

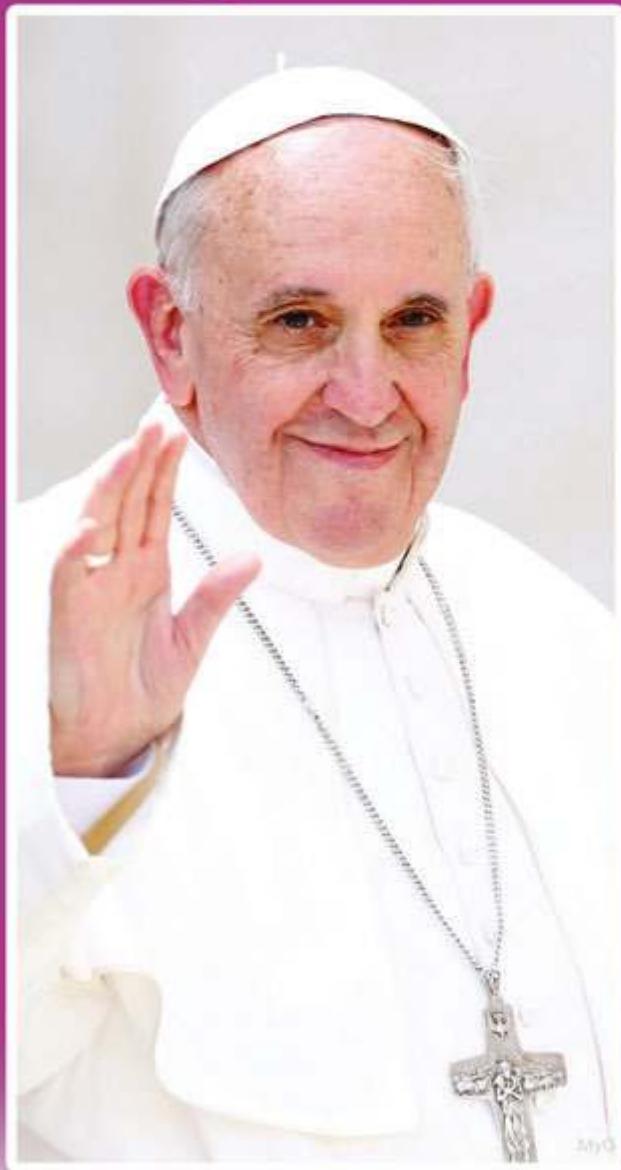
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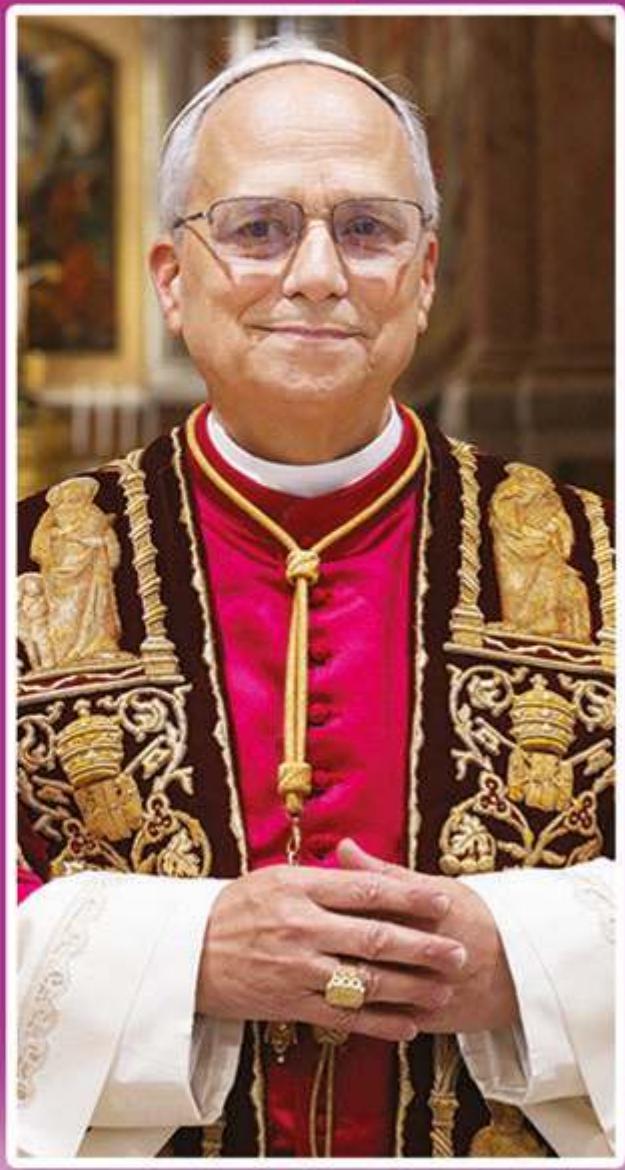


# ING NEWSLINE

SALESIAN PROVINCE OF GUWAHATI



**Adieu, Papa Francis**



**Viva, Papa Leo XIV**



**Ad Multos Annos!**  
**Our Perpetually Professed Salesians**

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As the gentle monsoon rains begin to nourish our beautiful northeastern landscape, we find ourselves at the midpoint of another year of service and dedication in the province. This June edition of *Newsline* invites us to pause and reflect on our journey thus far, while looking ahead with renewed purpose.

The past months have witnessed our province navigating both challenges and triumphs. Our educational institutions have continued to be beacons of hope for thousands of young people across the region. Our social outreach programmes have extended a helping hand to those most vulnerable in our communities. Our spiritual ministries have brought comfort and guidance to countless souls seeking meaning in an increasingly complex world.

Don Bosco's vision of education, which nurtures not just the mind but also the heart and spirit, remains our guiding light. In a region as culturally and linguistically diverse as Northeast India, our Salesian mission assumes unique dimensions. We are called to be bridge-builders – connecting traditional values with contemporary needs, local wisdom with global perspectives, and timeless faith with modern challenges.

Today's youth face pressures unlike those of previous generations. Digital technologies, while opening new horizons of opportunity, also present unprecedented distractions and dangers. Economic uncertainties loom large, especially in our

more remote communities. Climate change affects our agricultural patterns and traditional livelihoods. Social tensions occasionally threaten the harmony that characterises our multicultural fabric.

Yet amidst these challenges, we find extraordinary resilience and potential. Our young people demonstrate creativity, adaptability, and a genuine hunger for authentic values. Their energy and idealism remind us daily of why our Salesian presence matters so profoundly in this region.

As we move forward into the second half of 2025, let us recommit ourselves to strengthening our focus on quality education that prepares young people not just for careers but for life – education that forms ethical leaders who will serve society with integrity and compassion. Let us deepen our accompaniment of youth, creating spaces where they can discover their vocations and develop their gifts in service to others. In a world of superficial connections, our youth centres must offer genuine community and meaningful engagement. Our outreach to those on the margins – tribal communities, migrants, school dropouts, and others who might otherwise be forgotten can be in tune with Don Bosco's preferential love for the poorest young people.

The lamp of Don Bosco's charism burns brightly in the Northeast through each of us – priests, brothers, sisters, lay collaborators, young leaders, and

benefactors. Together, we form a powerful force for good in a region blessed with tremendous potential yet faced with significant challenges.

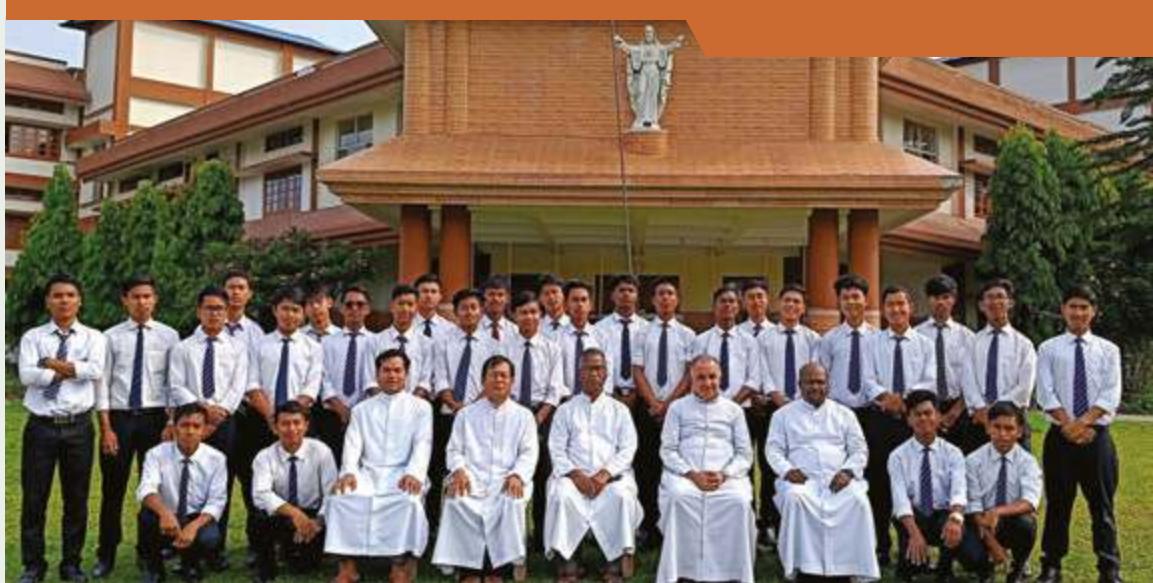
The present edition of *ING Newsline* presents a rich display of Salesian life and mission that spans from our local endeavours to the universal Church. Beginning with our Provincial's message and the significant celebration of General Chapter 29, we journey through the vibrant educational ministry at Don Bosco Centre for Learning in Tura, the pastoral care at St Michael's Church in Tangla, and the formative work at our Pre-novitiate House in Dotma. The issue highlights our commitment to the young at risk in the province while honouring the pioneering spirit of our early missionaries through cherished anecdotes that remind us of our deep roots in this region.

Our scholarly section features a thoughtful review of *The Catechetical Ministry in Northeast India (1890-1962)*,

complemented by inspiring stories from our Salesian brothers in Patagonia, Argentina, demonstrating the global reach of Don Bosco's charism. We also reflect on contemporary Church leadership through profiles of Pope Francis' transformative papacy, Pope Leo XIV's universal shepherding, and Rev. Fr. Fabio Attard, the Eleventh Successor of Don Bosco. The edition also showcases joyful celebrations captured in photographs of our perpetually professed and newly professed young Salesians, symbolising the continuity of our mission and the fresh enthusiasm that each new generation brings to the work of evangelisation and education in Northeast India.

As we celebrate this June issue of *ING Newsline*, let us draw inspiration from our shared stories of service, renew our commitment to our mission, and move forward with the optimism that has always characterised the Salesian spirit.

Fr Joy Kachappilly



Provincial with Aspirants at Sirajuli



## ***Message from the Provincial***

My Dear Confreres,  
Greetings from Provincial House,  
Guwahati!

We are at a significant moment of transition and renewal. The past few months have brought profound changes to our Church, most notably with the passing of our beloved Pope Francis on 21 April and the historic election of Cardinal Robert Prevost as Pope Leo XIV on 8 May – the first American pope in the Church's 2,000-year history.

Pope Francis, who guided our Church with compassion and humility for twelve years, leaves behind a legacy of mercy, environmental stewardship, and unwavering advocacy for the marginalised. As Salesians dedicated to the service of young people, especially the most vulnerable, we found in his papacy a powerful affirmation of our mission. His tireless commitment to the peripheries resonated deeply with our work here in northeast India, where we continue Don Bosco's dream of reaching those most in need.

Now, as we welcome Pope Leo XIV, we embrace new opportunities for growth and renewal. Our new Holy Father, with his missionary background in Peru and his Augustinian spirituality, brings a global

perspective that acknowledges the Church's vibrant presence beyond the Western world. His first words as pontiff – “Peace be with all of you!” – express a message our troubled world deeply needs, and one that aligns perfectly with the Salesian spirit of joyful optimism.

As a province, we also stand at our own threshold of renewal as we implement the directives of the recently concluded 29<sup>th</sup> General Chapter. This momentous gathering called us to return to the heart of our charism – accompanying young people with the loving kindness that characterised Don Bosco's educational approach. The Chapter's emphasis on digital outreach, ecological responsibility, and meaningful youth engagement offers our province fresh directions for our ministries.

