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SEPTEMBER 2025

ING NEWSLINE

SALESIAN PROVINCE OF GUWAHATI



ST CARLO ACUTIS AND ST PIER GIORGIO FRASSATI
Sanctity in Screens and Streets

SUMMER TIME YOUTH MINISTRY 2025



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Editorial

As we turn the pages of another enriching issue of ING Newsline, we are reminded of the vibrant tapestry of Salesian life that continues to unfold across the Northeast. This September edition captures the essence of our mission through diverse stories that reflect both our rich heritage and our dynamic present.

Our Provincial's message opens this issue with a timely reflection on digital discipleship, drawing inspiration from the recently canonised St Carlo Acutis and connecting it to our founder's pioneering spirit in the publishing ministry. As we navigate an increasingly digital world, this message encourages us to view technology not as a distraction from our mission but as a powerful tool for evangelisation and youth outreach.

In our Parish Section, Fr Damian Basumatary highlights the missionary work at Catholic Mission, Bengtol, illustrating how parish ministry continues to be a central aspect of our Salesian presence.

Our educational mission takes centre stage with articles on Don Bosco School, Tura, by Fr Pradeep Ekka highlighting how Salesian education continues to transform lives even in the most remote corners of our region. Education remains one of our most powerful tools for social change and youth development.

The human side of our Salesian family comes alive through Fr Francis

Cheeramben's stories in "All in the Family." These heartfelt memories offer personal portraits of two extraordinary Salesian Brothers whose quiet dedication and selfless service made a lasting impact on the communities they served. Through vivid stories—from Br Aloysius Serioli's resourceful management of Cathedral Parish House to Br Joseph Pakma's transformative work with altar boys—these accounts highlight the often-unsung heroes whose humble efforts touched many lives across Northeast India. Such personal stories remind us that behind every institutional achievement lie the human bonds that support us and serve as the invisible threads connecting our provincial family into a unified whole.

We pay tribute to Bishop Marengo's enduring legacy, whose pioneering work in the Northeast continues to inspire our missionary efforts. His vision and dedication laid the foundation upon which we still build, reminding us that each generation of Salesians stands on the shoulders of those who came before. In this issue, Fr Charles Deepen Lakra shares the early life and the formation years of this saintly Bishop.

We pause to remember Fr Thomas Chenginiyaden by sharing his article on the delicate balance between missionary zeal and responsible stewardship of resources. His life and ministry truly exemplified what he expressed in his writing. May his example continue to

guide us in understanding the proper use of money in mission settings.

The articles on spiritual retreats, summer youth ministry camps, and catechetical ministry showcase the diverse aspects of our apostolic work. Each provides a different way we engage with young lives and support faith communities. The spiritual renewal from retreats energises our entire provincial community. At the same time, our youth camps and catechetical programmes actively realise Don Bosco's vision of guiding young people on their journey of faith and development. Fr Lukose Cheruvalel, Fr Bromio Marak, and Fr Amit Chama Lakra have written on these themes.

Finally, the Mini Boscoree and Scout Masters' Training Camp at Don Bosco School, Barpeta Road, demonstrates our commitment to holistic youth development through innovative programmes that combine adventure, education, and character building. Fr Bivan Rodrigues Mukhim writes about

the camps and their impact on the overall youth ministry in the province.

Together, these articles portray a province that honours its history while confidently embracing the future. They emphasise a community that remains true to Don Bosco's charism while innovatively adapting to modern challenges and opportunities.

As you explore these pages, may you find inspiration in our confrères' dedication, encouragement in our shared mission, and renewed commitment to the young people we serve. Each story reminds us that we are part of something greater than ourselves—a global family dedicated to educating and evangelising youth.

I thank you for your ongoing support of ING Newsline and your active involvement in the Salesian mission within the province.

Fr Joy Kachappilly

About the Book

This meticulously researched study chronicles the remarkable journey of Christian faith formation in Northeast India from 1890 to 1962. Fr Francis Hembrom traces how three missionary congregations — Salesians, Jesuits, and Brothers of the Immaculate Conception — approached and integrated local communities. Drawing from historical archival sources, the book reveals how missionaries learned local languages, shared indigenous elements, and adapted the Gospel message to respect local customs while building vibrant Christian communities. From the preceding work of the Salesians through the transformative Salesian period, this comprehensive account demonstrates the power of culturally sensitive evangelisation. It is a vital read book for understanding how the Catholic Faith took root in one of India's most culturally diverse regions.

About the Author

Fr Francis Hembrom, SDB (1966-2022) was born in Andhra Pradesh, India, into a Hindu Social family. A native of Northeast India, he envisioned the very soul of indigenous Christianity that he would later develop in his scholarly work. Fr Francis joined the Salesian novitiate at Malgudi, Asansol. He made his first religious profession on 21 January 1987 at St. Ursula's, Shillong. After his primary education in 2001, he earned a Master's degree in Catechetics from Vista Jyoti College, Bangalore. He later pursued his doctoral studies in Catechetics at the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome. Throughout his priestly ministry, Fr Francis served in various capacities—catechist, parish priest, formator, and author. His deep love for catechesis led evangelisation and efforts to champion pastoral training programmes across major languages. Given his linguistic abilities, he spoke Sanskrit, Assamese, Hindi, West Bengal, and Odia, enabling him to connect authentically with diverse communities. This book, published posthumously, represents his life's scholarly contribution to preserving the necessary heritage of the region. It is his final gift to the Church for service with distinction and his permanent death on 20 July 2022.

THE CATECHETICAL MINISTRY IN NORTHEAST INDIA (1890 - 1962)

THE CATECHETICAL MINISTRY IN NORTHEAST INDIA (1890 - 1962)

IN
NORTHEAST INDIA (1890 - 1962)

FR (DR) FRANCIS HEMBROM SDB

Released on 14 August 2025

September 2025

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Message from the Provincial

My Dear Confreres,

Greetings from Provincial House,
Guwahati!

The canonisation of Blessed Carlo Acutis and Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati on 7 September 2025 provides us with a pioneering blueprint for 21st-century Salesian ministry. These young saints did not shy away from their generation's challenges—they transformed them into opportunities for evangelisation, offering genuine models for discipleship.

Carlo's declaration, "To always be united to Jesus: This is my life plan," was not just spiritual rhetoric—it was a digital manifesto. At fifteen, he established the International Exhibition of Eucharistic Miracles, now available in seventeen languages worldwide. His "kit for becoming a saint"—daily Mass, Communion, Rosary, Bible reading, Adoration, and Confession—drove his digital apostolate. Carlo demonstrated that screens can become windows to the sacred when held by hands raised in prayer and folded in adoration.

Pier Giorgio's *Tipi Loschi* (his "shady characters" group—ironically named for their virtue) pioneered peer evangelisation through friendship, adventure, and service. His motto, *Verso L'Alto*, was not about escaping earthly concerns but about

elevating them through divine love. From giving away his graduation money to sacrificing holidays for charity in the streets of Turin, Pier Giorgio showed that holiness is not found in withdrawal but in radical engagement with those in need. His formation at Collegio Don Bosco shaped his threefold mission: Good Example, Charity, and Persuasion—perfectly embodying Don Bosco's Preventive System.

Both saints reflect Don Bosco's passion for publishing and his courage to venture into dangerous territories for souls. Just as our founder established printing presses and magazines, recognising the evangelistic power of communication tools, we are called to be pioneers in digital mission fields. Carlo turned technology into a means for evangelisation, curiosity, and communion. Pier Giorgio demonstrated that authentic evangelisation flows through presence, solidarity, and self-gift in the worlds of suffering and exclusion.

Our young Confreres stand at a unique crossroads. They are digital natives who have chosen religious life—well placed to speak their generation's language while conveying Christ's timeless message. Our young people in the Northeast and beyond are not waiting for Salesians to catch up with technology; they are waiting for Salesians who can show them how to turn their devices from sources of distraction into tools for ministry.

Let us embrace social media, websites, and digital platforms with missionary courage. Create content that captures imagination and guides toward virtue. Help young people discover that their smartphones can become prayer books, their gaming skills can build virtual exhibitions of faith, and their social networks can become communities of service. Remember Carlo's wisdom: "Our aim must be infinite, not finite."

Like Don Bosco in industrial Turin's dangerous streets, trust that Mary Help of Christians guides our digital

evangelisation. Whether through printed words, digital platforms, or genuine friendships, our aim remains unchanged: guiding young people to Jesus. Both Carlo and Pier Giorgio prove that holiness is not nostalgic—it is vibrantly contemporary. Let us rise above digital passivity and become witnesses of hope in both virtual and tangible worlds.

With prayers and best wishes,



Fr Sebastian Kuricheal
Provincial

Catholic Mission – Bengtol

Fr Damian Basumatary

The Parish of Bengtol, dedicated to Bl. Michael Rua, was officially inaugurated on 24 June 1966 under Fr Joseph Zubizarreta as its first Parish priest. It developed from earlier Catholic missionary work among the Bodos that began in 1928 and grew into a thriving mission serving multiple ethnic communities, including Bodos, Adivasis, Santals, Garos, and Rabhas. Despite establishing 22 new parishes from 1973 to 2024, Bengtol continues to expand, with 7,400 parishioners across 51 villages as of 2025. It is supported by a comprehensive educational and pastoral infrastructure, including Don Bosco schools, hostels, and collaborative efforts with various religious congregations, notably the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, who arrived in 1976.

The Parish of Bengtol, dedicated to Bl. Michael Rua was carved out of the Parish of Barpeta. The new Parish was officially inaugurated on 24 June 1966 with Fr Joseph Zubizarreta as its first Parish priest. Thanks to the dedicated hard work of the priests, sisters, and lay catechists, the Catholic community has grown enormously in the past decades. The Bodos are the majority group; the Adivasis, Santals, Garos, Rabhas and others add to the ethnic mosaic.

