obey God in the abstract; we obey God in and through the human instrumentality of Superiors. Let us have this faith always.

In a religious way of living, obedience is essential. Obedience frees us from our self-will; it frees our heart and mind from what could become unnecessary distractions in our following of Jesus Christ. It guarantees our growth in holiness, and our eventual salvation.

Our Lord Jesus showed us how to obey, taking the form of a slave. He went to the cross in obedience to the Father. He did this in order to cancel out the first sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Their sin was in fact disobedience, through which sin entered the world. Jesus through his obedience gave us the grace of salvation. Whenever we obey it is a firm step towards our redemption. But whenever we disobey or show reluctance to obey, we are slowing down our progress towards the goal or even going off track. In and through our every act of obedience, let us embrace Jesus and his cross, and along with him let us defeat the Evil One.

Dear confreres, let us thus begin this new assignment (this new academic year) in a deep spirit of faith. Let us build our fraternal communities in genuine love, being ready to

Obedience
is the proof
of our faith
in God.

obey God's will even if it means sacrifice or suffering. May we be true, humble and obedient instruments of God's love wherever we are sent.

As informed to you earlier, it may take a few more days for the list of the Apostolic assignments of the province to be approved by the Rector Major and the General council, I am sending you the circular without the transfers list. I shall publish the obedience list as soon as the approval comes from our Generalate.

INTROSPECTION ON OUR QUALITY INTERVENTION IN THE PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN EXAMINATIONS

I congratulate the Rectors, the Principals, the Vice Principals, the Staff and the students of our schools for the encouraging HSSLC and SSLC results, declared recently. While appreciating all the remarkable achievements of most of our schools, I along with many confreres with whom I had interacted feel that we could perform still better.



I appreciate our schools for admitting the poorer youth of the locality into our institutions, but I wish that they especially from the poorest and most challenging families pass the Board examinations well. Let us be generous with scholarships, sponsorships and extra/remedial classes. Never insult a student for his or her inability to pay.

For our schools, it is not enough to secure a 100 per cent pass (and most of our schools are not getting 100 percent pass these years) but it is good to scrutinize the grades in which the students pass. It should be our effort to make the students pass mainly in the I division. Looking at the results of quite many schools, it can be noticed that many students have passed in the II and III divisions.

The Principal needs to organize the teachers especially the Class teachers to identify the weak students right from the start of the scholastic year and follow them up throughout the year. It is not fair to say that they are not interested and not co-operative. We have to motivate them and make them co-operate with us. Having contact with the parents of the weak students regularly and planning with them the follow up of the students in studies will help much.

Over these years I have noticed that under some Salesian Principals the so called "not so good" school has come up well in all spheres including sports, games, scouting, etc, while under somebody else, the so called "good" school also has shown deterioration.

Each Principal needs to be responsible and should make all efforts to ensure that what was built over so many years, are not destroyed through lack of professionalism, dedication and focus.

All the time, the Provincial cannot have “good and effective” Principal at his disposal. It is important that anyone to whom the task of the Principal is given proves responsible and through hard work bring up the school well. We need to learn to consult and learn from experienced Principals and those who worked in schools including the lay people.

I wish to repeat here that the Rectors, the Principals and the Vice Principals must be present in the school actively at every working/class day. It means much to the teachers, parents and especially the students. They cannot and should not be absent from school without valid reasons. Some confreres want to relax while not working sufficiently hard enough.

Over these past years, I have seen many schools providing refresher courses to the Staff. It is appreciated. During the course of the year, however it is needed to follow up the teachers closely in lesson planning, in classroom teaching, correction of home works, setting questions for weekly test and correcting the test copies well and giving personal correction to the students etc. Regular Staff meeting to motivate and generate enthusiasm is required of the Principal.

Pope Francis motivated the Salesians, saying, “Never disappoint the aspirations of the young”. The failure of one or two students should make us ask the question if we had failed to assist the students to achieve their aspirations in life. The confreres especially the Rector and the Principal need to have a close link with the students during class hours and during recreation. Be in touch with Class XII and X in the class room, interact with them, ask them patiently the challenges that they face daily in studies, at home and in society and respond positively.

Like any other mission, imparting quality education to students is the mission of the entire community. Compartmentalization of sectors weakens the community and our achievements will not be high.

Let us promote in an organized way Sports and games and other co-curricular activities. Together with developing personalities, such activities promote discipline, team spirit, enthusiasm, and finally contribute to holistic education. Don Bosco told us to love what youth love, so that they would love what we love.

Let us love the students sincerely. Make an effort to know their struggles and problems both at home and in school. Counsel them and if needed, make referrals to professional counsellors. Their academic progress and regress must be the uppermost in the mind of

the Principal and give assistance to students. The brilliant and intelligent students too need further assistance while the weak students need remedial and extra classes.

If too many students fail in one particular subject, it is good to ask the subject teacher his or her opinion on this phenomenon.

Parents' meeting needs to be more often and animation must be given lots of attention. If the animation is good, the children will benefit in their studies while they are at home.