Our province, with its rich cultural diversity and extensive youth services across the region, is uniquely positioned to embody these renewal efforts. Our schools, youth centres, parishes, and other settings reach thousands of young people daily, offering them not just education but a spiritual home where they can discover their full potential.

As we move forward under the guidance of Pope Leo XIV and in the spirit of the 29<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, let us recommit ourselves to Don Bosco's vision. In these times of

rapid change, may we maintain an unwavering focus on the young, especially those at the margins, while embracing innovative approaches to meet contemporary challenges.

The path ahead calls us to be, as Don Bosco envisioned, “signs and bearers of God’s love for the young.” Our lives must be attractive to the young. They must experience our personal holiness, which flows naturally from our intimate relationship with Christ, the Divine Master who first loved us and continues to draw us deeper into his Sacred Heart through daily prayer, the Eucharist, and faithful living of our religious vows.

As we grow in this transformative love for Jesus, we become more authentic witnesses of His joy and mercy to the young people entrusted to our care, embodying Don Bosco’s vision of educators who touch hearts not merely through words but



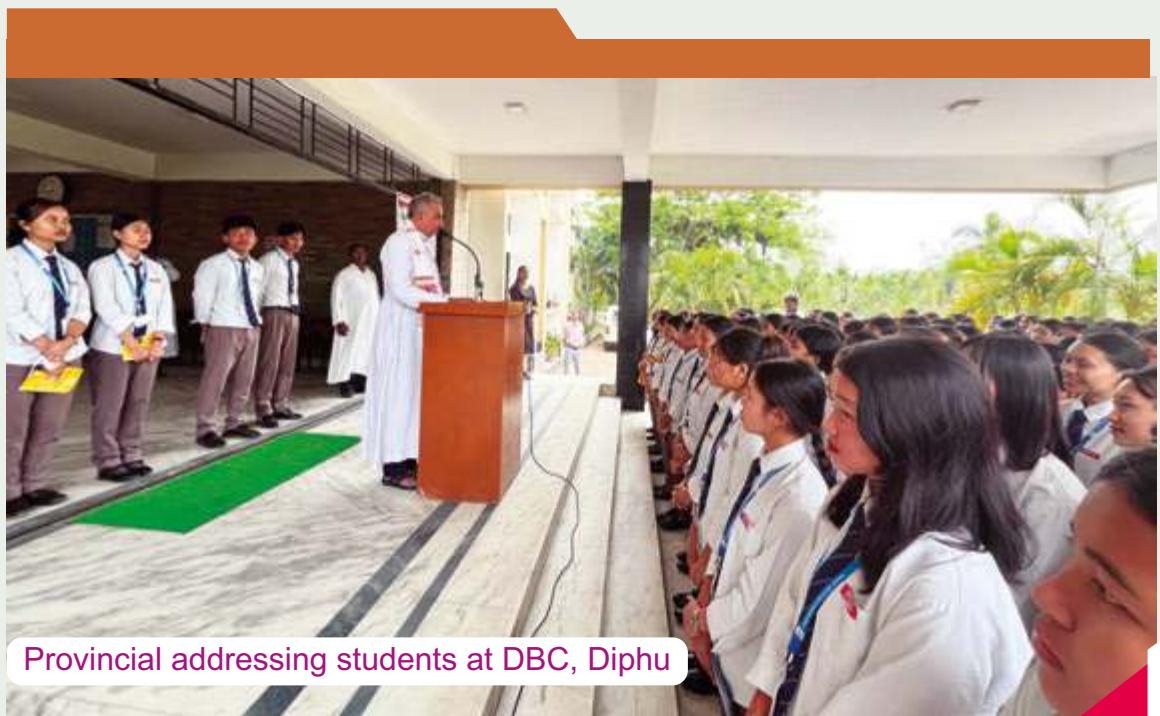
**Fr Provincial Receiving Chapter Memento  
from the Rector Major**

through the radiant holiness that springs from a life totally surrendered to Christ. Let this renewal deepen our identity as Salesians and strengthen our service to the youth of the region!

With prayers and best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Fr. S. Kuricheal".

**Fr Sebastian Kuricheal  
Provincial**



**Provincial addressing students at DBC, Diphu**

# The Celebration of the 29<sup>th</sup> General Chapter

Fr Joy Kachappilly

**Abstract:** The 29th General Chapter of the Salesians convened at Valdocco, Turin, from 16 February to 12 April 2025, under the theme "Passionate about Jesus Christ - Dedicated to Young People." The eight-week gathering adopted a synodal "conversation in the Spirit" methodology, focusing on three core areas: spiritual renewal and community life, collaborative mission with lay people, and governance restructuring. Key decisions included creating two African regions, allowing Salesian Brothers as community directors on an experimental basis, and emphasising the integration of prayer, fraternity, and mission while addressing contemporary challenges in youth ministry and digital culture.



General Chapter members at Cuorgnè, the birthplace of Saint Callistus Caravario

The 29th General Chapter of the Salesians took place from 16 February to 12 April 2025, at the historic motherhouse in Valdocco, Turin. Under the theme "Passionate about Jesus Christ - Dedicated to Young People: Living our Salesian Vocation Faithfully and Prophetically," this eight-week gathering brought together delegates from around the globe to discern the future direction of the Congregation.

The choice of Valdocco as the venue carried profound symbolic and spiritual significance, as it was here that Don Bosco began his work with disadvantaged youth in the 19th century. The Chapter members

walked the same courtyards where Don Bosco had accompanied young people and prayed in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, which he had built. Rev. Fr Pascual Chávez, former Rector Major (2002-2014), provided spiritual animation through pilgrimages to Colle Don Bosco (Don Bosco's birthplace) and Chieri, creating opportunities for spiritual renewal and connection with the origins of the Salesian charism.

The Chapter coincided with the 150th anniversary of the first Salesian missionary expedition to Argentina (1875-2025), adding historical significance and highlighting the



international character of the Congregation. This anniversary was commemorated with special presentations and a re-enactment of the first expedition by chapter members.

### **Methodology: A Synodal Approach**

A distinctive feature of this General Chapter was its adoption of “conversation in the Spirit,” a methodology inspired by the recent Synod on Synodality. This approach emphasised communal discernment through spiritual dialogue rather than traditional parliamentary-style debates, representing a significant shift from the formal procedural methods of the previous chapters.

Presented by Fr Andrea Bozzolo and Fr Eunan McDonnell, the method involved three key phases: Listening (attentively considering the Congregation's reality), Interpretation (exploring the reasons behind observations and offering understanding criteria), and Choices (proposing concrete action steps). The process began with prayerful meditation on relevant Scripture passages, establishing a spiritual foundation for discussions.

This methodology proved particularly valuable during sensitive discussions and the election process, creating what Fr Stefano Martoglio, Vicar of the Rector Major, described as “a great communion in diversity.” The final document noted that conversing “in the Spirit” reminded participants that the Holy Spirit is the great protagonist of discernment.

### **Core Area 1: Animation and Care of Each Salesian's Real Life**

The first core area addressed the spiritual and communal foundations of Salesian identity, acknowledging both strengths and challenges in the lived experience of confreres across 134 countries. While many Salesians demonstrate joyful fidelity and passionate dedication despite challenging circumstances—including those serving in war zones, economically impoverished areas, and contexts of religious persecution—the Chapter honestly confronted weaknesses such as individualism, activism that sacrifices prayer and community life, and a weakened sense of Salesian identity.

The Chapter emphasised recovering the depth of Don Bosco's spirituality, particularly his constant union with God that enabled the "grace of unity" between contemplation and action. Central to this renewal is rediscovering the Eucharist as "the summit and source of Christian life" and "the central act of every Salesian community." The Chapter called for the Eucharist to be understood not merely as ritual but as the wellspring from which Salesian life flows.

Fraternal community life was highlighted as an essential witness to God's love and mission support. The Chapter noted that communities opening themselves to new forms of sharing life with young people often exhibit more prophetic and attractive styles. Special attention was given to formation processes, emphasising personalised accompaniment that helps Salesians develop deep inner synthesis between prayer, community, and mission. The vocation of the Salesian Brother, which has been declining in many regions, received particular care and calls for renewed promotion.

## **Core Area 2: Collaborative Mission with Young People**

The second core area addressed the evolving nature of Salesian mission, recognising that contemporary service to young people bears the essential imprint of collaboration between Salesians and lay people. This collaboration reflects not merely a pragmatic response to the declining number of Salesians but a deeper theological understanding of the Church as the People of God, where different vocations complement one another.

The Chapter acknowledged that Don Bosco's charism continues attracting individuals from diverse backgrounds, including different religious confessions, who recognise the Preventive System's value. This has generated significant collaborative experiences worldwide, with the Salesian charism being inculcated in new ways through the creative contributions of local lay collaborators.

Challenges remain in fully integrating lay people into decision-making roles and ensuring adequate formation for both Salesians and lay collaborators. The Chapter called for systematic formation programmes, a clearer understanding of different levels of lay involvement, and organisational structures promoting genuine participation.

Special attention was given to the relationship between education and evangelisation, recognising both dimensions as essential and inseparable in the Salesian approach. The Chapter reflected on Don Bosco's example as a priest deeply focused on education while maintaining a clear evangelising purpose, captured in the expression "we educate by evangelising, and we evangelise by educating."

The Chapter highlighted emerging mission frontiers, particularly digital culture, integral ecology, and new expressions of charism responding to contemporary youth poverty and marginalisation. Young people today face new challenges, including loneliness, psycho-affective fragility, various addictions, and disorientation. The Chapter called for a Salesian presence in these arenas, utilising pedagogical and pastoral wisdom, and developing

systematic approaches to digital culture, while embracing integral ecology, thereby connecting care for creation with care for human dignity.

### **Core Area 3: Governance Review and Re-planning**

The third core area focused on organisational structures supporting the Salesian mission, generating significant debate around questions pending from the previous General Chapter, which concluded early due to COVID-19. Fr Chávez provided a historical perspective on the evolution of governance structures from Don Bosco's time to the present, explaining how the 1971-1972 Special General Chapter established the current configuration, which includes sector councillors and regional councillors.

After careful deliberation, the Chapter decided to establish a second region in Africa, specifically Madagascar, by creating distinct "East and South Africa" and "Central and West Africa" regions. This decision recognised significant vocational growth in Africa and the diverse cultural, linguistic, and social contexts requiring more focused attention.

One of the most sensitive discussions concerned leadership roles traditionally reserved for priests. The Chapter considered whether Salesian Brothers could be appointed as community directors, provincials, or Rector Major. After a thorough debate that revealed diverse perspectives, the Chapter approved an experimental provision allowing Salesian Brothers to be appointed as community directors for a term of six years, while maintaining the priesthood requirements for provincials and the Rector Major.

The Chapter addressed improving coordination between sector and regional councillors while maintaining the current structure. Other governance matters included enhancing the effectiveness of extraordinary visitations, ensuring community consistency, reviewing term durations, promoting financial transparency and accountability, and developing interprovincial collaboration structures.

Throughout these discussions, the Chapter sought a balance between unity and decentralisation, tradition and innovation, with the ultimate goal of better serving young people, particularly the poorest. The Chapter affirmed the importance of synodal leadership styles at all levels, echoing the Church's emphasis on synodality as a way of being and acting, while providing practical tools for more effective animation and governance that preserve the fundamental Salesian identity.

To conclude, the 29th General Chapter represents a pivotal moment in Salesian history, successfully balancing fidelity to Don Bosco's original charism with creative adaptation to contemporary challenges facing young people worldwide. Through its innovative synodal methodology and comprehensive examination of spiritual life, collaborative mission, and governance structures, the Chapter charted a path forward that honours the past while embracing necessary evolution. The decisions made at Valdocco demonstrate the Congregation's commitment to prophetic renewal in service of its fundamental mission: being passionate about Jesus Christ and dedicated to young people.