As early as 1909, American Baptists and later Lutherans had established contacts with the Bodos in the Goalpara area and set up several Christian communities among them. The first contact between Catholic missionaries and the Boros began in 1928. In that year, Fr Leo Piasecki baptised a few Bodos in the Udalguri area. In 1932, Fr Vincent Scuderi baptised a few others in the Bengtol region. In the years 1933-34, Fr

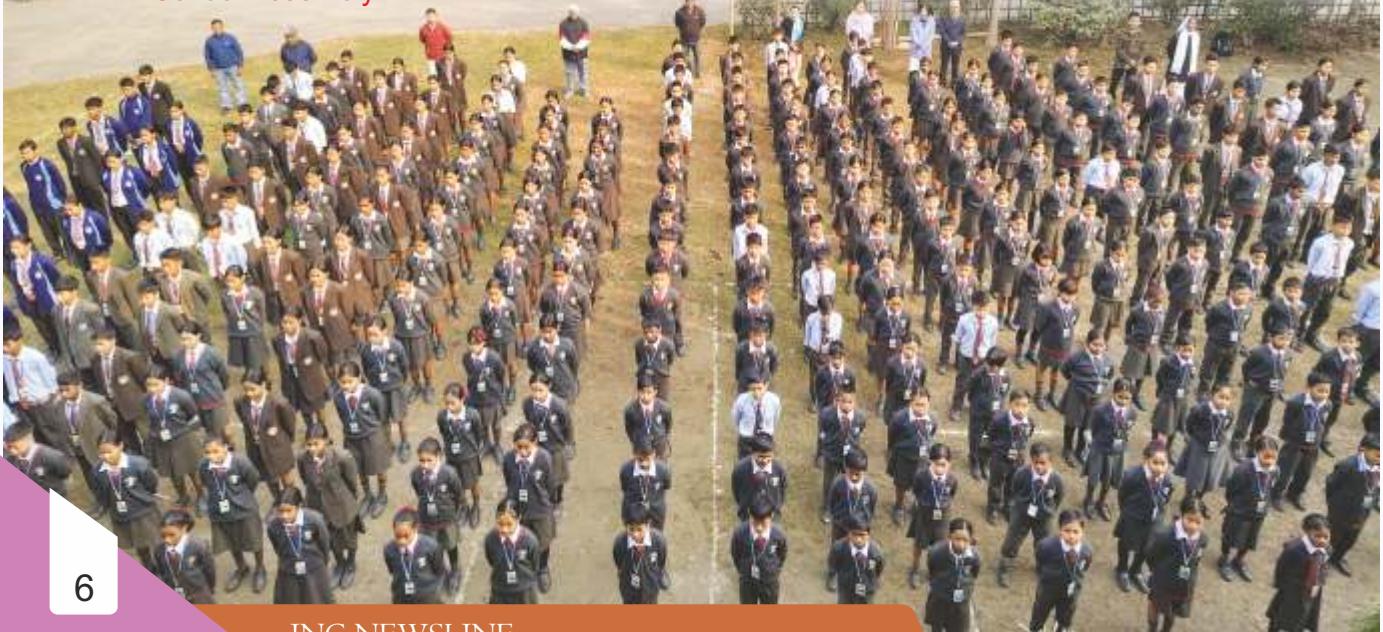
Aloysius Ravalico and Fr Anthony Alessi baptised some in the Mongoldoi area. In 1936, Barpeta was made a Parish, and the evangelisation work among the Bodos received a boost. In the following years, Fr Orestes Marengo, Fr Theodore Bonomi, Fr Michael De Valle, Fr Patrick Burns, Fr Remus Morra, and Fr Thomas Lopez, all from the Barpeta Mission, worked zealously among the Bodos.

In 1956, Fr Joseph Zubizarreta was sent to Barpeta with the mandate to open a new Parish for the Bodos. Fr Zubizarreta began to stay at Barpeta in a 'little hut' from 24 June 1966. That was the official beginning of the Parish of Bengtol. With the arrival of Fr Zubizarreta, the mission work progressed. The hostel for the boys was built in 1968, and in the same year, an Assamese medium School was started. The more spacious new School building was completed in 1970, and in 1978, the English Medium School was started. The Parish church was built and blessed in January 1984. In the same year,

a Hospital building was completed. To promote the higher education of youth, a College Hostel was also constructed in Kokrajhar. It began to function in 1991.

In July 1967, Fr John O'Day was appointed assistant priest at Bengtol. The zealous work of missionaries like Fr Matthew Kadavunkal, Fr John Mulungothara (a diocesan priest), Fr Peter Bianchi, Fr Kulandaisamy (a diocesan priest), Fr Edward D'Souza, Fr Joseph Palamthattel, Fr Chacko Kuthur Vellattukara, Fr Ronald Joseph Venadt, Fr Koikara Basil, Fr James Perunneparampil, Fr Alphonse Malngiang, Fr Jose Thiruthanathy, Fr Sebastian Ishorary, Br Jerome Lyngdoh, Br Benjamin Kujur, Fr Glorious Syiemlieh, Fr Damian Basumatary, Fr John Changsan, Fr Uttam Hubert Molsom, Fr Sylvester Synrem, Fr Thomas Lakra, Fr Joshy Thomas, Benny Moshashary, Fr Cyril Sangma, Fr Lucas C. Marak, Fr Siby John Vattapara, Fr Jimmy T. Sangma, Fr Augustine

School Assembly





Edasserithottathil, Fr Francis Basumatary, Fr Justin Narzary, Cornelius Myrthong and others, made the Mission progress rapidly.

Today, several parishes have been carved out of the original Parish of Bengtol. They include Soraibil (1973), Gosaigaon (1984), Dotma (1986), Bashbari (1989), Bongaigaon Bhowlaguri (1994), Balamguri (1995), Garubhasha (1996), Kokrajhar (1999), Bongaigaon Cathedral Parish (2000), Bijni (2000), Kwilamwila (2001), North Salmara (2001), Kathalguri (2002), Gauripur (2003), Chapar (2003), Magurmari (2005), Kachugaon (2005), Dadgari (2010), Panbari (2013), Tungkubari (2016), Balagaon (2021) and Khungring-Doimuguri (2024). Despite all these divisions, the Parish continues to grow in both numbers and vitality. According to 2025 statistics, there are 51 villages with Catholic communities in the Bengtol parish. The Catholic community comprises 1,560 families with 7,400 parishioners. The number of vocations to religious life and the priesthood from the Parish of Bengtol is a remarkable feat.

Don Bosco School at the centre was upgraded into a higher secondary School in 2013. When Fr Siby John was the principal, a band was introduced in the school, which excelled both at the state and national level events like the Republic Day parade. The following served the School as headmasters and principals: Mr Albin Moshahary, Sr Elizabeth Francis MSMHC, Sr Rose Joseph MSMHC, Sr Jane Francis MSMHC, Fr James Perunneparampil, Br Benjamin Kujur, Fr Alphonse Malngiang, Fr Joshy Thomas, Fr Benny Moshahary, Fr John Changsan, Fr Glorious Syiemlieh, Fr Sylvester Synrem, Fr Siby John Vattapara and Fr Justin Narzary. Currently, Fr Jimmy Sangma is the principal of the school. Twenty-three teachers serve the school. The School currently has 714 students. There are 342 boys and 372 girls studying in the school.

In 2013, renovation work on the High school, boys' hostel, and Salesian residence was initiated. In the same year, the High School was upgraded to a

Higher Secondary level, offering humanities. In 2017, the primary section of the School building was renovated.

The Salesian community at Bengtol was canonically recognised in 1992. The present community (September 2025) consists of Fr Damian Basumatary (Rector and Parish Priest), Fr Jimmy T. Sangma (Principal), and Fr Birendra Dungdung (Assistant Parish Priest and Vice Principal)

Don Bosco High School, Malivita, was established in January 2008 as a sub-centre of the Parish by Fr Thomas Lakra. On 27 April 2014, the Sisters of St Ann, Luzern, came to collaborate with the Salesians at Malivita. They look after the School and run hostels for boys and girls. The Salesian province of Guwahati constructed a church at this sub-centre, which was blessed on 6 December 2015. The current student strength in the School is 450, with separate hostels for boys and girls.

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd help in the running of another village School in

Ouguri. The Sisters also run a hostel. At present, the student strength is 252. The School has reached up to class 8 and is a proceeding school. The last feeder School of the Parish was opened at Balajhar Gomat. It has now reached class five.

The Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC) arrived in the Parish on 4 June 1976. The sisters conducted the English-medium School from 1978 until 1991, when Fr James Perunneparampil was appointed its first Salesian headmaster. The Sisters conduct the boarding for the girls; they serve in the School, manage the dispensary and do evangelisation and catechesis work in the villages.

The growth of the Catholic Church in the region owes much to the dedicated hard work of lay catechists, both men and women. The Parish Council and the Lay Associations, such as the Evangelisation Commission, Catholic Youth

Bengtol Parish Church



Association and the Mohila Committee, collaborate actively in Church activities. As the Parish is preparing to celebrate the diamond jubilee of its establishment in 2026, the Salesians and Sisters working there under the leadership of Fr

Damian Basumatary, with the help of the Evangelisation Commission, are making every effort to enhance the quantity and quality of Catholic presence in the Parish.

Don Bosco School - Tura

Fr Pradeep Ekka

Don Bosco School, Tura, was founded in 1956 by Fr Anthony Buccieri in the East Garo Hills district of Meghalaya. It has developed into a leading educational institution under the guidance of successive Salesian Headmasters and Principals, currently educating 2,300 students with 80 teachers. The School features extensive facilities, including a boys' hostel, youth centre, and book centre. Beyond traditional academics, it has become a regional sports hub with various academies in basketball, football, taekwondo, karate, shooting, and music, while continuing the Salesian mission of holistic youth development through education, skills training, and values formation in the Garo Hills region.

Don Bosco School, situated in the centre of Tura, the District Headquarters of the East Garo Hills district in Meghalaya, has developed into a prominent educational institution in the region. The School started modestly in 1956. Fr Anthony Buccieri, a renowned missionary in the Garo Hills, established the school.

The dedicated hard work of successive Headmasters and Principals—Fr Anthony Buccieri (1956-1965), Fr George Stadler (1965-1968), Fr D. J. Wollaston (1968-1968), Fr Jim Burns (1969-1971), Fr Joseph Edakkudan (1971-1975), Fr Joseph Parippil (1975-1984), Fr Thomas Chenginiyaden (1984-1990), Fr George Plathottam (1990-1994), Fr Charles Sangma (1994-2008), Fr Januarius Sangma (2008-2015), Fr Albert Thirniang (2015-2018), and Fr Threnius Sangma (2019-present)—has helped the

School become a premier educational institution in Tura.

The Salesian presence was officially recognised as a canonical community in 1969. Many of the Headmasters or Principals also served as rectors. Other Rectors who were not headmasters or principals include Fr Victor Amanattuvilla, Fr Joseph Puthenkalam, Fr Joseph Puthenpurackal, Fr Sebastian Kunnathukuzhy, Fr George Maliekal, and Fr Sebastian Palatty.

Other Salesians who worked at the School include Fr Thomas Thekkedam, Fr Thomas Manooramparambil, Fr Jacob Thotekat, Fr Anthony Vazhappillil, Fr Benedict Kharlyndoh, Fr Anthony Marak, Fr Rajesh Ekka, Fr Jose Mariadas Kallanickal, Fr Punit Kumar Lakra,



School Assembly

Fr Ranjit Kulkant Xalxo, Fr Charles Deepen Lakra, Fr Ignatius Sangma, and Br Nirmal Ekka.