One of the schools in the Province has shown significant improvement and achievement this year by introducing the Weekly Test. Most of us complain that the students do not study the daily lesson. It is true. Quite many students study before the exams which is a bad habit. Daily study habit needs to be insisted with all the students. One of the ways to make the students study is to give homeworks and conduct weekly tests. If the homeworks and weekly tests are corrected properly and if the students are made accountable especially for failures, then they will start showing seriousness in studies gradually. The weekly test papers need to be signed by the Parents, the subject teacher and the Principal. Putting the signature on such papers by the Principal, rather than the rubber stamp is an indication of how much we value such exercises and hence he must find time to sign them.

Finally, let all our institutions especially educational centres be homes. Make daily effort to create an atmosphere of joy, familiarity, welcome and security to everyone who comes to us. Ensure the cleanliness of the compound and the classrooms. Children learn so many values from the well prepared and flawless conduct of the assembly. A loving Principal or Head will make sure that there are good facilities like clean drinking water, clean toilets, reading facilities, recreation centres, etc. It is preferable, if possible, to make the students especially the younger ones to bring their own tiffin from homes.

All the above will depend a lot on the person of the Principal. That is why the saying "Show me the Principal and I will tell you what the school will be like" is true. As I congratulate you for enjoying the trust of the province to head this responsible and futuristic institution, it is my earnest request that you prove yourself responsible and do all that is in your power to make your institution the best and keep up the brand **DON BOSCO**. It also entails seeking guidance and suggestions from the experienced Salesians and others in administering such institutions. I wish you all, all the best for this year. May 2024 HSSLC and SSLC results see you at the top. I wish the same to the higher education institutions of the province.

Henry Ford once said, "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got."

YES TO GOD IN THE STYLE AND FOOTSTEPS OF MARY

Eight (8) of our novices made their first profession at Sunnyside, Shillong and three (3) at Zubza, Kohima. They have already been assigned the post-novitiate formation communities in Dimapur, Nashik and Aluva. This year, we have not sent anyone to Sonada.

Twelve (12) of our pre-novices have entered the novitiates at Sunnyside and Zubza.

After the retreat of Clerics and Brothers, in which 32 of them participated, 19 of them renewed their vows at the concluding Holy Mass at Orlong Hada. Their retreat was animated by Fr George Maliekal, former Provincial of Shillong province.

Thirteen clerics (10 from ING and 3 from LKC) made their Perpetual profession at Don Bosco Shrine, Gojapara. The attendance of the faithful was huge. It is likely that all of them have witnessed the perpetual profession ceremony for the first time. Thanks be to God. Some of our clerics renewed their vows in Dimapur and Shillong.

We thank God for the gift of each one of them and we pray that they find joy and fulfillment in the life they have chosen. We pray that they may persevere in their vocation, especially during the challenging moments of life. May the Lord bless their communities and their parents. We continue to pray for more vocations for the province.



CONCLUSION

I wish you all a very happy feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Let the celebration of the feast help us to look at our own hearts. Our hearts need to be healthy biologically. Yet, it is our spiritual heart which makes us what and who we are - humane, authentic, divine, austere, firm and charitable.

It is good to listen to what your heart speaks in the silent moments of your life.

I wish those who are taking up the new assignments in the province all joy and happiness in the new ministry. Let us love our mission and the people who look up to us for spiritual enrichment. It will be a sorry state of life if the bulk of our efforts are on physical works and we give less or no time to prepare ourselves for evangelisation, catechesis, administration of sacraments and in being with the people. No doubt we

need to renovate the facilities but our main vocation is to be the evangelizers and we should never forget that, be in the educational institutions or parishes.

The visitation of the province ended happily. Fr George felt at home with us. His assessment of our communities has been factual. His visitation will be a moment of grace if we implement his recommendations to our best.

May Jesus the good Shepherd bless us. May our Mother and St John Bosco intercede for us to be faithful despite challenges of life. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco,



Fr Januarius S Sangma, SDB
Provincial



***MOST SACRED HEART OF JESUS
HAVE MERCY ON US***

JUNE 2023

Date	Day	PROVINCIAL'S PROGRAMME
1	Thu	Guwahati
2	Fri	Guwahati >> Boko
3	Sat	Damra (Meeting) - Bosco Mount
4	Sun	Bosco Mount - Rongkhon Parish - BEd College
5	Mon	Guwahati
6	Tue	Guwahati >> Satgaon: Animation of the ADMA
7	Wed	Satgaon: Chapel Blessing - Rongkhang Village
8	Thu	Guwahati
9	Fri	Guwahati >> Dotma : Prenovitiate
10	Sat	Doomni - Chapel blessing - Arnbil Village >> Sirajuli
11	Sun	Sirajuli >> Tezpur : DBSTI
12	Mon	Guwahati
13	Tue	Guwahati
14	Wed	Guwahati
15	Thu	Guwahati: Blessing of the renovated CFG office
16	Fri	Guwahati >> Umsawai
17	Sat	Amkachi
18	Sun	Guwahati
19	Mon	Shillong - Sunnyside Novitiate
20	Tue	Shillong
21	Wed	Guwahati
22	Thu	Guwahati
23	Fri	Guwahati
24	Sat	Provincial Council Meeting, Provincial House (9.30 am - 5.00 pm)
25	Sun	Damra: Chapel Blessing - Chechapani (Rabha) village (10.00 am)
26	Mon	Tura : Governing Body Meeting (4.00 pm)
27	Tue	Tura >> Garobadha
28	Wed	Garobadha - Tura >> Guwahati
29	Thu	Guwahati
30	Fri	Guwahati