# Don Bosco Centre for Learning, Tura

Fr Bromio Marak

**Abstract:** The Don Bosco Centre for Learning, Tura, is a higher secondary institution established in 2014 as an independent campus separate from Don Bosco College. Located in Tura, West Garo Hills, Meghalaya, the centre serves over 1,400 students with 46 teaching staff members. Originally founded by the Salesians of Don Bosco in 1987, the institution underwent restructuring following the recommendations of the NAAC. Currently led by Fr Jogesh B. Sangma as rector and principal, the centre includes academic facilities and a hostel that accommodates 130 students pursuing various educational programmes.



The Higher Secondary Section, Tura, now known as the Don Bosco Centre for Learning, is part of Don Bosco College, Tura, which was established by the Salesians of Don Bosco in 1987 to serve the cause of higher education for the people of the Garo Hills, particularly, and for the northeast in general. The college was officially inaugurated by Shri Purno Sangma, the then Union Minister for Labour, on 22 May 1987, and this date is observed as the College Foundation Day. Fr Cyriac Vettickathadam, the first principal of the college, served the college for about 25 years. Over the years, the college has

evolved into one of the premier institutions in the State of Meghalaya.

Taking into consideration the recommendation of the NAAC peer team that the Higher Secondary Section should be de-linked from the Degree College and to give greater focus to the students at the Plus Two level, Fr John Parankimalil (PD), the then Principal of Don Bosco College, requested the then Salesian Provincial, Fr Thomas Vattathara, for permission to de-link the Higher Secondary Section. The Provincial deputed Fr Januarius S Sangma, then in charge of the Garo Hills, to study the request of the Principal of the College.



Fr Januarius held several rounds of meetings and consultations with Salesians working in the Garo Hills region, particularly with those from the Don Bosco College Community. Based on the suggestions from the region, the Provincial and his council decided to shift the Higher Secondary Section to the existing hostel campus. Fr John Parankimalil (PD) was assigned the tasks of restructuring the hostel building for the higher secondary classes and constructing a new hostel building for the students.

The Higher Secondary Section of Don Bosco College, Tura, was relocated to the present campus on 22 June 2014 and was subsequently named Don Bosco College: Higher Secondary Section. It was inaugurated on 24 July 2014 by Shri E. P. Kharbhii, IAS, the then Commissioner and Secretary, Education, Government of Meghalaya, and Executive Chairman of the Meghalaya Board of School Education, Tura. Several dignitaries were present on the occasion, including Most Rev. Andrew R Marak, Bishop of Tura, and Shri Pravin Bakshi IAS, the then Deputy Commissioner of West Garo Hills District. Fr Jogesh B. Sangma was appointed the vice principal in charge of the Higher Secondary Section. When Fr Jogesh B. Sangma was transferred to Diphu in June 2016, Fr Jimmy T. Sangma was appointed as the Vice Principal in charge.

Towards the end of December 2016, the Junior College was established as an independent community with Fr Thomas Chenginiyaden as its first director. When Fr Jimmy was transferred to Holy Cross Church, Rongkhon, in February 2017, Fr Thomas Chenginiyaden took care of the college. Fr Zacharias Varickasseril was appointed as the director when Fr Thomas Chenginiyaden was transferred to Satgaon in February 2018. Fr Jogesh B. Sangma was appointed the Principal of the Higher Secondary Section in June 2018. With the transfer of Fr. Zachary Varickasseril to Degree College Community, Fr. Francis Cheeramben was appointed director in April 2019. In 2021, Fr Jogesh B. Sangma became the director following the transfer of Fr Francis Cheeramben to Sirajuli. In 2022, when the community was canonically established, Fr Jogesh became its first rector.

Don Bosco Junior College, Tura comprises the Don Bosco College Higher Secondary Section and the Don Bosco College Boys' Hostel. The Centre also looks after the Salesians in formation who undertake their studies in the college. Today, the college caters to over 1,400 students. The teaching staff at the college comprises 46 members, and 16 non-teaching staff members are also employed at the college. The hostel accommodates approximately 130 boys pursuing their Higher Secondary



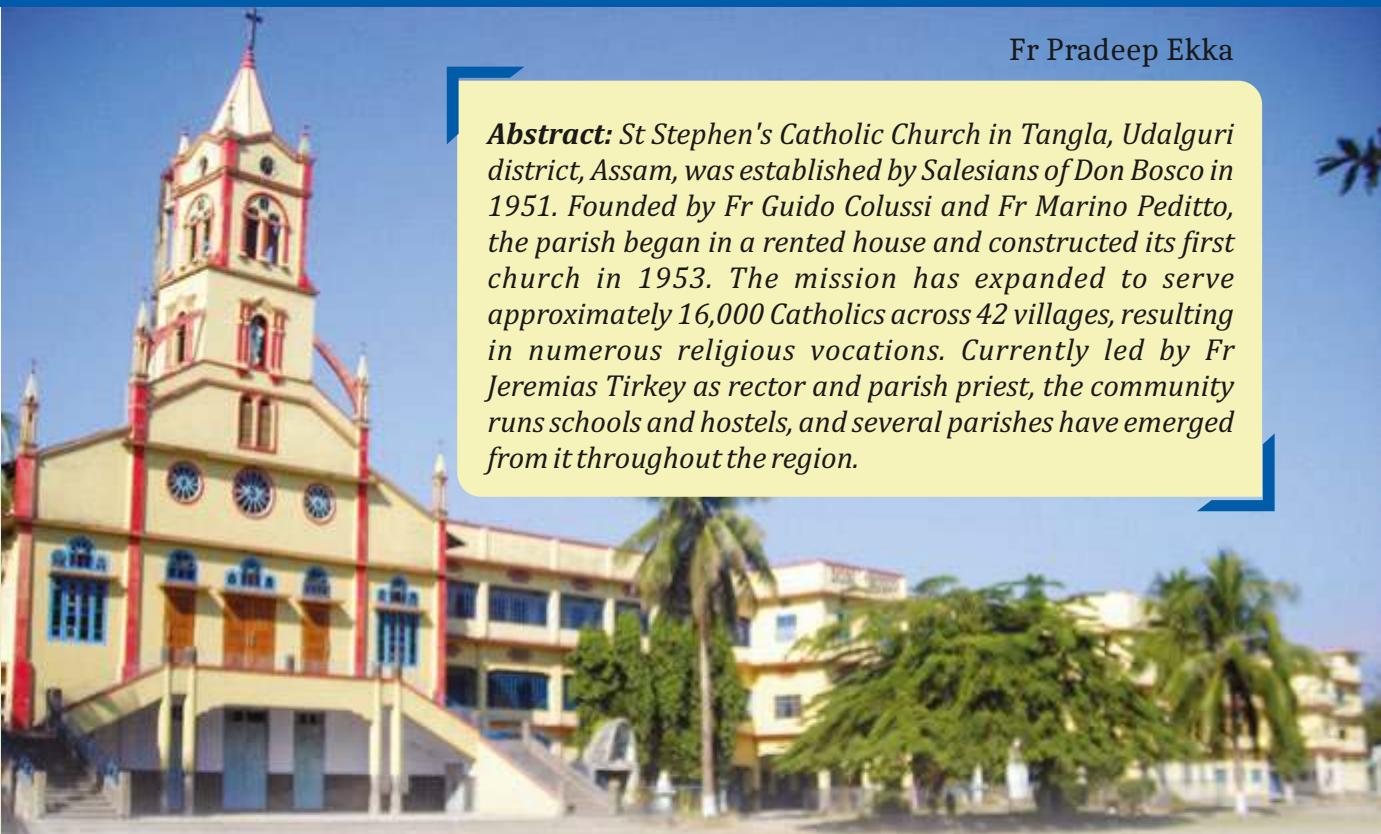
courses, Degree Programmes, and B.Ed. Courses. Young Salesians, pursuing their degree or B.Ed. studies are also housed in the hostel. Other Fathers who worked as wardens include Fr Thomas Kunnappillil, Fr Joy Kachappilly, Fr Roland Halge, Fr Zachary Varickesseril, Fr Alex Kattakayam, Br Joby Mani, Fr Jogesh B. Sangma, Fr Albert Khorgeswar D. Sangma, Fr Francis Kujur, and Fr Romanius Barwa.

Besides the twelve young Salesians, in June 2025, the community comprises Fr Jogesh B. Sangma (Rector and Principal), Fr Andreas Panna (Vice Rector), and Fr Bromio Ch. Mara (Vice Principal and Warden).



# St Stephen's Catholic Church, Tangla

Fr Pradeep Ekka



**Abstract:** *St Stephen's Catholic Church in Tangla, Udaguri district, Assam, was established by Salesians of Don Bosco in 1951. Founded by Fr Guido Colussi and Fr Marino Peditto, the parish began in a rented house and constructed its first church in 1953. The mission has expanded to serve approximately 16,000 Catholics across 42 villages, resulting in numerous religious vocations. Currently led by Fr Jeremias Tirkey as rector and parish priest, the community runs schools and hostels, and several parishes have emerged from it throughout the region.*

The Salesians of Don Bosco opened a parish at Tangla in 1951. The first missionaries associated with the villages of Tangla were Fr Michael De Valle and Fr Theodosio Bonomi. They were known to have visited the area from Barpeta Parish since 1936. The first resident priests at Tangla were Fr Guido Colussi and Fr Marino Peditto. They were appointed to the newly formed mission district of Mangaldai in August 1951. They took up residence in a rented house in Jhalubari on 4 September 1951. Fr Peditto primarily provided pastoral care for the flock. Fr Colussi was busy acquiring the necessary land to set up the mission centre. On 22 January 1952, the sale deed for the land was finalised, and the foundation for the

mission centre was laid. The Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC) occasionally visited the villages to catechise the people. In May 1952, Bishop Stephen Ferrando visited the mission and initiated the construction of the church building. In January 1953, Bishop Ferrando blessed the newly constructed parish church, witnessed by an impressive gathering of the faithful. In 1956, the school and the hostel became a reality.

In 1956, Fr Colussi, while holding charge of the Tangla mission, was sent to Calcutta to oversee the Salesian work there. Fr Chacko Kulamkuthiyil, a diocesan priest, was sent to Tangla for a few months to assist Fr Peditto in the absence of Fr



Tangla Salesian Community

Colussi. Towards the middle of 1958, Fr Peditto left for Italy, and Fr Martin Caligaris was sent in his place. In 1960, when Fr Colussi went to Europe, Fr Mathew Kunnath, a diocesan priest, assisted in the parish. In the same year, Br Paul Sebastian joined the community, primarily to care for the boys in the hostel. In 1962, during the Chinese war, the mission campus was used by the Indian army for a brief period. In 1963, when the new Diocese of Tezpur was established, Fr Peditto was transferred to Tezpur, and Fr Mathew Kunnath was assigned to North Lakhimpur. Fr Ugo Turco and Fr George Venturoli served the Mission for a short period. Fr Venturoli worked hard for the Bodos of Udaguri area, and eventually it became a Parish in 1966. Fr Dominic Barwa was sent to assist Fr Colussi, and he remained at Tangla for several years as Assistant Parish Priest.

Meanwhile, the Parish experienced great growth through the years; the number of Catholics increased, and many new communities were formed. The need for a more spacious parish church was keenly

felt. Fr Thomas Lopez from Dibrugarh supervised the construction of the two-storeyed edifice. The new church building was blessed in 1964. Fr Colussi continued serving as parish priest till the year 1968. Those who succeeded him as parish priests were Fr Paul Taverna (1969), Fr Elias Kerketta (1969-1973), Fr George Kuzhipallil (1973-1974), Fr Thomas Arackal (1974-1978), Fr Zachary Panamathampambil (1978-1981), Fr Philip Kokapallil (1981-1982), Fr Joseph Aind, now Bishop Emeritus of Dibrugarh (1982-1985), Fr Joseph Panamthanath (1985-1989), Fr Jose Thiruthanathy (1989-1992), Fr Santosh Minj (1992-1995), Fr Zephyrinus Baxla (1995-1996), Fr Chacko Kuthur Vellattukara (1997-2000), Fr Marcus Lakra (2000-2006), Fr Mathew Parackatte (2009-2012), Fr Francis Basumatary (2012-2015), Fr Michael Bhengra (2015-2017), Fr Xavier Tete (2017) and Fr Marcus Lakra (2017-2022). On 24 May 2022, Fr Francis Hembrom was appointed parish priest. Unfortunately, on 30 July 2022, he passed after a brief illness. Fr Marcus continued to look after the parish until Fr Jeremias Tirkey was appointed parish priest. Later, he was also appointed rector. Since 1970, all parish priests have also served as rectors of the Salesian Community, with the exception of Fr Peter Pazhayamkottil





and Fr Sebastian Edathumparambil, who were appointed rectors and headmasters. Some of the other confreres who worked in Tangla were Fr Raphael Cherukareth, Fr Chacko Edamala, Fr John Chellanthara, Br Samuel Lakra, Fr Joseph Topno, Fr Thomas Koitharaputhenpura, Fr Ethelbert Minj, Fr Anthony Thekkel, Fr Kujur Thadeus, Fr Cletus Pattamkulam, Fr Rajendra Ekka, Fr Victor Tigga, Fr Anil Condapan, Fr Jose Perunneparampil, Fr Christopher Warlarpiah, Fr Arvind Kailash, Fr Ranjit Xalxo, Fr Pradeep Ekka, and Br Michael Kindo.