To extend educational opportunities to the marginalised children, the Salesian community established the Don Bosco Evening School in 1988, marking the centenary of Don Bosco's death. Fr Thomas Chenginiyaden, the then rector and headmaster, initiated the Night School and oversaw the expansion of the School building. Fr Charles Sangma, during his tenure, led efforts to construct a stadium and undertake various other development projects on the School campus. Besides academics, the School also excels in sports and games, with well-organised scouts, guides, and NCC troops. Fr Januarius Sangma, during his term as rector and principal, built an additional block to upgrade the School to a higher secondary level.

Don Bosco Boys' Home, the boarding house, was established in 1980 to provide educational opportunities for boys from distant villages and other parishes in the

region. It offers accommodation, study facilities, spiritual guidance, and a family-like atmosphere for the boys. Currently, there are 55 hostel students.

In the past several years, various developmental projects have been undertaken to enhance the school's infrastructure. A centenary block was constructed with toilet facilities for higher secondary students, a reading room cum library, nursery classrooms, computer labs, and more. The children's park was renovated. A refectory was built to serve midday meals to students. Staff rooms and offices were also refurbished. The roofing of the galleries at the football field is nearing completion. Similarly, in the residential building, the boys' refectory, chapel, guest rooms, parlour, staircase, toilets for hostel children, and the entrance of the residence have been renovated to provide improved facilities.

Currently, the School has 2,300 students, including 1,400 boys and 900 girls. There are 80 teachers and 40 support staff to help the pupils.





In accordance with the directives of the Salesian Provincials Conference of South Asia (SPCSA), the School has introduced a sports academy, and its campus has become a centre for sports activities in the Garo Hills, fostering young talents through academies and tournaments. The School organises the Annual All Garo Hills Basketball Tournament (with participants from schools, clubs, and district basketball associations) and the Buccieri Memorial Basketball Tournament, Tura (inter-school, clubs, academies, and associations) regularly. A football academy has also been established in partnership with Top Corner and Leisure. Additionally, "Baby League" football is in planning. In martial arts, the Don Bosco Taekwondo Academy, recognised by the West Garo Hills District Taekwondo Association, performs excellently. The School also hosts a karate academy. A shooting academy, under the auspices of the District Police, West Garo Hills, Tura, is operational within the school. Furthermore, the School has a music academy dedicated to nurturing young musical talents.

Don Bosco Book Centre is an additional service offered by the community. It supplies educational, religious, and moral literature, audio-visual materials, and religious articles.

Don Bosco Youth Centre, connected to the community, offers a range of services for local youth. Over the years, the Youth Centre has undertaken various initiatives under the leadership of directors such as Fr Thomas Manoorampambil, Fr Anthony Vazhappillil, Fr Anthony Marak, and Fr Ignatius Sangma. Currently, Fr Ravi Prabhat Ekka is the centre's director. The centre provides computer education and coaching classes, organises outdoor tournaments, and offers library facilities for graduate and postgraduate students. It also promotes skill development, training, and youth outreach programmes.

As of September 2025, Fr Threnius N Sangma serves as the Rector and Principal, Fr Ravi Prabhat Ekka is the Vice-Rector and Vice-Principal, and Br Firstjoy Felix Sutong holds the positions of Administrator and Warden.

Don Bosco Higher Secondary School, Tura, along with the Don Bosco Boys' Home and Youth Centre, continues the Salesian mission of St John Bosco by empowering youth through education, sports, skills training, and values formation. The institution stands as a beacon of faith, discipline, and service, shaping generations of leaders for the Garo Hills and beyond.

All in the Family

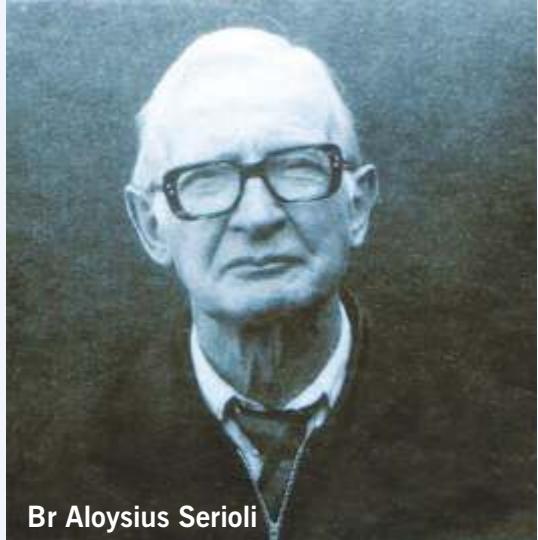
Anecdotes from Fr Francis Cheeramben

Brother Aloysius (Luigi) Serioli

Cathedral Parish House at Shillong

When I met Br Serioli, he was at the Cathedral Parish House in Laitumkrah, Shillong. At that time, he was what was called a 'FACTOTUM,' loosely translated into English as 'a jack of all trades.'

In the Cathedral Parish House in Shillong, there was the Parish Priest, two Assistant Parish Priests, and Br Serioli. The priests were busy with the spiritual and sacramental life of the parish. Br Serioli's task was to manage the material matters of the parish house; he had to oversee the supply of provisions and the operation of the kitchen. His mode of transportation was a scooter, an old Italian-made vehicle. He made countless trips to the market to buy supplies. He needed to ensure the timely preparation of meals for the Confreres, maintain the upkeep of the house, and care for the Cathedral Church. He made sure that Confreres received hot, nutritious meals on time. During those days, evening prayer and spiritual reading took place around 3.00 pm. Afterwards, priests were free to visit families. During the day, people were busy with their work, so the best time to visit families was in the evening. It was natural for Confreres to arrive late for the evening meal. Br Serioli devised a kind of hot box to keep the food warm. It wasn't the fancy hot cases we see nowadays; still, that simple device was quite effective at maintaining the warmth of the food.



Br Aloysius Serioli

Hostel for College Students

Br Serioli used to accommodate ten to fifteen college boys in the parish premises. When Fr Ignatius Rubio built the new Cathedral Parish House, he also included rooms for hostel boys. The boys shared rooms, with two or three boys in each. Downstairs, there was a common kitchen where the boys could cook their meals. The boys had to bring provisions and rice from their homes. On Sundays, Brother would provide meat for lunch, either beef or pork. The hostel fees were fifty rupees per month for those who could pay. For the poorer boys, Br Serioli would find generous souls to sponsor their boarding fees. No boy was refused admission because he was poor. Brother would follow up on their studies. Lazy boys had no place in his hostel.

Wine Maker

In those days, mass wine was available from the Cathedral Parish House in Shillong. Br Serioli used to buy resin in



Br Serioli with Fr Thomas Lopez

bulk and make wine. Sometimes, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) would provide resin. Br Serioli's wine was of excellent quality. Some of his hostel boys helped him make the wine. He used to charge ten rupees per bottle. At that time, we considered that very expensive. His second wine was also available for sale at the Don Bosco Hostel for Rs 3/- per bottle for feast day meals.

Livestock

Br Serioli used to keep pigs and country chickens. The leftovers from the boys' kitchen and the Confreres' kitchen would go to feed the pigs. He used to buy rice bran to supplement the pigs' feed. The profit from all these would go to the upkeep of the boys' hostel.

The priests at the parish house did not worry about running the parish house. Br Serioli used to see to every detail. He was a silent and hard worker. Through his humble hostel, he raised many eminent leaders for society and for the Church. His contribution to the parish church at Laitumkrah was significant.

In his old age, we find him in the Salesian Novitiate at Sunnyside. By that time, he was suffering from dementia. The Confreres and the novices at Sunnyside looked after him lovingly. May this humble, hardworking Salesian Brother intercede for us from heaven!

Br Joseph Pakma

The first Salesian Community at Umran, Meghalaya, was established in September 1976. The pioneering members included Fr Felix Bolini, the Superior, Br Joseph Pakma, and me, Fr Francis Cheeramben. Br Joseph Pakma came to Umran from Punsolin, Bhutan. What I admired about Br Joseph Pakma was his willingness to do any work and adapt to the challenging circumstances in Umran. We had no electricity and relied on kerosene oil lamps. There was no piped water supply; we had to fetch water from the well. In those days, our driver also served as our cook. When Fr Bolini went to Shillong with the driver and vehicle, we had to cook with limited knowledge. Br Joseph did not complain but willingly stepped into the kitchen to prepare simple meals. Gradually, the situation improved. After a year, we had an electric line installed at our house.



Br Joseph Pakma

Water was pumped to our residence. We also had a permanent cook and a few boys in the hostel.

When our living standards improved, Br Joseph Pakma was transferred to Savio Juniorate. Savio Juniorate had a tradition of having a Salesian Brother to manage the small tailoring department they had. For some time, there was no brother available to oversee that department. Br Joseph was sent to fill that void. What surprised everyone was that the Brother was not only a skilled tailor but also an excellent assistant who was willing to help boys wherever needed. He was a mentor and guide to all the boys, especially those experiencing difficulties in their lives and in need of a sympathetic and supportive guide. Troublesome boys showed significant improvement under his guidance.

Some years later, he was transferred to Mawlai parish. Here, his real aptitude manifested. He began an 'Altar Boys Sodality.' He encouraged teenage boys to join this sodality. He taught them to serve Mass. He took Catechism classes for

them. Br Joseph was an excellent tailor who had been trained in Italy. He stitched beautiful cassocks and surplices for them to serve Mass. It was a wonderful sight to see young boys serving Mass like little angels. The then Parish Priest, Fr Gervasis Kozhuppathadam, encouraged Br Joseph in his apostolate and generously financed all his expenses. From among that group of boys, several of them became priests. That was a great credit for this humble and zealous Salesian Brother. Once I asked him, 'Brother, so many of your boys became Salesian priests, why did you not encourage one or two to become Salesian Brothers?' His answer startled me, 'I will not encourage anyone to become a Salesian Brother, because it is a very difficult and unappreciated life!'

May Br Joseph Pakma pray for us from heaven! May some generous and brave youngsters become Salesian Brothers, to follow in the footsteps of Br Joseph Pakma!

In a lighter vein,

Young Missionary: Fr Provincial, I want to ask you for a favour.

Fr Pianazzi: Yes, my son, what can I do for you?

Young Missionary: Fr Provincial, when I go on a mission tour, can I wear civil clothes?

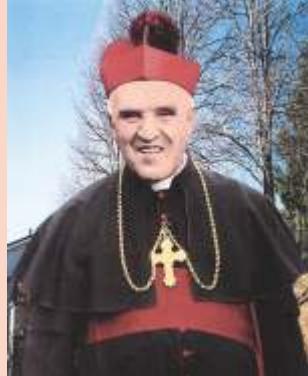
Fr Archimedes Pianazzi

Fr Pianazzi: No, my son, we must always wear a cassock.



Young Missionary: But Father, I heard that when you were in Garo Hills, you used to go around in short trousers and T-shirts.

Fr Pianazzi: Yes, I was not a fool like you to ask permission from superiors for such a small matter.



Bishop Stephen Ferrando was touring the villages in the Garo Hills. He was dressed in a cassock. His porter, who carried his belongings, was dressed only in an Indian tie. They had to cross a river, and the water was very deep. When he crossed, his pants and the lower part of his cassock up to the waist were wet. He had to wait patiently until he reached the next parish house. The porter, when he crossed, took out his tie, rinsed it thoroughly, put it back on, and continued. Bishop exclaimed, "Poor me, I have too many clothes on!"

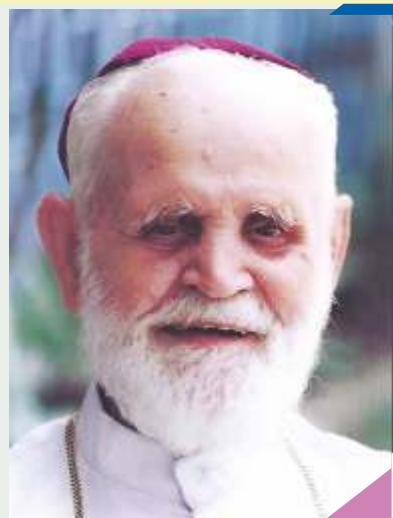
Servant of God Bishop Orestes Marengo: Early Life and Formation (1906-1932)

Fr Charles Deepen Lakra

As the Salesian province of Guwahati has appointed Rev. Fr Joseph Almeida, former Provincial, to expedite the process of progressing towards declaring the Servant of God Bishop Orestes Marengo as Venerable, the ING Newsline will present a series on the life and ministry of this great missionary to our land in upcoming issues, so that we can appreciate and emulate the example he has left us. In this issue, we will explore the early life and the Salesian formation of Bishop Marengo.

Family Background and Childhood (1906-1919)

Orestes Marengo was born on 29 August 1906, in Le Cecche, near Diano d'Alba in the Cuneo province of Piedmont, Northern Italy. He was baptised on the same day in the parish Church of St John the Baptist in Diano d'Alba. Coming from an agrarian family that worked in vineyards, Marengo learned the spirit of hard work from his parents. His father, Lorenzo Marengo (1860-1943), was described as "generous, good, sincere with all as well as with the Lord to whom he made a gift of three of his children." His mother, Agostina Montaldo (1872-1953), was characterised as a





Bishop Marengo among Confreres

woman of sacrifice and devotion, for whom “suffering, detachment and sacrifice were her daily bread.”

The Parish of Diano d’Alba played a central role in young Marengo’s formation. The town had approximately 3,200 inhabitants during his youth. He received his Sacrament of Confirmation from Bishop Joseph Francis Re of Alba on 27 October 1913. The parish priest, Mgr Joseph Falletti, was a learned and holy man who greatly influenced Marengo’s spiritual development. Falletti was a great admirer of Don Bosco and had dedicated one of the six little chapels in the Parish church to him. Young Marengo was deeply impressed by the priest’s zeal and dedication, actively participating in all church activities, including serving as an altar boy.

Early Education with the Salesian Sisters (1914-1919)

Marengo received his elementary education at the Institute of the Salesian Sisters in Diano d’Alba. Despite the daily



Bishop Marengo among people

12-kilometre journey to and from school, he proved to be an above-average student. The school community was blessed with visits from Salesian pioneers, including Michael Rua (Don Bosco’s first successor) and Cardinal John Cagliero, who had led the first missionary expedition to Patagonia in 1875.

The most significant influence during this period was Sr Caterina Zannone, who had served as a missionary in Patagonia for 18 years before returning to teach at Diano d’Alba. She occasionally entertained students with stories of her missionary experiences. Marengo later wrote, “My Salesian vocation is to a great extent due to her.” The Salesian Sisters’ apostolate created tremendous growth in vocations to priestly and religious life in the region.

Discovery of Vocation and Journey to Valdocco (1919-1923)

Marengo had known about Don Bosco and the Salesians from childhood, partly because his mother had attended Don Bosco’s funeral in 1888 during her schooling in Turin. Despite his desire to join the Salesian school at Valdocco, financial constraints posed a significant

challenge. His father was already supporting his brother in the Seminary at Alba and needed to provide a dowry for his sister entering religious life. Mgr Falletti provided a crucial recommendation for Marengo "to be accepted by the Salesians at a very generous concession."

In his letter of recommendation, Mgr Falletti wrote that Marengo "distinguished himself among his companions for good conduct and innocence of life and gave every sign of hope of a vocation to Salesian religious life." On 11 October 1919, Marengo joined the Salesian school at Valdocco, Turin, completing his four-year Latin course from 1919 to 1923.

Formation at Valdocco

At Valdocco, Marengo was immersed in the authentic Salesian educational system based on Don Bosco's "Preventive System," which emphasised reason, religion, and loving kindness. The school followed strict regulations emphasising piety, study, obedience, and work. Students were taught that "the fear of God" was fundamental, to be maintained through prayer, sacraments, and the Word of God.

During his years at Valdocco, Marengo had the privilege of personal contact with early Salesians who had known Don Bosco directly. He knew Fr Paul Albera, Don Bosco's second successor and Rector Major from 1910-1921, even assisting at his Sacrament of Anointing when Albera died on 29 October 1921. He also became acquainted with Blessed Philip Rinaldi, the third successor, and Fr Peter Ricaldone, who would become the fourth successor.



Aspirants in Bosco Mount felicitates
Bishop Marengo

Desire for Ecuador Mission and Redirection to India

Following Fr Albera's death and the election of Fr Rinaldi as Rector Major in April 1922, some provincials from South America visited Valdocco to recruit vocations. Marengo applied three times to Fr Bartolomeo Fascie, the councillor general of scholastics, seeking permission to join the Ecuador missions. However, being only in his second year of Latin studies and considered too young, his applications were denied, causing him considerable sadness.

After completing his Latin studies, Marengo applied for admission to the novitiate but initially forgot to specify his desire to become a Salesian, mentioning only his missionary calling. Fr Charles Maselli, the rector, corrected this oversight. Despite his disappointment about Ecuador, divine providence opened another path when Fr Dominic Canepa, his future novice master at Foglizzo, learned of an opening in the first group of novices being sent to India.



Bishop Marengo among Confreres

Journey to India and Novitiate Formation (1923-1925)

On 30 August 1923, Marengo began his novitiate at Foglizzo, Italy, receiving his cassock from Fr Philip Rinaldi. However, his stay was brief. When one novice from the original India group died and another withdrew, Marengo was selected to join the first group of eight novices departing for India under Fr Stephen Ferrando's leadership.

Historic Journey to Assam

On 2 December 1923, this historic group left Venice for India, marking the first time the Salesian Congregation sent novices to complete their formation in mission countries rather than in Italy. They arrived in Bombay on 18 December and reached Shillong on 22 December 1923, receiving an enthusiastic welcome with a procession from the Catholic community.

Novitiate in Shillong (1924-1925)

Marengo began his formal novitiate on 21 January 1924, with Fr John De Ponti as Novice Master and Fr Stephen Ferrando as Assistant Novice Master. The novitiate community consisted of twelve novices: eight from Europe and four from South India. The formation

followed the official curriculum prescribed by the Congregation, using the Piccolo Manuale di Vita Religiosa by G. Zolin as the primary text.

The novitiate curriculum included religion, Salesian pedagogy, general ethics, Italian, Latin, Greek, liturgy, and etiquette. Despite the small premises and prevailing poverty, the community was characterised by joy, peace, and family spirit. The chronicle noted: "We formed really one heart and one soul; joy, peace, and family life were the chief features."

Fr De Ponti, though suffering from stomach cancer, was described by Marengo as "very fatherly and kind and taught us above all with his example and his heroic patience." When De Ponti's health deteriorated and he had to leave for treatment, Fr Ferrando assumed the role of Novice Master.

Immediately after making his first religious profession on 21 January 1925, Mgr Louis Mathias took Marengo and his companions to Laikynsew Mission Station for a month-long missionary experience. This exposure to village life and missionary work deeply moved Marengo and provided practical insight into his future apostolate.

Philosophical Studies (1925-1927)

Following his novitiate, Marengo undertook two years of philosophical studies at Our Lady's House, Shillong, from 1925 to 1927. The curriculum included philosophy, Latin language and literature, Greek language, English, history, mathematics, physics, and natural history, all guided by the



Bishop Marengo with a little child

worldwide Salesian formation programme directed by the general councillor.

During his philosophical studies, Marengo gained valuable pastoral experience by assisting at the festive oratory at the parish, which served 136 children. In his second year, he wrote an article on the Garo tribe for the Salesian Bulletin, deepening his understanding of local cultures. The formation house accommodated 19 students of philosophy and theology during the 1925-1926 academic year.

Practical Training in Guwahati (1927-1929)

After philosophy, Marengo was sent to Don Bosco Orphanage in Guwahati for practical training, which was a mandatory three-year formation period (though he received only two years due to a special concession). The community managed an orphanage, an elementary school, a preparatory school, and a carpentry workshop, serving 48 Adivasi children from tea estates in the Brahmaputra Valley.

Fr Leo Piasecki was the Rector and Parish Priest, whose parish

encompassed the entire Brahmaputra Valley from Sadiya to Dhubri—over 1,000 kilometres—plus some Garo communities. The parish included 150 Catholics in Guwahati town and 5,000 Catholics throughout the valley. Due to constant mission tours, either the parish priest or his assistant was frequently away from the station.

Marengo was particularly impressed by his superiors' missionary zeal. Fr John Topno, one of the boarding boys who later became a Salesian priest, remembered Marengo as "very understanding and kind" with "words that were very convincing, since he spoke with conviction." Marengo made his perpetual profession on 21 January 1928, writing in his application: "I find myself very happy and satisfied in the choice I have made. Not only that, I am convinced that it is the vocation in which God wants me to be."

Theological Studies and Ordination (1929-1932)

In February 1929, Marengo began his four-year theological studies following the Congregation's worldwide curriculum. The programme included Sacred Scripture, dogmatic theology, sacramental theology, moral theology, ecclesiastical history, canon law, patrology, liturgy, archaeology, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, English, and sacred eloquence.

Diverse Apostolic Experiences

During his first year of theology, Marengo combined morning theology classes with afternoon teaching at Don Bosco Technical School, where 130



Bishop Marengo with Fr Busolin

boys were learning various trades. In his second year, he served as assistant and teacher to philosophy students while continuing his theological studies. During his third year, he became a full-time teacher at St Anthony's High School, teaching Hindi, while also assisting Fr Constantine Vendrame.