The school at the parish remained a middle school for several decades, and the medium was Assamese. In 1993, Fr Santosh Minj boldly introduced the English medium. The English-medium

high school continues to make efforts to obtain government recognition.

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) reached the Tangla mission in 1960 at the invitation of Bishop Ferrando. The Auxilium Convent was officially inaugurated on 27 February 1960. The Sisters run an English-medium school and a hostel for girls. They organise Sunday oratories and marriage preparation courses, tour and catechise villages, and are engaged in healthcare and social work.

The growth of the Catholic community in the area necessitated the creation of new parishes. Tangla, as the mother parish, has given birth to the parishes of Udagiri (1966), Ambagaon (1972), Mangaldoi (1973), Rowta (1977), and Dimakuchi (1984). In 1970, the Salesian community at Tangla was canonically established under the patronage of St Stephen.





Today, there are about 16,000 Catholics in 42 villages. One of the remarkable features of the Parish is the large number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life from the sons and daughters of the place. The formation of lay leadership is a priority in the parish. The active lay association is the Maria Sangat for the Catholic women. They provide various services, including family visits, care for the sick, organising Marian devotions, maintaining village chapels, and assisting in Sunday catechism classes.

In recent years, a college hostel has been opened for boys who live far from Tangla. In 2019, thirteen students were doing their College studies. The SYM youth group is being revamped in its mission,

and a St Joseph's sodality for men is being formed. Construction and renovation work were undertaken at the village chapels at Bongrum, Binapani, Bormukli, and Gharapara. Renovation works for the ground floor verandah and the college hostel are completed.

The province, with the assistance of Don Bosco Institute in Guwahati, established a high school in Bhooteachang, one of the villages within the parish. The Sisters of St Ann, Luzern presently run the school. Since 2022, Salesians have begun to reside there. Br Michael Kindo and Fr Jyotish Beck took up residence there. When Br Michael was transferred, Fr Barnabas Mardi joined to help manage the complex.

In recent years, some renovations have been carried out on campus. The perpetually professed confreres working in the parish at present (June 2025) are Fr Jeremias Tirkey (rector and parish priest), Fr Louis Martin Bhengra (principal and assistant parish priest), and Fr Silverius Amsong (assistant parish priest). Fr Jyotish Beck and Fr Barnabas Mardi continue to oversee the Bhooteachang mission.



# Pre-novitiate House, Dotma

Fr Lukose Cheruvelel

**Abstract:** The pre-novitiate is a preparatory formation period designed to deepen vocational choices and assess candidates' suitability for Salesian religious life. Established in Dotma in 2012, the Guwahati Province's pre-novitiate house has formed 253 candidates through comprehensive programmes focusing on human maturity, Christian foundation, and understanding the Salesian charism. The one-year programme includes studies in Salesianity, Scripture, interpersonal relationships, and apostolic experiences.



The pre-novitiate is a period of special preparation required before the novitiate, designed to deepen the candidates' vocational choices and assess their suitability for beginning the novitiate. The focus during this stage is on growth in self-knowledge. The pre-novitiate programme typically lasts for one year but is not usually less than six months, although individual circumstances and processes of vocational growth may necessitate a longer duration. In some provinces, there is a ten-month preparation programme for candidates to join the Salesian religious novitiate.

The pre-novitiate has the following specific objectives that need to be known by the candidate and pursued by way of concrete formative steps:

- Maturing as a human being and as a Christian.
- Acquiring adequate information regarding the vocation to the consecrated life with particular attention to the Salesian charism and mission.
- Having a community and apostolic experience, and reflecting seriously on the Salesian life and mission.
- Getting to know his vocation and deepening the motivations of his vocational choice.
- Arriving at a conscious and informed decision, free from internal and external pressure.

Pre-novices follow a specific programme of study in the Salesian Formation House, taking various courses related to



Salesianity and religious life, as well as acquiring proficiency in English and humanities. The Salesian studies aim to bring the pre-novice to admire Don Bosco and his mission and to find in him a model of human and Christian values. The pre-novice is offered a glimpse of the Salesian mission today and of Salesian works worldwide; he is invited to draw inspiration from some of the great Salesian figures of the past and present - priests, brothers, and missionaries.

According to the new Ratio, among the topics to be considered during the pre-novitiate are:

- Relationships and interpersonal communication, along with aspects of self-knowledge and sexual and affective maturity.
- Introduction to the study of Sacred Scripture.
- Deeper knowledge of the faith and Christian morality, with the help of YouCat: Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church (FSDB 904).
- The various stages of life in the Church and Salesian consecrated life, in its two forms, along with models of Salesian life.
- The new youth cultures.
- An educational approach to the digital world.
- Learning the language to be used in the novitiate, or other useful languages.

Other studies may be contemplated, provided they do not interfere with the primary objectives of this phase of formation.

Additionally, apostolic works and possible exposure to Salesian works prepare pre-novices for the novitiate. Some provinces include village exposure, folk arts training, oratories, and monthly counselling during this period.

The official guidelines specify that at least one Salesian brother should be on the team of formators of the pre-novitiate to allow the novices to learn the two forms of the Salesian vocation directly.

The pre-novitiate, novitiate, and post-novitiate form a unit and are vital for growth in the Salesian consecrated identity in its two forms.

The overall goal is to prepare them adequately for the novitiate. To enable him to carry out solid vocational discernment, he is helped throughout the year to confront the progress he makes in his vocation.

The pre-novitiate serves as the final preparatory stage before the formal novitiate year, ensuring that candidates possess the necessary human maturity, Christian foundation, and understanding of Salesian life to make an informed decision about a religious profession.

### **Pre-novitiate in Guwahati Province**

The fully fledged one-year pre-novitiate programme in the Guwahati province was



established in Mariamnagar, Tripura, in 2007, with Fr Jeevan Kishore Lakra as the first director of the pre-novices. However, in 2012, when the province of Silchar was carved out of Guwahati, the pre-novitiate house became part of the newly formed province.

Hence, a new pre-novitiate house was opened in Dotma on 13 July 2012, when Rev. Fr Thomas Vattathara, the then provincial, solemnly blessed it. The existing hostel for the boys was modified to house the pre-novices. Fr Sanjay was appointed director of the pre-novices, and Fr Ajay Xaxa was appointed assistant director. From June 2016, Fr Lukose Cheruvalel was appointed director, and Fr Anugraha Tete was appointed assistant director. Fr Francis Cheeramben also worked in the pre-novitiate for some years. In 2018, Br Firstjoy Felix became the dean and administrator of the pre-novitiate.

Upon his transfer, Fr Robert Faustin Lalfakzuala assisted Fr Lukose in caring for the pre-novices. Due to health reasons, Fr Robert could not remain there for long, and in 2022, Fr Paul Minj was appointed the dean. In 2023, when Fr Lukose was transferred to Snehalaya as its rector, Fr Joseph Almeida became the director of the pre-novices. Fr Ajay Xaxa was once again appointed dean in 2024, when Fr Paul Minj was transferred to Shashipur. In May 2025, Fr Joseph Almeida was transferred to Bosco Mount, and Fr Mackley Gomes

took his place. In June 2025, Fr Mackley Gomes is the director, and Fr Ajay Xaxa is the dean and administrator of the pre-novitiate.

Since its inception in 2012, 253 pre-novices have undergone their formation at the pre-novitiate house in Dotma. In 2025, there are 25 pre-novices. We shall present the year-wise statistics:

<b>Year</b>	<b>pre-novices</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>pre-novices</b>
2012 .....	22	2019 .....	32
2013 .....	18	2020 .....	23
2014 .....	23	2021 .....	19
2015 .....	13	2022 .....	22
2016 .....	12	2023 .....	13
2017 .....	18	2024 .....	22
2018 .....	16	2025 .....	25

The pre-novitiate house in Dotma has successfully served as a cornerstone of Salesian formation in the Guwahati province since 2012, nurturing 253 young men in their journey toward religious life. Through its structured programme of human, Christian, and Salesian formation, the pre-novitiate continues to prepare candidates with the necessary foundation of self-knowledge, spiritual maturity, and understanding of the Salesian charism before they enter the formal novitiate. With 25 pre-novices currently in formation under the guidance of Fr Mackley Gomes and Fr Ajay Xaxa, the pre-novitiate remains vital to ensuring the future of the Salesian mission and ministry in the region.

# Ministry for the Young at Risk in the Province

Fr Charles Deepen Lakra

**Abstract:** Snehalya (*House of Love*) is a comprehensive social service programme established by the Salesian Province of Guwahati in 2000 for distressed children. Founded by Fr Lukose Cheruvelel and inspired by Mother Teresa, it grew from a humble “Pinardi Shed” into five strategic centres serving 200 children. The programme includes residential care, education, advocacy, and innovative initiatives like railway station assistance booths and child-friendly literacy centres. Snehalya has reunited over 200 children with their families, pioneered child rights advocacy in Northeast India, and established policy frameworks, all while embodying Don Bosco’s preferential option for vulnerable youth.

Snehalya, meaning “House of Love,” is a social service programme established by the Salesian Province of Guwahati for the care, protection, and social reintegration of children in distress. Officially launched on 16 August 2000, when Archbishop Thomas Menampampil blessed a plot of land acquired for the centre at Dhirenpara (Guwahati), Snehalya became fully operational on 1 January 2001. The initiative was championed by Fr Lukose Cheruvelel, who had cherished the dream of launching a programme for distressed children in Guwahati for years. After

discussions with St Teresa of Kolkata during her visit to Guwahati and with Salesian authorities, the project finally materialised when Fr Lukose was released from his service as Secretary to the Archbishop in June 2000. The inspiration for this ministry came from multiple sources, including the work of late Br Castellino Fernandes who visited incarcerated boys in Shillong, an appeal by Fr Joseph Thelekkatt in 1991 for Salesian volunteers to initiate services for at-risk youth, Fr Lukose's attendance at Mother Teresa's funeral in 1997, which crystallised his resolve, and Mother Teresa's promise: “My sisters will hand over to the Salesians all the boys they pick up from the streets of Guwahati.” This initiative in Guwahati followed other successful Salesian programmes for vulnerable youth across India: Snea Bhawan in Kochi (1974), initiatives in Bangalore (1980), and Ashalayam in Kolkata (1985).

Snehalya began modestly in a watchman's shed, referred to as the “Pinardi Shed” (named after Don Bosco's first oratory). The day after its inauguration, eight children from





Guwahati Railway Station, who had been in the care of the Missionaries of Charity, were transferred to Snehalaya. The first staff member was Ms Baby Rabha, who joined as a resident primary teacher and caregiver. The facility quickly grew from housing these initial eight children to accommodating more than twenty within weeks. By February 2001, a literacy centre was established, featuring a tin roof and bamboo-mat walls, to educate poor children from the surrounding area. Over 80 out-of-school children attended classes. Over time, Snehalaya expanded to form what the founder called a “garland of love” - five strategically located homes around Guwahati city: Snehalaya Boys’ Home at Dhirenpara (the original centre, later expanded into a larger permanent building in 2004), Pan Bazar Drop-in Centre (established in 2002 on rented land to serve vagrant children found at Guwahati Railway Station), Auxilium Snehalaya at Noonmati (opened on 31 January 2003, in collaboration with Salesian Sisters to serve destitute girls), Jyoti Snehalaya at Beltola (started 3 April 2004, in partnership with Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians for girls), and Ila Snehalaya at Betkuchi (acquired in 2004 from Ila Trust, gradually transformed from a hospice for destitute adults into a centre for disabled destitute children). Together, these centres housed approximately 200 children, cared for by nearly 50 staff members, who provided not only necessities but also education,

counselling, and opportunities to develop their talents. Older children were introduced to vocational training and employment opportunities.