Influence of Fr Constantine Vendrame

Working alongside Fr Vendrame proved transformative for Marengo. Vendrame was credited with baptising over 30,000 Khasis through his simple but effective methodology: "Love, affection, friendship, sympathy and identifying with the simple people preceded his preaching of the Faith." Marengo learned the Khasi language from Vendrame while absorbing his missionary methodology and spirit. He wrote gratefully: "I thank God for the privilege of having been at his side... This gave me a chance of knowing this apostolic man and picking up at the same time a working knowledge of the Khasi language."

Additional Pastoral Responsibilities

During his theological studies, Marengo undertook various pastoral responsibilities that enriched his formation. He served the village of Umlingka for his Sunday apostolate during his second and third years, further enhancing his Khasi language skills. He also organised the Sunday Oratory on the parish premises for one year, serving 136 students. On 27 November 1931, he was admitted to the subdiaconate, and his application for diaconate was accepted in early 1932.

Ordination to the Priesthood (1932)

Marengo received admission to priestly ordination on 31 March 1932. On 2 April 1932, he was ordained a priest along with six others by Archbishop Ferdinand Perier of Kolkata in the Church of the Most Holy Redeemer, Shillong. His companions in ordination included Fr Austin Anderson, Fr Joseph Bacchiarello, Fr Albert Correngia, Fr William Haughey, Fr Louis Rocca, and Fr Louis Ravalico.

First Mass

Marengo's first Mass was marked by a memorable incident that showcased his adaptability and pastoral heart. Scheduled to celebrate his first Mass on 3 April 1932 in Sohringkham village, 10 kilometres from Shillong, he discovered upon arrival that the missal had been forgotten. Rather than waste the opportunity, he spent four hours blessing houses in the hilly village while waiting for the missal to be brought on foot from Shillong. Despite his parched throat from the rigorous fasting requirements of the time, he successfully

celebrated his first Mass in the afternoon, demonstrating the pastoral dedication that would characterise his entire ministry.

Marengo's early life and formation laid the foundation for his remarkable missionary career. From his humble agrarian beginnings in Piedmont through his comprehensive Salesian education in both Italy and India, he developed the linguistic skills, pastoral sensitivity, and missionary enthusiasm that would serve him throughout his episcopal ministry. His journey from a village boy inspired by missionary stories to a newly ordained priest prepared to serve the scattered Christian communities of Northeast India exemplifies the transformative power of genuine religious formation rooted in the charism of Don Bosco. The influence



Bishop Marengo with Fr Joseph Thelekkatt

of key figures like Sr Caterina Zannone, Mgr Falletti, Fr Vendrame, and the early Salesian pioneers shaped his understanding of missionary work as fundamentally based on love, service, and identification with the people he was called to serve.

Mission and the Use of Money | Fr Thomas Chenginiyaden

On 30 July 2025, we observed the third death anniversary of Rev. Fr Thomas Chenginiyaden. As we entrust his soul to God's loving mercy and pray for his eternal peace, we honour his memory through this article he wrote years before his death. His commitment to the wise stewardship of resources in our missionary work was widely acknowledged. Although financial support remains essential to our evangelising efforts, he urges us to trust in Divine Providence, whose abundant grace never fails those who rely on it.

Every missionary understands that money presents both a significant opportunity and a genuine risk in evangelisation. Remaining true to the radical values of the Gospel and living a life of poverty, following Jesus' example alone, will ensure divine provision in the life of the evangeliser and their pastoral work.

The Role of Money in Missionary Work

The word 'money' here is used broadly to include cash, profit-driven investments, and both movable and immovable assets.





Fr Thomas with Family Members

The connection between money and mission is so fragile yet real that it requires ongoing discernment to maintain the correct balance. This involves prioritising within the apostolate, ensuring transparency in financial management, and above all, placing great trust in Divine Providence. Using money in line with Gospel values demands that the missionary avoid easy shortcuts and temptations to acquire and spend it.

History of Support for the Church, Mission and the Poor

Let us briefly examine the origins and development of the practice of giving donations to support evangelisation and aid the poor. In the Old Testament, most Jews regarded helping the poor as a religious duty of the law. It lacked genuine love or concern for the needy or a sense of solidarity with them. Prophets such as Amos condemn the insensitivity of the people towards the poor (Amos 2:6-9).

Luke captures the essence of Jesus' mission in these words. "The Spirit of the

Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim the release of captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free" (Lk 4:16). During his lifetime, apart from teaching people a new way of life to return to God, Jesus alleviated human suffering and taught his followers that this was the hallmark of discipleship. The Apostles understood this, as shown by the early Church's history. St Paul urges the more wealthy Christian communities of his time to assist the Christians in Jerusalem who were in need (2 Cor 8). Therefore, helping the poor and supporting evangelisation became part of Jesus' followers' tradition in the Church, and it has remained a permanent mark.

From the latter part of the 18th century, missionaries from Europe accompanied explorers, colonisers, and traders from the West to Africa, the Americas, and some Asian countries. Their initial aim was to minister to the pastoral needs of Christian soldiers and traders they accompanied. However, once in the colonies, they dedicated themselves to spreading the faith and establishing Christian communities across these continents. Religious congregations leading this missionary movement in the Church sought financial support from their local churches to aid their brothers and sisters in mission lands. As the movement gained momentum, "Fundraising or propaganda" became more systematically organised. Some missionaries even adopted business models to enhance their fundraising efforts. After World War II, the rapid

economic growth of Europe and America resulted in increased financial assistance to the missions.

Over the past 50 years or so, numerous NGOs—both Church-based and lay organisations—have emerged everywhere to help people in developing countries. The Churches and missionaries have been major beneficiaries of these efforts. Additionally, some Western governments' Overseas Development Cooperation sectors began to channel part of their foreign aid through Church-related NGOs in their own countries, which, in turn, sent aid to the poor via Church organisations and NGOs in mission lands.

Once local churches were well established in developing countries, missionaries could raise funds from their own communities for Church work. Help also came from local governments for social projects run by missionaries. As a result, the funds available to missionaries, both for pastoral care and especially for social development projects, have grown rapidly over the past 40 years.

Change in Motivation for Giving Aid

Over the years, the reasons for donating money to missionaries and mission work have evolved. Initially, people sent money to missionaries and churches in mission lands to spread the Gospel. As the world grew increasingly secular and modern communication methods brought live images of suffering and



With St John Paul II

hardship in underdeveloped countries, their motivation for giving changed significantly. They became more focused on alleviating human suffering than on spreading the Gospel. Western churches also began to emphasise the socio-economic aspects of evangelisation. Consequently, missionaries shifted their focus towards development projects because it was easier to secure funds for such initiatives. In recent decades, missionaries have increasingly appealed for socio-economic development of the poor, rather than solely for evangelisation.

Finally, we reach the present situation where foreign funds are gradually diminishing. Over the past 25 years or so, the Church and religious congregations in mission lands, expecting a halt in foreign funding, have been working towards self-reliance. This has led them to invest large sums in building institutions to ensure an income when

foreign funds may no longer be available. This marks a shift away from the evangelisation strategies of the past.

Jesus' Attitude to Poverty and Money

Jesus serves as the model for every missionary, especially in their attitude towards money and financial resources. The content and approach of evangelisation should be grounded in the life of Jesus. His life and teachings should steer missionaries in their apostolic work. In his incarnational mystery, Jesus embodies extreme poverty. Born into poverty, he faced the insecurity of a carpenter earning his living through hard work. Once he began his ministry as an itinerant preacher, his life demonstrated complete dependence on his Father's providence. This is what he taught his disciples: to rely on God rather than on money.

During His public ministry, Jesus and His disciples relied on support from some of their followers and friends. He was even able to help others using this shared fund. For Jesus, the kingdom of God extended beyond its proclamation. The sign of the kingdom was His compassion for the crowd. Early Christians were recognised by their compassion and service to the poor.

Jesus instructed his disciples to go beyond merely safeguarding their own financial security. He encouraged them to share what little they had with those who had less or nothing, aiming to alleviate human suffering and promote Christian solidarity with the poor. He urged them to assist the poor in overcoming their poverty.



Receives the Missionary Cross from Fr Juan Vecchi, Rector Major

For Jesus, the kingdom of God did not end with its proclamation. The sign of the kingdom was his compassion for the crowd, his healings, and miracles through which he reached out to people in their spiritual and physical suffering. Jesus' life was in complete harmony with what he preached. When he sent out his disciples, he said, "Do not store for yourselves treasures on earth." He told them to share most generously whatever they received from Him: compassion for the poor, the power to heal, and trust in the providence of their heavenly Father. He becomes even more specific and tells them not to trust in the security that money and possessions can bring. Through this radical approach to poverty, which He demands from his disciples, Jesus aims to emphasise the lasting and powerful sign of their missionary work.



African Missionary

Use of Money in Pastoral Work

However, Jesus did not glorify poverty per se, nor did he demonise money. He recognised poverty as an existential reality within God's Divine plan and, through his sharing in the pain and suffering of the poor, taught his disciples how to accept it.

Missionaries are stewards of the money they receive for the work of the church. This money, entrusted to them in good faith, requires prudent and careful spending. It should be used for what is deemed necessary based on evangelical priorities and the needs of the poor. It also calls for transparency and accountability. The missionary must ensure it is spent for the purpose for which it is given.

Money and Efficiency in Evangelisation

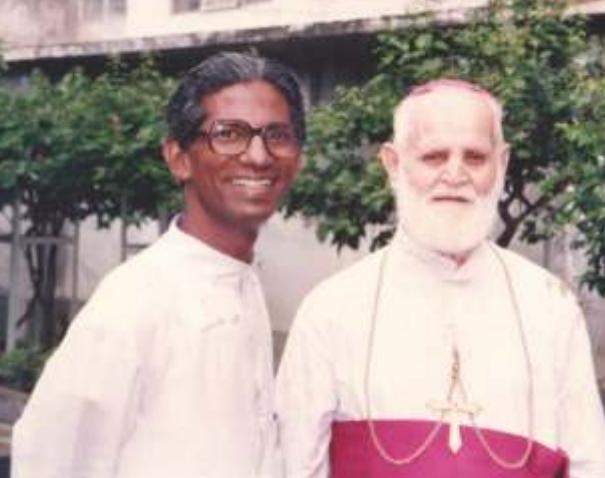
Evangelisation mainly involves spreading the Gospel and helping the poor. Clearly, this cannot happen without financial resources. It is often argued that the success of evangelisation depends heavily on money and other economic assets. Some evangelisers

justify their lifestyle choices by citing the need for efficiency. Missionaries need basic necessities to live and work for the kingdom, but they should not judge their success based on the resources they have or use. Their buildings, vehicles, comforts, and gadgets should be seen as gifts from those who sacrifice their own comforts to support the work of the church. God forbids all extravagance. From a Gospel perspective, efficiency should not be judged by business success or material gain. We must not mistake ordinary grain for chaff. If we live and work humbly before the Lord, we will never be in want.