Snehalaya expanded beyond residential care to develop several innovative programmes. The Children’s Assistance Booth was established at Guwahati Railway Station on 20 April 2005, to contact and befriend vagrant children, assisting approximately 500 children over ten years. Okonir Snehalaya, a day-care centre, was inaugurated on 24 June 2007, for children of single parents, allowing parents to leave their children in care while they worked. The Psycho-Social Support Project was launched in June 2007 at the invitation of UNICEF and the Assam Social Welfare Department to provide support to children in government Observation Homes. Child Friendly Guwahati (CFG) was initiated on 3 August 2013, targeting out-of-school children by opening 45 literacy centres in Guwahati and its outskirts with the motto “all rights to all children,” reaching approximately 1,500 children at a time. A Child Rights Resource Centre and Advocacy was established at Paltan Bazar to coordinate advocacy efforts and house a drop-in centre, inaugurated on 4 October 2010. Additionally, a Child Counselling Centre was set up with professional counsellors and inaugurated by Justice Madan B. Lokur, then Chief Justice of the Guwahati High Court, in early 2011.



Snehalaya has been a pioneer in child rights advocacy in northeast India through various educational initiatives. It organised the first-ever workshop in northeast India on the "Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000" in August 2001, held the All Assam Consultation on Child Rights in December 2008, conducted a Workshop on "Is Guwahati Child-Friendly?" in February 2009, and established a Master's Degree Course in Child Welfare and Development under Assam Don Bosco University. In terms of networking, Snehalaya established EKTA (Unity), the first network of NGOs working for child welfare in Guwahati, launched the All Assam Forum for Child Rights in October 2010, and founded Matri, an NGO that advocates for child rights and enhances parenting skills. For policy development, it held a National Consultation in September 2011, which led to the formulation of the Don Bosco Social Reintegration Policy. The organisation also participated as a member of the State Committee for Drafting the State Rules for the JJ Act 2000. It served as a member of the Executive Body of the State Child Protection Society (SCPS).

Snehalaya's expertise has been recognised at the highest levels through appointments to statutory bodies, awards, and government partnerships. Fr Lukose Cheruvalel was appointed as a member of the Juvenile Justice Board of Kamrup District in 2007 and later as Chairperson of the Child Welfare Committee of Kamrup Metro from 2010 to 2016. The organisation received the YAR Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017, the Social Work Excellence Award from the University of Science and Technology Meghalaya in 2016, and the Netaji Smarak Garima Award in 2014. Snehalaya collaborated with the Government of Assam in 2014 to formulate and implement an After-Care Project for children from government childcare institutions. Its literacy centres were subsequently certified as the best centres under the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan in Guwahati.

The direct impact of Snehalaya on the lives of children has been significant, particularly in areas such as family reunification, education, rehabilitation, and addressing complex issues. Over 200 children were reunited with their families over eight years, with comprehensive rehabilitation for both lost and runaway



children. Success stories include Pradeep (name changed), who joined the Indian Army; another youth who completed Class XII at Don Bosco Higher Secondary School and secured employment; and Deepak, an orphan who became a graduate in Social Work and a Fellow of the Gandhi Foundation. Snehalaya has pioneered efforts to combat substance abuse among street children, addressed juvenile alcoholism, domestic violence, child trafficking, and child labour, and provided legal intervention and counselling for children facing physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

Snehalaya stands as a testament to the commitment of the Salesian province of Guwahati to the most vulnerable youth in society. From its humble beginnings in a watchman's shed to its development into a comprehensive network of services, Snehalaya has transformed the landscape of child welfare in northeast India. The organisation embodies Don Bosco's special concern for marginalised young people, particularly those who are "poor, abandoned, and in danger." Through residential care, education, advocacy, and policy development, Snehalaya has not only provided direct assistance to thousands of children but has also helped shape the broader child welfare ecosystem in the region. As Fr Lukose Cheruvalel passed the leadership to Fr Thadeus Kujur and subsequently to Fr

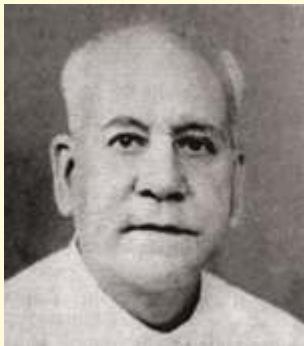
Tomey Anikuzhikattil, and now once again back to Fr Lukose Cheruvalel, Snehalaya continues to evolve while remaining firmly grounded in its founding vision: creating a "house of love" where every child in distress can find care, protection, and the opportunity for a better future.

Several other Salesians assisted in this noble venture. They include Fr Thomas Punnolikunnel, Fr Dominic Perunneparampil, Fr Lucas Ch. Marak, Fr Thomas John Koitharaputhenpura, Fr Jose Perunneparampil, Fr Joseph Thelekkatt, Fr Dennis Solomon Joseph, Fr Jeremias Tirkey, Fr Francis Kujur, Fr Prasad Kalaparty and Fr Mackley Augustine Gomes. Currently, the Salesian community comprises Fr Lukose Cheruvalel (rector and director), Fr Sebastian Kunnathukuzhy, Fr Jerbasius Xalxo, Fr Ranjit Kulkant Xalxo and Fr Amit Tete.

The "spark that was lit about thirty years ago" has indeed become a flame, serving as a constant invitation to every Salesian in the province to reaffirm their preference for vulnerable youth whom we find in and around every Salesian House. They are invited to be sensitive to their well-being, imitating the compassion of St John Bosco, whose heart went in search of the vulnerable youth in the prisons and streets of Turin, making incredible personal sacrifices.

# All in the Family

## Anecdotes from the Early Missionaries in the Region



Fr Joseph Wollaston

Fr Joseph Wollaston was a young man who was impressed by the childlike enthusiasm and earnestness of the early Salesians at Shillong. When he wanted to join the Salesians, Fr Louis Mathias and other Salesians welcomed him into their ranks with great enthusiasm. Wollaston was indeed a prized catch. He was a clever man who ranked second in his graduate examinations throughout the British Dominion in India. He was the teacher of English to the first Salesian missionaries in Shillong. As a Salesian, he did his higher studies in Italy. He was the Principal of Anthony's College, Shillong. He gave its motto, *Excelsior* (Ever more, better ever). He saved the college from a hostile takeover by the wrong people.

Fr Joseph Wollaston was hospitalised in Nazareth Hospital for his leg, which was affected by gangrene. He was receiving a lot of attention from an endless stream of friends who were visiting him. If someone asked him: How are you, Father?" Fr Wollaston's enigmatic answer was: "Always better but never well."

It was during or at the end of World War II. Fr Andrew Killermann was Prefect of Don Bosco Technical School, Shillong. One morning, an English lady came to collect from Br Vitalis, who had succeeded Fr Cid in the shoe-making department, the pair of shoes she had ordered.

The lady walked into the office of the Prefect to make the payment. During the transaction, she very unwittingly asked by way of a filler, "What is your name, Father? I have never seen you here."

"Oh, my name is not nice," drawled the Prefect apologetically.

"What is so bad about your name that you cannot tell? What is it, Father?" insisted the lady.

"My name is Killermann," responded the Prefect.

"What?... Killer man?" The surprised lady reacted.

"Yes, Killermann," said the Prefect.

"What nationality are you, Father?" Pursued the lady.

"German!"

"What? German! German!"

"Yes," mumbled the Prefect in a sotto voce.

"Good morning, Father! Good morning, Father!" The lady hoisted herself hastily and stomped out of the Prefect's office.



**Fr Peter Tonello**

It was attributed to Fr Peter Tonello that when he toured the villages, he would very often be served eggs, but not chicken. After it had happened umpteen times, he decided to get to the why of it. He was asked once: "Where is the mawthere (mother = chicken)?"

Fr Peter Tonello was a venerable old man who had hit the early 90s, being then also the second senior-most confrere in the then undivided Guwahati province. Fr Felix Bollini, who had a stroke, was recuperating in Don Bosco Technical School, Shillong. Fr Tonello happened to be passing by, and thought he would compliment Fr Bollini on his progress. Among other things, Fr Tonello said: "Fr Bollini, we worked very hard; we toured all the villages. Yes! We worked very hard like Fr Vendrame." Fr Bollini quipped in: "All those who worked hard have died."



**Fr Felix Bollini**



Fr Leo Piasecki



Mgr Orestes Marengo

Mgr Marengo narrated the following anecdote about Fr Leo Piasecki:  
“The Lion of the Brahmaputra had been invited to a wedding at which he was asked to raise the toast. 'No! Why should I take toast when there are cakes and many other things

When Fr Victor Ampanattuvila was appointed to the mission of Damra, his first priority was to replace the old, wooden, rickety church with a concrete one. He asked Archbishop Hubert D'Rosario for permission to re-dedicate the new church to Don Bosco because the first and substantial donation had come from the Rector Major. Archbishop Hubert refused the permission. Instead, he asked Fr Victor to retain the patron, St Michael, saying: “He is needed to fight the enemies of the Church there.” The newly constructed church was eventually blessed on the feast of Archangel Michael.

Fr Victor Ampanattuvila was a man of quiet humour. He narrated that a certain boy from Don Bosco School, Tura, visited a doctor in the town because of some stomach indisposition. He was bewildered when the doctor asked him: “Did you pass stool this morning?” Totally confused, he answered quite summarily: “No! I passed only matic.”

Fr Victor Ampanattuvila, who was re-appointed to the Damra mission after it went through a rocky period, was asked about the situation there. He said in his characteristic way, “Problems start with people and end with people...Some people are like magnets that attract all kinds of rust, and when they move out, all problems are ironed out automatically.”

Fr Victor Ampanattuvila was the main celebrant on the feast of St Maria Goretti in his parish in the Garo Hills. He had printed in Garo the life of St Maria Goretti. A man who had read the book came to Fr Victor and said: “Foolish girl! Very foolish! She never needed to die that kind of death. She was very foolish.”



Fr Victor Ampanattuvila

# The Catechetical Ministry in Northeast India (1890 - 1962): A Book Review

Fr Charles Deepen Lakra

*Abstract: Fr Charles Deepen Lakra reviews Fr Francis Hembrom's posthumous scholarly work, which examines seventy-two years of missionary catechetical practices in Northeast India. The study chronicles three missionary periods—Salvatorian, Jesuit, and Salesian—emphasising cultural adaptation, indigenous catechist training, and innovative methods. Drawing from primary sources, Hembrom documents how missionaries learned local languages, utilised creative media like "magic lantern" shows, and developed contextually appropriate faith formation approaches. Despite academic density and some Salesian bias, the work provides valuable historical documentation and contemporary insights for evangelisation and inculturation efforts.*

Fr Francis Hembrom's meticulous study, *The Catechetical Ministry in Northeast India (1890-1962)*, which will be released on 14 August 2025, coinciding with the third death anniversary of the author, represents a significant contribution to the understanding of missionary work in Northeast India. This posthumously published work stands as both a scholarly achievement and a personal testament to the author's deep commitment to preserving the history of the Church he served throughout his life.

The book spans an impressive seventy-two-year period, beginning with the arrival of the Salvatorian missionaries in 1890 and concluding just before the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Hembrom's approach is thoroughly academic, drawing extensively from primary sources including mission chronicles, archival materials, letters, and contemporary reports. His methodology combines historical analysis with pastoral insight, offering readers both factual documentation and interpretive



Fr Francis Hembrom

understanding of the catechetical practices employed during this formative period.

The author's insider perspective as a Salesian priest from Assam provides unique credibility to his analysis. His familiarity with local cultures, languages, and pastoral realities enables him to offer

nuanced interpretations that external researchers might miss. This indigenous perspective particularly enriches his analysis of the interaction between missionary approaches and local customs.

The book is logically structured into distinct chronological phases, each representing different missionary congregations' stewardship of the Assam mission. The first two chapters chronicle the pioneering work of the Salvatorian missionaries (1890-1915) and the transitional period under the Jesuits (1915-1922). The remaining chapters focus extensively on the Salesian period, which forms the core of the study.

Each chapter follows a pattern that examines historical context, specific catechetical methods, notable personalities, and long-term impacts. This organisational approach allows readers to understand both the evolution of catechetical practices and the continuities that linked different missionary periods.

Fr Hembrom identifies several significant themes throughout the book. First, he demonstrates how effective catechesis in this context required profound cultural engagement. The early missionaries learned local languages, studied indigenous customs, and developed contextually appropriate methods of transmitting the faith. This cultural sensitivity, while not explicitly termed “inculturation” until Vatican II, showed remarkable prescience in adapting the Gospel message to local idioms.

Second, the author highlights the centrality of indigenous catechists in the mission's success. He documents how missionaries invested heavily in training local leaders who became the bridge

between European religious traditions and tribal world views. These catechists often possessed deeper cultural insights than foreign missionaries and could communicate faith concepts in ways that resonated with local populations.

Third, Hembrom emphasises the innovative use of various media and methods. From the famous “magic lantern” shows to the publication of indigenous-language literature, from Sunday oratories to popular devotions, the missionaries displayed remarkable creativity in their catechetical approaches. The author provides a detailed analysis of publications such as *UNongialam Katholik* and *Ka Īing Kristan*, demonstrating how print media became crucial tools for faith formation.

The book's most significant contribution lies in its comprehensive documentation of specific catechetical practices. Hembrom meticulously records how missionaries organised congresses, conducted retreats, established formation houses, and utilised popular devotions as vehicles for religious instruction. His analysis of figures like Fr Constantine Vendrame, “the Apostle of the Khasis,” provides insight into how individual missionaries embodied larger catechetical strategies.

Particularly valuable is the author's examination of how political upheavals—including two world wars and the Indian independence movement—affected catechetical work. His documentation of how the Church maintained its mission despite missionary internments, restrictions on foreign personnel, and political uncertainties offers important lessons for Church resilience during challenging periods.

While comprehensive, the book occasionally suffers from excessive detail that may overwhelm general readers. The extensive quotations from archival sources, while valuable for researchers, sometimes interrupt the narrative flow. Additionally, while Hembrom acknowledges challenges and failures, the overall tone tends toward celebrating missionary achievements, potentially overlooking some more problematic aspects of the cultural encounter during the colonial period.

The author's perspective as a Salesian appears to create some bias in favour of highlighting Salesian contributions over those of other congregations. While he provides detailed coverage of Salvatorian and Jesuit periods, these sections feel somewhat perfunctory compared to the extensive analysis of Salesian methods. However, the author intended to make a critical study of the Salesian contribution, highlighting the aspects of continuity and originality in their ministries.

Despite focusing on a historical period, Hembrom's study offers significant insights for contemporary catechetical work. His analysis of culturally adaptive methods provides valuable lessons for ongoing inculturation efforts. The emphasis on training indigenous leadership speaks directly to current priorities in Church development. The creative use of media and various catechetical moments offers inspiration for modern faith formation approaches.

The book also serves as an important reminder of the Church's capacity for cultural dialogue and adaptation, demonstrating how faithful Gospel

proclamation can respect and even celebrate cultural diversity. In our increasingly multicultural world, these historical examples provide both inspiration and practical guidance.

The book stands as a monumental work that preserves crucial Church history while offering contemporary insights for evangelisation and catechesis. Fr Francis Hembrom has left the Church a valuable gift that serves multiple purposes—as historical documentation, as missiological analysis, and as inspiration for ongoing missionary work.

The book's strength lies in its comprehensive documentation combined with pastoral insight. While it may be challenging for general readers due to its academic density, it proves invaluable for historians, missiologists, catechists, and anyone interested in understanding how the Gospel took root in Northeast India.

As a posthumous publication, this work represents Fr Hembrom's final catechetical contribution—a fitting tribute to a life dedicated to preserving and transmitting the faith in culturally sensitive ways. Future researchers will find in these pages a treasure trove of primary source material, while pastoral workers will discover proven methods of faith formation that transcend temporal boundaries.

This book deserves a place in any serious collection on Indian Church history, missionary studies, or catechetical methodology. It stands as both a memorial and a manual, honouring past achievements while pointing toward future possibilities in the ongoing mission of the Church.

# **Inspiring Anecdotes from the Salesian Missionary Work in Patagonia, Argentina**

*Fr Amit Chama Lakra*

*Abstract: Fr Amit Chama Lakra shares inspiring stories commemorating the 150th anniversary of Salesian missions in Patagonia. Beginning with Don Bosco's prophetic dream in 1872, these anecdotes include the miraculous silver chalice that washed ashore at La Candelaria Mission, Father Ding's missionary calling at age 50, the mission's survival against adversity including devastating fires, young volunteers dedicating "one year of life," Blessed Ceferino Namuncurá's legacy as "The Lily of Patagonia," and the continuing Sunday lunch ministry at La Boca, demonstrating enduring Salesian commitment to serving marginalised communities.*

**A**s we commemorate the 150th anniversary of the first Salesian missionary expedition to Patagonia, Argentina, I would like to share with you some inspiring anecdotes associated with the Salesian mission in that region.

## **The Dream That Led to Patagonia**

Don Bosco had a prophetic dream around 1872 that would change the course of his mission. In this dream, he saw missionaries working among native peoples in a distant land. As he later recalled: "Then a missionary intoned: *Praise Mary, Ye Faithful Tongues*, and, as with one voice, the song swelled in such unison and power that I awoke, partly frightened." Though initially uncertain about the location, he eventually realised this dream was directing him to Patagonia. This spiritual vision became reality when, in 1875, the first ten Salesian missionaries departed for Argentina, launching what would become a vast global mission network that now spans more than 130 countries.

## **The Silver Chalice from the Sea**

The Salesian missionaries at La Candelaria Mission in Tierra del Fuego experienced what many considered a miraculous gift from the ocean itself. In the small sacristy of the historic La Candelaria Chapel (inaugurated in 1899), alongside liturgical garments that belonged to Monsignor Fagnano and other sacred objects, rests "an exquisite silver chalice the sea dragged to the shore, right in front of the mission over 20 years ago."

This remarkable story of the chalice washing up on the shores facing the mission became a powerful symbol for the Salesians working in this remote region. The missionaries, who faced the harsh Patagonian climate with temperatures dropping to twenty degrees below zero during long winters, viewed this unexpected gift as divine encouragement for their work. The silver chalice remains treasured in the chapel. It has become part of the rich oral history shared with visitors who come to learn about the dedication of the Salesians to the indigenous Selk'nam



Argentina - Mons. Giovanni Cagliero with the Caciques of Patagonia.



Don Giovanni Cagliero - leader of the first Salesian missionary who later became Cardinal.

### The La Candelaria Mission's Survival Against Adversity

The establishment of the Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria Mission in Tierra del Fuego stands as a testament to Salesian perseverance. When the first missionaries arrived in November 1893, they settled near the Grande River to create a community for the indigenous Selk'nam people. However, disaster struck in 1896 when a fire completely destroyed their settlement. Undeterred, the Salesians rebuilt in 1897 near Cape Santo Domingo, where the mission stands to this day. What began as a refuge for the persecuted Selk'nam people evolved into an enduring educational and religious centre that has influenced generations of Patagonians, demonstrating remarkable resilience in the face of extreme challenges.

### Young Volunteers Giving “One Year of Life”

The Salesian missionary spirit inspires not just religious vocations but also lay volunteerism. In the Province of South Argentina, young people commit to the powerful declaration: “I make one year of my life available” through the Salesian

people and their ongoing educational mission in one of the world's southernmost inhabited regions.

### Father Ding's Missionary Call at Age 50

In recent years, the Salesian missionary spirit continues to inspire new vocations. One Salesian priest, Father Ding, felt a special missionary calling on his 50th birthday - what he described as “a call within a call.” After serving in the Philippines, he joined the 152nd missionary expedition in 2021 and was sent to Patagonia. Despite facing language barriers and cultural differences upon arrival, Father Ding persevered. He discovered that “you understand everyone and everything only if you give yourself wholeheartedly for the mission entrusted to you, for the people with whom and for whom you live.” His story exemplifies how the Salesian mission in Patagonia continues to draw dedicated missionaries even today.

## *First missionary expedition*



*November 11, 1875*

SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO

Missionary Volunteer Work programme. These volunteers are placed throughout Patagonia's challenging environments, from the highlands of Chubut to the remote regions of Río Negro. As programme leaders describe them, these volunteers are "extremely normal people, of flesh and bone, but full of energy, strength, dreams, people who ask and discern, and now, what else, or what more?" This programme continues Don Bosco's legacy by bringing fresh energy and dedication to communities throughout Patagonia.

### **Blessed Ceferino Namuncurá: The Lily of Patagonia**

Perhaps the most inspiring figure to emerge from the Salesian missions in Patagonia is Ceferino Namuncurá, known as "The Lily of Patagonia." Born in 1886 as the son of a Mapuche chief, Ceferino was baptised by a Salesian missionary priest at age eight. After studying with the Salesians, he aspired to become a priest to help his people. Though he died of tuberculosis at just 19 years old in 1905,

his profound faith and dedication left an indelible mark. In 2007, Ceferino was beatified in a ceremony held in his native Chimpay, the first beatification of a South American indigenous person. His life bridges two worlds—the indigenous Mapuche culture and Catholic faith—making him a powerful symbol of reconciliation and hope for Patagonia.

### **The Sunday Lunch Ministry at La Boca**

The tradition of communal service and solidarity continues strong in the Salesian missions of Patagonia, particularly exemplified by a beautiful practice at La Boca, one of the original sites of Salesian work in Argentina. Every Sunday, a special lunch is prepared for the city's poor, bringing together people from all walks of life in service to others. School staff, parishioners, and members of the Salesian Family can be seen cooking and helping the needy, all together, starting with the community director and school headmaster.

This weekly gathering beautifully demonstrates the Salesian commitment to serving the marginalised in a spirit of family and cooperation. What makes this ministry particularly meaningful is how it breaks down traditional hierarchies—from school administrators to everyday parishioners, everyone works side by side in the kitchen and serving area, embodying Don Bosco's vision of a community where everyone contributes to the well-being of those in need. The practice stands as a living testament to the enduring Salesian value of creating family-like environments where faith is expressed through practical acts of love and service, continuing the missionary spirit that first brought the Salesians to Patagonia nearly 150 years ago.

# Pope Francis

## A Legacy of Mercy, Humility, and Radical Discipleship

Fr Sanjay Aind

*Abstract: The article examines Pope Francis's transformative papacy (2013-2025) through a Salesian perspective, highlighting his theological vision centred on mercy and encounter with the marginalised. The article explores his major writings (*Evangelii Gaudium*, *Laudato Si'*, *Fratelli Tutti*), pastoral gestures among the poor, and Church reform efforts. Francis's emphasis on accompanying youth, serving peripheries, and joyful discipleship resonates deeply with Don Bosco's charism. His legacy challenges Salesians to embody a merciful encounter, courageous reform, and evangelical joy in their educational mission, particularly in the diverse contexts of Northeast India.*

### The Unexpected Pope

When the white smoke billowed from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel on 13 March 2013, few could have predicted the profound impact Jorge Mario Bergoglio would have on the Catholic Church and the world. As the first Jesuit pope, the first from the Americas, and the first to take the name Francis—after the humble saint of Assisi—Pope Francis signalled from the outset that his papacy would chart a new course. Standing on the balcony of St Peter's Basilica that evening, he asked the faithful to pray for him before he blessed them—a simple gesture that embodied the humility and pastoral sensitivity that would come to define his pontificate.

As we reflect on his years as the 266<sup>th</sup> successor to St Peter, we can see how Pope Francis has embodied a vision of the Church that Don Bosco himself would recognise—one that prioritises the margins over the centre, mercy over judgment, and authentic discipleship over rigid formalism. For us as Salesians, Pope Francis' leadership offers particular resonance with our charism of joyful service to the young and the poor.