Jesus valued his missionary work through his lifestyle as well as his preaching and teaching. Although he had access to great wealth, he deliberately chose to identify himself with those he preached to. There was consistency between what he preached and how he lived.

Dependency, Paternalism and Promoting Personal Cult

Although Jesus preached God's providence and came to aid those in



With Bishop Marengo

need, he did not support paternalism or dependency. Missionaries can easily fall into the trap of using money to create reliance among their followers. Empowering the poor must not lead to keeping them permanently dependent.

A missionary from the West who had worked many years in Africa returned to his home country due to ill health. Once, while writing to his former Bishop in Africa, he inquired how his Christians were doing. In his reply, the Bishop also had these words to say: "Father, you did not leave any Christians in the Parish but a group of beggars." This may have been a harsh way of expressing it, but it highlights the fact that sometimes evangelisers, knowingly or unknowingly, make their communities dependent on them.

Sometimes, this results from promoting paternalism and using money by some evangelisers. They tend to keep a group of people loyal to them to meet their own need for recognition, praise, and support. This leads to building a personality cult around them. Grand celebrations for one's birthdays, feast

days, and other important events are organised for them. All of this comes at a cost and strays from the primary purpose for which God sends them financial resources. Sometimes, missionary religious or church groups organise joint celebrations with grand pomp and show. These events can sometimes give the impression of a secular culture of wealth and power, which starkly contrasts with their missionary vocation.

In one of his talks to the heads of religious congregations, Pope Paul VI said, "The Church must not only be poor but also be seen and recognised as poor." This calls for a critical discernment between efficiency in evangelisation and the pitfalls inherent in the use of money, which is in sharp contrast to how Jesus lived and what he taught.

A Word on the Macro Projects

The Church in mission areas, especially those belonging to religious orders, have been capable of implementing large-scale projects like hospitals, schools, colleges, universities, and centres for social development and research. Most of these began modestly, such as a small mission centre with simple buildings, a primary school, a small dispensary, and so forth. They were established to meet the basic needs of the poor and particularly of local Christians. Over time, with easily available project funding, those managing these centres started expanding them, and eventually they grew into significant institutions. The costs associated with running, maintaining, and continually expanding



Among African Mothers

these large institutions are so high that operators are compelled to increase tuition fees and service charges, often making their services unaffordable to ordinary people, let alone the poor. Therefore, what was initially intended for the poor and especially for Catholics often ends up perpetuating an economic divide between the rich and the poor, and to some extent, creating a gap between the Church and the impoverished. In many cases, their services are mostly utilised by people for whom they were not originally intended.

Once, I had the opportunity to meet a Lutheran theology professor in Ethiopia. During our conversation, he told me the following: The Catholic Church has more influence than the Protestants because of their large schools, hospitals, and institutions. Yes, you have the structures, but we have the people. Although Catholic missionaries arrived in Ethiopia four centuries before the Protestants, Catholics number just over two-thirds of a million, whereas Protestants have 16.7 million adherents.

The money the Catholic Church receives from foreign donors each year also far exceeds what the Protestants receive in the same period.

After Vatican II, some congregations in India seriously considered this situation and even wanted to transfer a few of their prestigious and wealthy city schools to laypeople. They also aimed to reach interior villages to start micro-educational and development projects for the poor. However, pressure from the rich and powerful sections of society, as well as a reluctance among some members to change their way of life and work, brought this initiative to a swift end.

Mistakenly, evangelisers might be measuring the success of their work solely by its institutions, grand shows, and well-organised events, as well as news coverage of their achievements by the press or TV channels. If missionaries believe in such things, they will not hesitate to spend money to achieve this goal. It is important to give visibility to

what missionaries do for the church and society, but if that becomes their main priority in the apostolate and significant funds are also used to do so, then a serious re-evaluation is needed.

Self-sufficiency and Divine Providence

If we examine the current state of the Church's missionary efforts in India, we see a dominance of institutions over mission centres. Every Parish has a large school. We say that education signifies development and that schools serve as places for evangelisation. These statements are entirely valid. Based on

these reasonable premises, missionaries have invested substantial sums of money received from donors to build large structures that do not necessarily help the genuinely needy and often overlook Catholics who lack the financial means to access their services. In Parishes with such extensive schools, there is also a risk that more effort is spent on managing the school than on planning and conducting pastoral work. Ultimately, one might ask oneself, "Is there a place for Divine Providence in missionary work?" or do we rely solely on money?

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL IN THE PROVINCE OF GUWAHATI

Fr Lukose Cheruvalel

The Salesian Province of Guwahati held two transformative annual retreats in July 2025 at Siloam in Umiam, Meghalaya, with the first retreat from 11-17 July led by Fr Jose Varickasseril, and the second from 27 July to 2 August led by Fr Biji Thomas. Both retreats focused on spiritual renewal, prayer, and vocational recommitment through comprehensive programmes including guided meditation, spiritual talks, and solemn vow renewals. These intensive spiritual formation initiatives demonstrate the Province's committed effort to uphold ministerial vitality and community cohesion through regular, well-structured opportunities for encountering God and renewing dedication to the Salesian charism.

The Salesian Province of Guwahati demonstrated remarkable commitment to spiritual formation through two transformative annual retreats in July 2025 at Siloam in Umiam, Meghalaya. Another retreat is scheduled for December. These events mark a significant moment in the spiritual life of the province, offering vital opportunities for prayer, reflection, and vocational renewal.

The inaugural retreat, held from 11 to 17 July 2025, laid the groundwork for this

yearly tradition. Fifty-one confreres took part in the first retreat, guided by Fr Jose Varickasseril, whose scriptural insights and pastoral wisdom fostered an atmosphere of deep engagement. Themed around Mark 6:31, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while," the retreat highlighted the importance of stepping back from ministerial demands to encounter God in silence and solitude.

The comprehensive programme included daily guided meditation, spiritual talks, Eucharistic celebrations,



Fr Biji Thomas animates the Retreat

extended adoration periods, and significant personal prayer time. A particularly meaningful element was the Penitential Service on 15 July, offering profound opportunities for spiritual healing. The retreat concluded with all participants solemnly renewing their vows, demonstrating collective recommitment to Salesian religious life that went beyond ceremonial observance to reflect genuine transformation.

Building on this, the second retreat began on 27 July and is scheduled to conclude on 2 August 2025. Fr Biji Thomas served as the animator, bringing his distinctive, charismatic approach to spiritual direction. His opening presentation included personal sharing about developing his own retreat ministry charism, creating an immediate connection with participants and encouraging their inward spiritual journey. This vulnerability exemplified the authentic engagement expected throughout the experience.

The retreats highlighted core aspects of Salesian spirituality, especially encouraging a closer relationship with

God through quality prayer and an inward journey of commitment. Both events provided opportunities for confreres to rediscover vocational joy and experience renewal through the Holy Spirit. The community-focused approach fostered vital fraternity, reinforcing unity and shared mission across the province.

Fr Sebastian Kuricheel, Provincial, provided substantial leadership support by presiding over the concluding Holy Masses and expressing satisfaction with the prayerful participation that characterised both occasions. His visible involvement highlighted the administration's focus on spiritual formation rather than optional activities. Fr George Palamattam, Director of Siloam, offered exceptional hospitality that was key to creating the contemplative atmosphere essential for meaningful engagement.

The intensive approach of organising two major spiritual events within one month highlights the importance of renewal in maintaining ministerial vitality and effectiveness. This goes beyond individual growth to include



After the First Retreat

community building and collective vocational recommitment. The province's investment in developing capable spiritual leadership, with different preachers bringing unique charisms and approaches, enriches the overall experience while offering diverse models of direction to serve various community needs.

The retreats demonstrate the Province's understanding that spiritual formation needs systematic institutional support and regular, well-structured opportunities. The selection of Siloam Centre was strategic, with Meghalaya's natural tranquillity providing perfect conditions for prayer and reflection. The biblical foundation of the first retreat, emphasising sacred pauses in life's rhythm, echoed throughout both experiences.

These spiritual rejuvenation initiatives are genuine encounters with the divine that transform hearts and renew vocational commitment to ongoing service in the Salesian tradition. The integration of personal spiritual growth with community building promotes a holistic formation approach that addresses both individual and collective needs within the religious community.

The focus on the renewal of vows in both retreats is particularly significant, as it signifies more than just a ceremonial conclusion but an authentic spiritual commitment to living the Salesian charism with renewed enthusiasm. The collective aspect of these renewals strengthened mutual support and shared dedication among confreres, forging bonds that extend beyond the retreat into everyday ministerial life.

The efficacy of both retreats and the scheduled December retreat demonstrate a mature understanding within the province that regular spiritual growth is vital for maintaining authentic religious life and effective apostolic service. As the Province continues to expand and face new pastoral challenges, these annual retreats will remain vital sources of spiritual strength, community cohesion, and renewed dedication to serving young people and the marginalised. The established model shows that genuine spiritual renewal requires both personal commitment and organisational backing through careful planning, skilled leadership, and enthusiastic participation.

Summer Time Youth Ministry Camps in the Province 2025

Fr Bromio Marak

The Summer Time Youth Ministry (STYM) 2025 marked a significant revival of youth engagement in the Salesian Province of Guwahati after an eight-year break. It began with a comprehensive three-day animator training programme from 1-3 July at Don Bosco Institute, Kharghuli, followed by camps held across 16 locations throughout July under the theme "Pilgrims of Hope," involving over 2,000 young participants. The initiative effectively combined spiritual formation, practical workshops, cultural celebrations, and leadership development across diverse geographical and cultural contexts. It concluded with an evaluation session on 28 July, where animators expressed gratitude for the transformative experience, and participants voiced hopes for STYM to become a regular annual event, thereby strengthening Salesian youth ministry throughout the region.



Training of Trainers at DBI

The Summer Time Youth Ministry (STYM) has become a transformative initiative within the Salesian Province of Guwahati, marking a significant revival of youth animation after nearly eight years. This comprehensive programme demonstrates the Salesian commitment to empowering young people as agents of hope and joy in their communities, in line with St John Bosco's preventive system of education. The STYM initiative serves as a vital platform for nurturing and supporting young people in their journey of faith and life, addressing modern challenges faced by youth while strengthening their spiritual foundation.

The main theme of "Pilgrims of Hope" resonates throughout the various camps, symbolising a journey of faith, renewal, and dedication to Christ in today's challenging world. This theme reflects the Church's call for young people to become bearers of hope, especially during the 2025 Jubilee Year. The programme's vision extends beyond mere entertainment or fleeting engagement; it aims to rekindle the spirit of youth animation across the province, preparing young leaders to serve society and their peers with Christian values and responsibility. Through a carefully crafted mix of formation, fellowship, and faith-building activities, STYM has



STYM Amkachi



STYM Baithalangso

effectively nurtured a movement that transforms mindsets and lives, guiding participants towards positive change and meaningful living.

Training of Animators: Building Capacity for Youth Leadership

The success of the Summer Time Youth Ministry depended on a comprehensive three-day training programme held from 1 to 3 July 2025 at Don Bosco Institute, Kharghuli. This foundational training was the cornerstone of the entire STYM initiative, bringing together enthusiastic young leaders who would later animate camps across the province. The programme was officially inaugurated by Rev. Fr Sebastian Kuricheal, Provincial of the Salesian Province of Guwahati, who emphasised the vision of empowering young people as "salt of the earth" and "light of the world," capable of dispersing darkness and adding flavour to life. The training drew inspiration from Jesus' calling of his disciples, encouraging participants to emerge as leaders of faith and service who could share their learnings with peers across various Salesian centres.

The training curriculum was carefully designed to equip participants with essential skills for youth animation and

pastoral leadership. Dynamic sessions included "Youth Alive" icebreakers, workshops on youth engagement, and intensive preparation of skits, action songs, prayer moments, faith formation sessions, and interactive games. Participants were organised into five teams, each presenting their creative work with constructive feedback from experienced facilitators, including Fr Bivan Mukhim, Fr Cletus Sebastian, Mr Ravi Hembrom, and Mr Jemtus. The programme incorporated field experience sharing, spiritual reflections through daily celebration of Holy Mass, and evening discussions that fostered community building. The training concluded with participants offering feedback and personal testimonies, affirming the programme's impact on their faith, leadership capabilities, and mission readiness. This comprehensive preparation ensured that animators were well-equipped with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills to conduct meaningful youth programmes across the province.

The STYM Camps Across Salesian Centres

The STYM journey commenced at St John Bosco Parish, Boko, from 4-6 July 2025, setting a high standard with over



STYM Boko



STYM Doomni

70 participants guided by brothers from Sacred Heart Theological College, Mawlai. During the same period, St Francis Xavier Parish, Haflong, hosted a specialised children's summer camp bringing together 170 children from various sub-centres from 4-6 July, organised by the Catholic Youth Movement in collaboration with the Parish council. The Parish of Sojong also ran concurrently from 4-6 July, attracting about 60 eager participants, inaugurated by Fr Bivan Rodrigues Mukhim, Vice Provincial. Satgaon Parish organised its four-day camp from 3-6 July with around 300 participants, including youth from Satgaon and representatives from the Dokmoka Garo Catholic community, concluding as the Jubilee for Youth with the theme "Journeying Together in Faith and Hope."

The second wave began on 11 July 2025 with Don Bosco Parish, Mendal launching its camp with 149 participants under the theme Chadamberang Beberaanio Damsan Remikkangna (Let us walk together in faith and unity). Don Bosco Parish, Tangla, hosted one of the largest gatherings from 11-13 July with approximately 250 youth participants from Tangla and Dimakuchi. Don Bosco Baithalangso was inaugurated on 11 July by Fr Joseph Teron, whilst Don Bosco

Parish, Gojapara, organised its programme from 11-13 July, bringing together over 150 youths from four centres: Gojapara, Hatigopa, Lemakona, and Borbakra.

The third phase commenced on 18 July with Don Bosco Kumarikata hosting a vibrant camp from 18-20 July under the theme "Anchored in Hope." The Parish of Umswai attracted 110 enthusiastic participants for three days from 18-20 July, whilst Holy Cross Parish, Rongkhon, energised over a hundred young participants during its camp from 18-29 July (with an apparent typographical error in the date range). Four Parishes surrounding the Salesian Parish of Shallang participated in a three-day Youth Convention under Zone IV of the Diocese of Nongstoin from 18-20 July. The Catholic youth of St Paul's Parish, Amkachi, gathered for their Summer Youth Camp 2025 from 19-20 July.

The final wave began on 25 July with St Dominic Savio Parish, Garobadha, hosting its camp from 25-27 July, attracting over 200 youth participants from various Parish circles. Don Bosco Kokrajhar launched its programme on 25 July with around 120 Parish youth, continuing until 27 July. Don Bosco



STYM Dotma



STYM Garobadha

Church, Doomni, hosted its three-day programme from 25-27 July with enthusiastic participation from various Parish centres. The series concluded with St Francis Xavier Parish, Dotma, hosting the Summer Time Youth Ministry 2025 on 26-27 July.

Each camp maintained a consistent format combining spiritual formation, practical workshops, cultural celebrations, and community service. The programmes featured well-balanced activities including sessions on Christian identity, youth roles within the Church, leadership development, and personal transformation. Sessions on "Youth as Agents of Change," understanding the liturgy, and deepening Eucharistic participation formed the spiritual backbone of these gatherings. Notable specialised sessions included human trafficking awareness at Kumarikata, personality development at Umswai, career guidance at Gojapara, and social media awareness across multiple venues.

The camps benefited from outstanding leadership, with Vice Provincial Fr Bivan Rodrigues Mukhim acting as the chief guest at multiple venues, delivering compelling homilies on service and youth responsibility. Fr Sebastian

Kuricheal's involvement at Garobadha and Fr Januarius S. Sangma's presence at both Satgaon and Shillong demonstrated committed leadership. Cultural evenings featured local talents, with traditional Garo, Santhali, and Bodo performances celebrating regional diversity, while sporting activities, quiz competitions, and creative presentations fostered community spirit and learning.

Concluding Evaluation

The Summer Time Youth Ministry 2025 concluded with a meaningful evaluation session held at Mario Hall, Provincial House, Panbazar, Guwahati, on 28 July 2025, where the Salesian brothers who had animated youth across various parishes throughout the month gathered to reflect on their experiences. Facilitated by Fr Bivan Rodrigues Mukhim, Vice Provincial, this final session provided a platform for the animators to share their insights, challenges, and transformative moments from their field experiences. For many brothers, this marked their first direct involvement in youth animation, and they described the experience as deeply enriching and formative. However, they also candidly recognised the real-life challenges encountered while working closely with young people. The brothers expressed



STYM Gojapara



STYM Haflong

heartfelt gratitude to the Province for reintroducing the STYM initiative after an eight-year interval and for providing them with this invaluable opportunity for pastoral engagement. They also conveyed the hopes of many young participants from the parishes, who expressed their desire for STYM to become a regular annual event, strengthening Salesian youth animation across the region.

The STYM camps represent a notable achievement in youth ministry, showcasing impressive organisational excellence and spiritual depth across 16 locations over three weeks. The initiative successfully generated a province-wide movement that transformed individual lives while strengthening community bonds and encouraging servant

leadership among young Catholics. The consistent quality of programming, exceptional clerical involvement, and vibrant youth participation reflect a mature and effective approach to modern youth ministry. The camps' focus on practical life skills alongside deep spiritual formation, together with the celebration of cultural diversity and systematic leadership development, establishes this initiative as an exemplary model of holistic youth engagement. The sustained momentum throughout July 2025, involving more than 2,000 participants across diverse geographical and cultural contexts, demonstrates both the organisational capacity of the Salesian Province and the genuine appeal of their youth-centred approach to Christian formation.



STYM Kumarakatta

THE CATECHETICAL MINISTRY IN THE PROVINCE

Fr Amit Chama Lakra

The Salesian Province of Guwahati has upheld a rich tradition of catechetical ministry in Northeast India for 97 years, building on the foundation laid by early missionaries inspired by Pope Benedict XV's Maximum Illud. The Salesians employed effective methods such as language learning, indigenous vocation development, village visits, sacramental ministry, and innovative communication tools like magic lanterns and visual aids to spread the Gospel among diverse tribal communities. Today, the Province continues this legacy through the Provincial Delegate for Missionary Animation (PDMA), who coordinates comprehensive catechetical programmes including annual catechist training, regular Sunday catechism classes, Parish spiritual activities, systematic family visits, and a 15-point missionary animation plan for 2025, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the first Salesian missionary expedition.

The Church in Northeast India boasts a colourful history of its own. The numerous tribes, languages, and peoples who embraced Christ were blessed in many ways. How wondrous are the ways of the Lord! The arrival of Christianity was a blessing not only for Christians but for the entire region. With Christianity came education, healthcare, and development. When we discuss development, we can consider various aspects, all aimed at benefiting the region's diverse populations: a mosaic of ethnic tribes. These multi-lingual, multi-religious realities are both a socio-cultural treasure and a challenge. Below, we offer a brief overview of 'Contribution that the Salesian Province of Guwahati made towards catechetical formation' in north-east India. A more inclusive perspective might consider the broader contribution of Salesians to catechetical formation in the region.

History is a great teacher. It records the past for the edification of the present and the future. Sometimes called 'past politics,' history provides insights into previous times. The missionary history of north-east shows us the pioneers and their successors who faced formidable challenges to bring the Good News to our peoples. We, in the



Archbishop John Moolachira administers the Sacrament of Confirmation

present, are richer because of it. We look to the past and learn from it. We look to the future and ask ourselves: *How can we best carry forward this 'torch of faith' bequeathed to us? Or to put it differently: What kind of missionaries does the Church in north-east India need today?*

The Salesian missionaries came armed with the ideas of *Maximum Illud!* This year, 2019, we celebrate the centenary of this highly regarded missionary apostolic letter from the pen of Pope Benedict XV. Among its many notable features, we can highlight a few: its core focus was on "Christianisation" of infidels (a phrase not suitable for today!). It also emphasised the importance of learning

languages and encouraging indigenous vocations. The growth of indigenous vocations signified a well-established Church and successful missionary work! The ultimate goal was to establish vicariates and prefectures. Indigenous clergy were not to be regarded as ‘second-class’ clergy but as future leaders and administrators of local Christian communities. The document also stressed the importance of personal sanctity, including humility, obedience, chastity, piety, prayer, etc.

Reflecting on the efforts of missionaries from the province of Guwahati, we cannot help but commend what they accomplished. They remained true to their religious calling. They followed all the precepts of the Church. They learnt and promoted local languages, supported indigenous vocations, instructed and trained people skillfully, and established churches in remote areas. Their achievements were significant because they were also men of God. Among them, three are already progressing towards the honours of the Altar: Venerable Stephen Ferrando, Servant of God Constantine Vendrame, and Servant of God Orestes Marengo. Their missionary work was in accordance with the directives of *Maximum Illud!* They truly deserve full recognition.

The Church of that era envisioned a great harvest around the world. To bolster its efforts, it established institutes for training future missionaries. They also received specialised training in Eastern languages and customs. The *Propaganda Fide*, as the name implies and as it was known then, led the Church’s efforts in evangelisation and catechesis. The PIME (*Pontificio Istituto delle Missioni Estere*=Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions) and the MEP (*Missions Etrangères de Paris*=Paris Foreign Missions) were such institutes in Europe. Their counterpart in America was the Maryknoll Missionaries.