### A Church of Mercy: The Theological Vision of Francis

At the heart of Pope Francis's theological vision lies the concept of mercy. His 2015 declaration of an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy was not merely a calendar event but a programmatic statement about his understanding of God's relationship with humanity. "The name of God is mercy," he has often repeated, emphasising that God's primary disposition toward us is not condemnation but compassionate love.

This theme is consistently present throughout his major writings. In his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), Francis called for a Church that is “bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets,” rather than a Church “concerned with being at the centre and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures.” This language echoes Don Bosco’s own commitment to meeting young people where they are—in the streets, prisons, and workshops of industrialising Turin.

Similarly, in *Laudato Si’* (On Care for Our Common Home), Francis extended this mercy to creation itself, articulating an “integral ecology” that recognises the interconnectedness of environmental degradation and social injustice. The encyclical’s insistence that “everything is connected” reflects a holistic spirituality that refuses to compartmentalise our moral obligations. For Francis, caring for the environment cannot be separated from caring for the poor, just as Don Bosco understood that caring for a child’s material needs is inseparable from caring for their spiritual well-being.

*Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship) further developed this vision, calling for a culture of encounter that transcends borders, ideologies, and religious differences. Drawing on the parable of the Good Samaritan, Francis challenged the global community to build a world where no one is considered “disposable” or beyond the reach of our concern. In a passage that Don Bosco himself could have written, he wrote: “Each day offers us a new opportunity, a new possibility. We should not expect everything from those who govern us, for that would be childish. We have the space we need for co-responsibility in creating and putting into place new processes and changes.”

## The Pastor Among His Flock: Gestures That Speak

If Francis’s writings have articulated a theology of mercy, his actions have provided its most powerful illustrations. From washing the feet of prisoners on Holy Thursday to embracing a man with neurofibromatosis in St Peter’s Square, from visiting refugee camps in Lampedusa to praying at the security wall in Palestine, Francis has consistently placed himself in physical proximity to suffering.

These are not mere photo opportunities but embodiments of his conviction that the Church must be “a field hospital after battle,” a place of healing rather than judgment. When he installed showers for the homeless near the Vatican or invited them to birthday celebrations, he was modelling the kind of practical charity that Don Bosco exemplified in his own ministry to the marginalised youth of 19<sup>th</sup> century Turin.

Perhaps most powerfully, Francis’s visits to places torn by conflict—such as Iraq, the Central African Republic, and Myanmar—demonstrate his commitment to being a bridge-builder in a fractured world. His ability to speak words of reconciliation in contexts of deep division reflects the Salesian emphasis on creating educational environments characterised by family spirit and loving kindness rather than coercion or fear.

## Reforming the Church: Challenges and Resistance

Francis’s papacy has not been without controversy. His efforts to reform the Roman Curia, address financial scandals, and promote a more synodal Church have faced resistance from those comfortable with the status quo. His openings toward those in “irregular” family situations in *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) prompted

accusations from some quarters that he was undermining Church doctrine, while others felt he had not gone far enough in accommodating contemporary realities.

The 2019 Amazon Synod highlighted these tensions, as discussions about new ministerial roles for women and married men revealed deep divisions within the Church about how to respond to pastoral challenges. Francis's approach has been to encourage open dialogue while insisting that the Church must find ways to bring the Gospel to every context without imposing a "monolithic body of doctrine guarded by all and leaving no room for nuance."

This willingness to engage with complexity rather than retreat into simplistic answers parallels Don Bosco's own innovative spirit. Just as our founder developed new models of education and ministry tailored to the needs of his time, Francis has called the Church to creative fidelity—maintaining connection to our tradition while responding courageously to the signs of the times.

### Youth Ministry: A Shared Priority

For us as Salesians, Pope Francis's special concern for young people holds particular significance. The 2018 Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment, culminating in the apostolic exhortation *Christus Vivit* (Christ is Alive), demonstrated his commitment to not just speaking about youth but listening to them.

"Young people are not meant to become discouraged; they are meant to dream great things, to seek vast horizons, to aim higher, to take on the world, to accept challenges and to offer the best of themselves to the building of something better," he wrote in *Christus Vivit*. This language resonates deeply with the Salesian approach, which has always emphasised the importance of helping young people discover their potential and develop into "good Christians and honest citizens."



Francis's encouragement of World Youth Day celebrations and his personal engagement with young people during his apostolic journeys demonstrate his belief that youth are not just the Church of tomorrow but vital participants in its mission today. His call for a Church that accompanies young people rather than merely instructing them echoes Don Bosco's preventive system, which prioritised loving presence over punitive discipline.

### The Challenges Ahead: A Legacy Still Unfolding

As we look to the future, it is clear that Pope Francis's legacy will continue to unfold in the life of the Church. The implementation of the synodal process he has initiated, the ongoing response to his call for ecological conversion, and the Church's engagement with a rapidly changing global context will all bear the imprint of his vision.

For us as Salesians in northeast India, Francis's emphasis on going to the peripheries holds special relevance. Our mission among tribal communities, migrants, and disadvantaged youth embodies his conviction that the Church must be present where people are most vulnerable. His call for inculturation of the Gospel reminds us that authentic evangelisation respects and builds upon the cultural riches of the peoples we serve.

Similarly, his insistence that young people need accompaniment rather than condemnation invites us to examine our own educational methodologies. Are we creating spaces where young people feel welcome to bring their questions and struggles? Are we modelling the merciful face of God that Francis so consistently presents?

### A Vision of Joyful Discipleship

In his first homily as pope, Francis declared: “We can walk as much as we want, we can build many things, but if we do not profess Jesus Christ, things go wrong. We may become a charitable NGO, but not the Church, the Bride of the Lord.” This reminder that all our activity must flow from and lead to Christ captures the essence of both the Franciscan and Salesian charisms.

For all his emphasis on social justice, ecological responsibility, and institutional reform, Francis's papacy has been fundamentally Christocentric. His repeated calls to encounter the living Jesus and to allow that encounter to transform our relationships with others and with creation reflect the deeply evangelical nature of his vision.

As Salesians, we find in Pope Francis a kindred spirit who shares Don Bosco's conviction that the Gospel is good news that should be proclaimed with joy rather than imposed as a burden. His often-quoted line, “ministers should have ‘the smell of the sheep,’” echoes our founder's commitment to being present among the young, especially those most in need.

Perhaps the most fitting summary of Francis's legacy comes from his own words in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!” This emphasis on joy as the hallmark of authentic discipleship resonates deeply with the Salesian charism, offering us a touchstone for evaluating our own ministry.

As we continue our mission in northeast India, may we embody the same spirit of merciful encounter, courageous reform, and joyful witness that has characterised the papacy of Francis. In doing so, we will honour not only his legacy but also the enduring vision of Don Bosco, who taught us that education is always “a matter of the heart.”



# Pope Leo XIV: The Universal Shepherd

Fr Bivan Rodrigues Mukhim

*Abstract: Pope Leo XIV (Robert Francis Prevost) was elected as the 267th Pope on 8 May 2025, becoming the first American-born pontiff and first from the Augustinian order. Born in Chicago in 1955, he served extensively as a missionary in Peru, obtaining dual citizenship. Previously Cardinal-Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops under Pope Francis, he brings international experience and a moderate leadership style. His papacy emphasises unity, social justice, and bridge-building between progressive and traditional Catholic factions while maintaining Francis's missionary focus and pastoral emphasis*

Pope Leo XIV (born Robert Francis Prevost on 14 September 1955) made history on 8 May 2025, when he was elected as the 267th successor of St Peter, becoming the first American-born pontiff and the first Pope from the Augustinian religious order. His election came after the death of Pope Francis on 21 April 2025, marking a significant transition in Catholic leadership.

## Background and Early Life

Born in Chicago, Illinois, to Louis Marius Prevost (of French and Italian descent) and Mildred Martinez (of Spanish descent), Robert Prevost grew up on Chicago's South Side in a devout Catholic family. His maternal grandparents, who once lived in New Orleans' 7th Ward, identified as Black or mixed race, reflecting America's complex racial history and adding an important dimension to his background.

Prevost received his early education at the Minor Seminary of the Augustinian Fathers before attending Villanova University in Pennsylvania, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics in 1977. He continued his



theological education at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, where he received a Master of Divinity degree. His academic journey led him to Rome, where he was ordained a priest on 19 June 1982, at the age of 27, and went on to earn a doctorate in canon law from the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

## The Augustinian Order

Pope Leo XIV is the first pope from the Order of Saint Augustine (OSA), marking a historic milestone for this religious congregation. The Augustinian Order, founded on the teachings of St Augustine of Hippo, emphasises community life, prayer, and service. Their core value is to “live together in harmony, being of one mind and one heart on the way to God.”

Prevost entered the Augustinian novitiate in 1977 in Saint Louis, in the Province of Our Lady of Good Counsel of Chicago, making his first profession in 1978 and his solemn vows in 1981. His rise within the Augustinian Order was remarkable - he was elected to lead the Augustinians' Midwest province in 1999. Subsequently, he was elected Prior General (the top leader) of the entire Augustinian Order for two consecutive six-year terms from 2001 to 2013. During this time, he travelled extensively to Augustinian communities worldwide, including visits to India, the Philippines, Kenya, Nigeria, and other countries where the order maintains a presence.

His leadership of the Augustinians reflects his commitment to their values of community, service, and missionary work. His episcopal motto, *In Illo uno unum* (“in the one Christ we are one”), comes from St Augustine and emphasises unity in diversity - a theme that may define his papacy.

## Missionary Work and International Experience

While American by birth, Pope Leo XIV spent much of his career outside the United States, particularly in Peru, earning him the nickname “Latin Yankee” in

Vatican circles. His first missionary assignment to Peru took place from 1985 to 1986, and he returned to serve there from 1988 to 1998, working as a parish priest, seminary teacher, and administrator in areas such as Chulucanas and Trujillo.

In 2014, Pope Francis appointed him as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Chiclayo, Peru, and he was ordained as bishop on 12 December 2014. He became Bishop of Chiclayo in 2015 and was so committed to his ministry there that he obtained Peruvian citizenship that same year. In 2020, he was also appointed Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Callao, extending his service in Peru.

This extensive international experience, particularly his deep connections to Latin America, has shaped his perspective and approach to church leadership, making him uniquely positioned to bridge cultural divides within the global Catholic community.

## In Vatican

Pope Leo XIV's rise to prominence within the Vatican hierarchy was largely due to Pope Francis, who recognised his leadership abilities and international perspective. Their relationship was one of mentor and *protégé*, with Francis strategically positioning Prevost for increasingly important roles.

In January 2023, Pope Francis appointed Prevost as Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops and President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, bringing him to Rome in a powerful position overseeing the selection of bishops worldwide. Later that year, Francis created him a Cardinal in the Consistory of 30 September 2023, assigning him the Diaconate of Saint Monica.

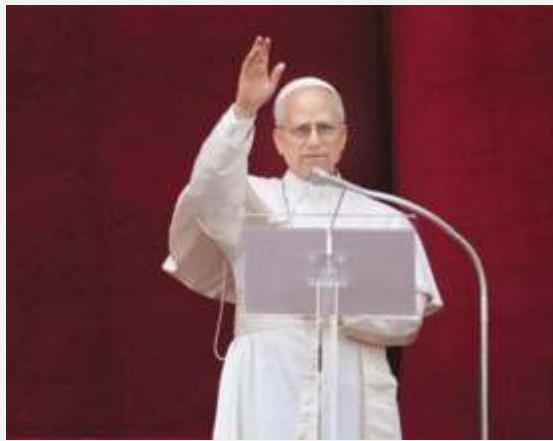
Pope Francis entrusted Prevost with implementing one of his most revolutionary reforms - adding three women to the voting bloc that decides which bishop nominations go forward to the pope, a significant step in increasing women's participation in church governance.

As a close collaborator of Pope Francis, Prevost participated in the Pope's Apostolic Journeys and both sessions of the Synod of Bishops on synodality in 2023 and 2024. He was also appointed to numerous Vatican dicasteries, including those for Evangelisation, the Doctrine of the Faith, and the Eastern Churches, among others, providing him with broad exposure to church governance. In February 2025, just months before becoming Pope himself, Francis promoted him to the Order of Bishops, granting him the title of the Suburbicarian Church of Albano.

This close association with Pope Francis is evident in Leo XIV's first public words as Pope, where he spoke warmly of his predecessor and echoed Francis' message that "evil will not prevail." In choosing the name Leo, however, he honours Pope Leo XIII, who developed Catholic social teaching, suggesting both continuity with Francis' social justice emphasis and a desire to establish his own distinct identity.

### A Bridge Builder Between Traditions

Pope Leo XIV is widely seen as a centrist or moderate who may help bridge the divide between progressive and traditional factions within the Catholic Church. While his style differs from Pope Francis - Leo is described as more reserved and formal in liturgical matters - he is expected to maintain many of Francis' priorities



regarding social justice, care for the environment, and outreach to migrants and marginalised communities.

The leadership style of Pope Leo combines the formality of tradition (he has chosen to wear the red papal stole and mozzetta that Francis rarely used) with Francis' emphasis on missionary outreach and dialogue. This balance may help reconcile different perspectives within the church, from those focused on traditional doctrines to those advocating for more inclusive approaches.

### American Pope in a Global Church

As the first American pope, Leo XIV faces unique challenges and opportunities. The United States is deeply divided politically, including among Catholics, and he will need to navigate these divisions carefully. His election occurs during Donald Trump's presidency, and tensions may arise regarding immigration policies and other social issues where Catholic teaching differs from the current US government's positions.

However, his extensive international experience, particularly in Latin America, may help temper perceptions of him as simply an "American pope." His dual citizenship with Peru, fluency in multiple languages (including Spanish, Italian, and Latin), and years of missionary work

demonstrate his global perspective. This internationalism may help him connect with Catholics in the Global South, where the Church is experiencing the most rapid growth.

## Continuity and Change

In his first public appearances, Pope Leo XIV has signalled both continuity with Francis' emphasis on being a "missionary church that builds bridges" and subtle shifts in tone and emphasis. He has stressed unity, peace, and dialogue in his early messages, themes that resonate with Francis' papacy while establishing his own voice.

Like Francis, he is expected to continue advocating for the poor, migrants, and environmental protection, but may approach these issues with a different temperament and style. His background in canon law and theology suggests he may bring rigorous intellectual depth to Church teaching while maintaining Francis' pastoral emphasis.

## Challenges Ahead

Pope Leo XIV inherits a Catholic Church facing significant challenges, including declining membership in traditional strongholds like Europe, ongoing sexual abuse scandals, tensions between progressive and traditional factions, and questions about the role of women and LGBTQ+ individuals in the Church.

His handling of these issues will define his papacy. While he has expressed some conservative views on issues like same-sex relationships, his implementation of women in leadership roles in the bishop selection process suggests openness to greater inclusion. On abuse scandals, he

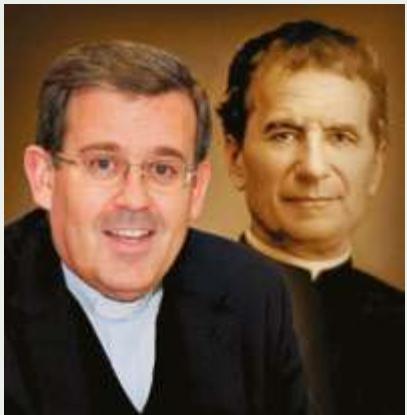
has emphasised transparency and support for victims, though questions have been raised about his handling of specific cases in both Peru and the United States.

## Conclusion

Pope Leo XIV's papacy represents both historic firsts and a continuation of the Catholic Church's evolution in the 21st century. As the first American and Augustinian pope, he brings unique perspectives shaped by his Chicago roots, extensive missionary work in Latin America, and close association with Pope Francis. His election signals the continuing globalisation of Church leadership beyond Europe, following the first Latin American pope with the first North American one. It also reflects the influence of Pope Francis, who elevated Prevost and entrusted him with implementing key reforms.

While it is too early to assess his impact fully, Pope Leo XIV's background suggests he will prioritise unity amid diversity, social justice, and bridge-building across cultural and ideological divides. His papacy may be characterised by a balance of tradition and innovation, formality and accessibility, as he leads the world's 1.4 billion Catholics through the challenges of our time.

As he stated in his first address: "We must seek together how to be a missionary Church, a Church that builds bridges, dialogue, always open to receive like this square with open arms." This vision of an open, engaged Church that maintains its core identity while responding to contemporary challenges will likely define the papacy of Pope Leo XIV in the years to come.



# REV. FR FABIO ATTARD

## 11<sup>th</sup> Successor of Don Bosco

Fr Joy Kachappilly

**Abstract:** Rev. Fr Fabio Attard was elected as the 11th Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco on 25 March 2025, during the 29th General Chapter. Born in Malta in 1959, he became the first Maltese Salesian leader of the 13,750-member congregation present in 136 nations. His extensive experience includes twelve years as General Councillor for Youth Ministry, founding Malta's Pastoral Formation Institute, and serving as papal consultor. Fr Attard emphasises avoiding "pastoral photocopies" while maintaining an authentic Salesian identity and adapting to the needs of contemporary youth globally

On 25 March 2025, the Salesians of Don Bosco witnessed a historic moment when Rev. Fr Fabio Attard was elected as the 11th Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation during the 29th General Chapter in Turin, Italy. His election marks a significant milestone, as he becomes the first Maltese Salesian to hold this prestigious role and, remarkably, the first Rector Major to be elected while not physically present at the General Chapter. Fr Attard succeeds Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artíme, who led the congregation for over a decade (2014-2024) before becoming Prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

As the 11th successor of St John Bosco, Fr Attard now leads one of the largest religious congregations in the Catholic Church, with 13,750 consecrated

Salesians organised across 92 provinces in 136 nations. His election represents a new chapter for the Salesian Family worldwide, as he brings his extensive theological knowledge, pastoral experience, and global leadership perspective to guide the congregation through the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

### Life and Formation

Born on 23 March 1959, in Gozo, Malta, Fabio Attard grew up in Victoria, where he received his early education in public primary and secondary schools. His vocational journey began to take shape during his years at the Major Seminary of Gozo, from 1975 to 1978. Later, he entered the Salesian aspirantate at Savio College in Dingli, Malta, before preparing for the novitiate in Dublin, Ireland.



**Fr Fabio Attard with Former Rectors Major**

On 8 September 1980, at the age of 21, he made his religious profession as a Salesian of Don Bosco in Maynooth, Ireland. Fr Attard pursued his academic formation with great dedication, earning a degree in Theology from the Pontifical Salesian University (UPS) in Rome and a Licentiate in Moral Theology from the prestigious Accademia Alfonsiana, also in Rome.

His ordination journey progressed with his diaconate ordination on 11 July 1986, followed by his priestly ordination on 4 July 1987, in Rome. These formative years established the foundation for what would become a ministry deeply rooted in pastoral care, academic research, and educational service.

## Academic and Pastoral Career

Fr Attard's missionary spirit was evident from the early years of his Salesian life. From 1988 to 1991, he was part of the pioneering group of Salesians who initiated the Congregation's presence in Tunisia, working in a predominantly non-Christian context where he helped establish foundations for evangelical and educational service.

Returning to Malta, Fr Attard assumed leadership roles as rector of St Patrick's Salesian School and the Salesian Oratory from 1993 to 1996, demonstrating his capabilities in educational administration and youth engagement. In 1999, Fr Attard completed his doctoral research on conscience within the Anglican sermons of John Henry Newman at the Milltown Institute for Philosophy and Theology, showcasing his theological depth and academic rigour.

His expertise led him to join the faculty of the Pontifical Salesian University, where he also co-directed doctoral theses at the Alphonsian Academy, making significant contributions to the intellectual and spiritual formation of future theologians. In 2005, he founded and directed the Pastoral Formation Institute in Malta, dedicated to training lay people engaged in



**Fr Fabio Attard with South Asia Delegates**

pastoral ministry, revealing his commitment to empowering the laity in the mission of the Church.

## Global Leadership Role

Fr Attard's emergence as a global leader materialised in 2008 when he was elected General Councillor for Youth Ministry during the 26th General Chapter. His exceptional service earned him re-election for a second term in 2014, allowing him to serve in this capacity until 2020. During these twelve years, he provided strategic guidance to the Salesian Congregation in its mission for and with young people worldwide.

One of his most significant contributions was the publication of the Salesian Youth Ministry Framework in 2013, a foundational document that offers updated guidelines for Salesian pastoral work worldwide. Under his coordination, the Congregation advanced several global initiatives, including the International Congress on Youth Ministry and the Family held in Madrid in 2017.

Fr Attard's leadership extended to coordinating activities addressing critical social issues such as marginalisation, poverty, and migration. He strengthened missionary volunteer programs and consolidated technical and vocational education and training (TVET) through initiatives like Don Bosco Tech Africa and Don Bosco Tech ASEAN. His influence extended beyond the Congregation, as he represented the Salesians at key international forums on youth policy, migration, and youth employment in Brussels and New York.

In recognition of his expertise in youth ministry, Pope Francis appointed Fr Attard as a Consultor to the Dicastery for the



Fr Fabio Attard, then Councillor for Youth Pastoral, welcomed at DBCTE, Tura

Laity, Family, and Life in 2018, a position he continues to hold, demonstrating his valued contribution to the universal Church.

After completing his term as General Councillor, from 2020 to 2023, Fr Attard was entrusted with coordinating Salesian and Lay Formation in Europe. This project culminated in the creation of a master's program for the formation of Salesians and lay collaborators, now managed by the Pontifical Salesian University in collaboration with the Youth Ministry Sector—further evidence of his commitment to collaborative leadership and formation.

## Vision for the Salesian Congregation

In his first address as Rector Major, Fr Attard outlined his vision and priorities for the Congregation with clarity and conviction. Speaking in a warm and direct tone, he emphasised the importance of a clear Salesian identity and the significance of the moment for the Congregation's future.

Fr Attard began by shifting focus away from himself, stating, "The most important subject today is not Fabio Attard, but the

Salesian Congregation.” He explained that the Congregation’s choice represented not only its vitality but also the desire for that vitality to continue through individuals chosen to serve for a specific period. He emphasised that those who serve the Congregation are part of a greater dynamic “where the Spirit of God is speaking... a human history that serves as a vessel for the power of a God who continues to create, redeem, and sanctify.”

A central aspect of Fr Attard’s vision involves avoiding what he terms “pastoral photocopies”—the danger of merely replicating past approaches without authentic adaptation to current realities. He acknowledges that while Salesians intellectually recognise this danger, “transitioning from intellectual understanding to prophetic fidelity is not easy.”

Building on the foundation of being rooted in Christ and conscious of the Salesian charism, Fr Attard challenges the Congregation to reconsider its educational service in what Pope Francis has called “a change of epoch.” He poses the provocative question: “Are we benefactors, masters, suppliers... or are we servants?” Drawing from his global experiences, he observes that young people today live in a single, interconnected village, and their fundamental questions remain the same, whether in Vietnam, Brazil, Spain, India, or elsewhere.

Fr Attard’s vision emphasises service that must be “lived credibly and visibly” by the General Council first and foremost, demonstrating his commitment to leadership by example. He has also

expressed special concern for Salesians serving in conflict zones, including Ukraine, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Myanmar, Sudan, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, calling them “martyrs of the new century” who need spiritual support as they witness to the value of being “a Don Bosco today for young people” in challenging circumstances.

### **Conclusion**

Fr Fabio Attard brings to his role as Rector Major a unique combination of deep spirituality, theological insight, pastoral experience, and global perspective. His extensive background in youth ministry, academic formation, and international leadership positions him well to guide the Salesian Congregation through the challenges and opportunities of our time.

As he assumes leadership of the second-largest religious congregation in the Catholic Church, Fr Attard’s vision centres on renewing the Salesian charism for the 21st century—remaining faithful to Don Bosco’s foundational mission while adapting to the changing needs of young people in our complex, globalised world.

Under his guidance, the Salesian Congregation will continue its vital work of education, evangelisation, and social transformation, carrying forward Don Bosco’s dream of being “witnesses and bearers of God’s love for young people” across 136 nations. Fr Attard’s election indeed represents a new dawn for the Salesian Congregation, which under his leadership seeks to generate hope and light for new generations around the globe.

# **CONGRATULATIONS!**

## Our Newly Professed Salesians





**Rector Major with the Members of his Council (2025-2031)**