Catechists Training

The initial missionaries were *not the product* of these Foreign missions, nor were they prepared for such missions either. Once the Salesians accepted the Assam Mission, the superiors issued passionate appeals for missionaries from Europe. The response was remarkable! There were Italians, Spaniards, Germans—all under a French team leader, Louis Mathias! It was the ideal combination. Different nationalities but united in mind and heart, much like the first Christians. A new wave of missionary teamwork was in motion! As we know well, the Salesians were repeatedly requested by the Holy See to address urgent needs. The abrupt repatriation of the Salvatorians from the Assam Mission due to World War I had left a void. The Jesuits of the Bengal Mission found it very challenging to manage the missions. To make matters worse, there was a shortage of personnel and funds. Furthermore, geographic distance posed a significant obstacle. The seven years of the Jesuit involvement were largely spent in ‘maintenance mode.’ They managed the missions effectively, though.

Training in Loco: The Salesian missionary training and preparation took place right there! They had little time for extensive preparation before setting sail for India. The superiors prepared them through missionary retreats, conferences, goodnight talks, and other interactions with senior superiors. The congregational missionary experiences from South America, Africa, China, and others, greatly motivated the missionaries. Therefore, once they arrived, they had just one goal – to spread the Good News among

all the tribes they encountered. Their main focus was on learning languages – English and Khasi. As their missionary work expanded, they learnt new languages.

As they dispersed in various directions, the Salesian missionaries began learning local languages. Some became notable literary figures, authoring books in those languages. A few of these works were used in schools, colleges, and even at the university level (NEHU). Others wrote catechism books, prayer books, and hymnals. Still, others regularly produced leaflets, pamphlets, and flyers with the sole aim of spreading the faith.

Missionary Pattern in Practice: The Salesians' missionary work followed a specific model: regular village visits, sometimes lasting nearly a month. Each visit was spiritually fruitful! They dedicated much time to giving instructions, sitting for long hours to hear confessions, celebrating the sacraments—especially baptism—and conducting Mass, visiting the sick, and more. Their ministry echoed Jesus' work: *preaching, teaching, and healing!* The core message was simple and focused: God loves you through His Son Jesus, who died on the Cross. This was, indeed, the primary proclamation! They were proclaiming Jesus Christ to those who had never known him.

Medium is the Message: We also note the missionary ‘aids’ used by the Salesian missionaries: the renowned ‘Magic lantern’, the ‘filmine’ strips, the LDC (*Elle di ci*) pictures, and so on. We have inherited a rich missionary legacy. The methods employed in the Northeast have proven over time. They continue to yield a substantial ‘harvest’. In the 97 years of Salesian presence, much has been accomplished. Nonetheless, we cannot simply rest on our laurels. The responsibility lies with us. We must persist in the good work to spread the Kingdom of God.

Reading the signs of the times, we may dare to say ‘it is the best of times, it is the worst of times’ for evangelisation and

catechesis. It is the “best” of times because of the media boom: social networks (Internet, mobile, WhatsApp, Twitter, FB, etc.). The Gospel must be proclaimed through every available means. At the same time, it can be the “worst” of times as these very means can hinder the spread of the Message! A creative missionary knows how to push forward his or her mission.

The Salesian pioneers were motivated by *Maximum Illud* to ignite their zeal. Today, we have many other ecclesial documents to stimulate our missionary enthusiasm: the Documents of the Second Vatican Council, the General Catechetical Directory (GCD), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), *Redemptoris Missio* (RM), *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT), General Directory for Catechesis (GDC), New Evangelisation, and others. It is up to us to explore deeply the ‘treasures’ these ecclesial documents offer. New challenges require us to adopt increasingly innovative methods. The call of the New Evangelisation remains highly relevant – new in enthusiasm and methods. It is an urgent response to a rising paganism in the world.

During the celebrations of the Diamond Jubilee of the province in 2019 and the first centenary (1922-2022) of the arrival of the Salesians in north-east India, a renewed missionary zeal is the need of the hour. Whatever has been achieved has indeed been commendable. We are moving forward. In the area of catechetical renewal, the Province has developed a policy for a revitalised catechesis. Catechesis or faith formation is a continuous need for every group of Christ’s faithful. Therefore, fostering faith renewal among children, youth, adults, parents, and catechists can significantly breathe new life into our mission. The future looks promising. We must make it even brighter!

Today, the vibrant Evangelisation and Catechesis Commission, led by the Provincial Delegate for Missionary Animation (PDMA), organises annual

training programmes for catechists and other lay evangelisers to improve their knowledge and skills in catechising the faithful within their respective parishes. The regular Sunday catechism classes in parishes and throughout the academic year in our schools for Catholic students help nurture the Christian faith among young minds. Holding regular spiritual activities for various groups of the faithful in the parishes, enthusiastic and joyful celebrations of novenas and liturgical feasts, frequent administration of sacraments, particularly of Penance and Eucharist, systematic family visits by priests, religious sisters, and catechists, and encouraging the practice of regular family prayers among the faithful are ways to foster and reinforce the faith of our Catholics.

The Commission for Social Communication of the Province published a well-researched book titled *The Catechetical Ministry in Northeast India (1890-1962)* by Fr Francis Hembrom on 14 August 2025, which highlights the history of the catechetical ministry of Salvatorian, Jesuit, and Salesian missionaries over the years. The book emphasises the different methods these former missionaries used to deepen people's faith. It provides a valuable resource for current missioners working to nurture faith within communities.

To appropriately commemorate the 150th anniversary of the first Salesian missionary expedition to Patagonia, which Don Bosco himself authorised, the PDMA of the Province has organised a series of animation programmes to inspire the confreres about their vocation as missionaries. The plan includes 15 distinct initiatives aimed at deepening missionary awareness and commitment at all levels of the organisation in the Province. It begins with sessions on initial proclamation and the Salesian Missionary Vocation for aspirants, pre-



Newly Married Couples in Dotma

novices, post-novices, rectors, parish priests, practical trainees, and young Salesians from February to June, all coordinated by the Provincial Delegate for Missionary Animation (PDMA). Key components include annual retreats on missionary charism scheduled for July, October, and December under the leadership of the Vice-Provincial, regional Salesian Mission days across the Garo Hills, BTR, Assam Plain, and Kharbi-Anglong regions during September and October, as well as ongoing spiritual practices such as monthly community animations on the 11th, daily prayers for missions, weekly Thursday Eucharistic intentions for missions, and regular vespers with missionary readings and prayers. The initiative also features practical elements, including statistical surveys of missions, compilation of missionary literature and pictorial books in various languages, assessment meetings for initial proclamation efforts, interactions between formees and missionaries, and a special missionary course for jubilarians in Shillong. This comprehensive approach combines formation, prayer, documentation, and practical missionary engagement throughout the commemorative year.

The future of the Church arguably relies heavily on strong faith. Rapid growth in secularity does not look promising for the Church's future. Only a faith that is deep, convinced, and fervent can withstand the onslaught of a secular world without God. The Province, through the interventions of the PDMA, is rising to the occasion to make the Church vibrant and filled with faith.

The 15th Mini Boscoree and Scout Masters' Training Camp at Don Bosco School, Barpeta Road | *Fr Bivan Rodrigues Mukhim*

The 15th Mini Boscoree and Scout Masters' Training Camp took place in June-July 2025, at Don Bosco School, Barpeta Road, bringing together over 1,300 Scouts and Guides from various Don Bosco institutions across the Salesian Province of Guwahati under the leadership of Provincial Fr Sebastian Kuricheel, who emphasised the importance of service to humanity and personal commitment to scouting values. The comprehensive five-day programme featured traditional scouting activities, competitive events including march past, folk dance, art competitions, route marches, campfires, and ceremonial activities, while simultaneously conducting intensive Scout Masters' Training to develop the next generation of adult leaders capable of mentoring youth and transmitting scouting skills and character development principles across the Don Bosco network in Northeast India.

In the summer of 2025, Don Bosco School, Barpeta Road, became the epicentre of one of the most significant scouting events in Northeast India. From 30 June to 4 July 2025, this prestigious institution hosted the remarkable 15th Mini Boscoree and Scout Masters' Training Camp that brought together over 1,300 enthusiastic Scouts and Guides from various Don Bosco institutions across the Salesian Province of Guwahati. This extraordinary event exemplified the enduring spirit of scouting while reinforcing the values of service, leadership, and community engagement that define the Don Bosco educational philosophy.

Choosing Don Bosco School, Barpeta Road, as the venue was especially significant. Recognised as one of the leading educational institutions and celebrated for its dedication to holistic development and character building in the region, the school offered the perfect infrastructure and environment for such a large gathering. Conveniently situated

near the railway station in Barpeta, Assam, the institution demonstrated its ability to host major regional events while upholding the high standards of organisation and hospitality associated with Don Bosco institutions.

The special visit of Rev. Fr Sebastian Kuricheel, the Provincial of the Salesian Province of Guwahati and Chief of the Don Bosco Scouts and Guides District, heightened the event's significance. His presence represented far more than a ceremonial visit; it embodied the deep commitment of Salesian leadership to youth formation and the scouting movement within the Don Bosco network.

The respect and reverence displayed by the scouting community were clear in the ceremonial presentation of Baden Powell's Cap to Fr Kuricheel during his engagement with the campers. This symbolic act highlighted the core values of scouting and signified the transfer of scouting ideals, while recognising leadership in fostering the movement's development.

In his address to the gathering, the Provincial extended heartfelt congratulations to the Camp Chief and the entire organising team for successfully coordinating such a large-scale and vibrant event. He also expressed deep appreciation to Fr George Mudakkampuram and his team at Don Bosco School, Barpeta Road, for hosting the programme and providing the necessary infrastructure and support.

Speaking to the Scouts and Guides, Fr Kuricheal encouraged them to embody the true spirit of scouting by being ever ready to serve humanity. "Be generous in offering yourselves for the service of others," he urged, emphasising the importance of taking up responsibilities with enthusiasm and commitment.

This message resonated deeply with the fundamental principles of scouting established by Lord Baden-Powell. It adapted within the Don Bosco context to align with the educational philosophy of St John Bosco. The emphasis on service reflects the Salesian commitment to forming young people who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible and spiritually grounded.

The training component was particularly significant, focusing on developing the next generation of Scout Masters and Guide Captains. These adult leaders play crucial roles in mentoring young scouts and guides, transmitting not only practical scouting skills but also the values and character traits that define effective leadership. The intensive

training program likely covered camp management, youth psychology, outdoor skills, first aid, and the educational methodology that makes scouting an effective tool for youth development.

A Comprehensive Programme of Activities

The success of such a massive undertaking required exceptional organisational skills and community cooperation. The seamless execution of a five-day programme for over 1,300 participants speaks volumes about the planning capabilities and dedication of the organising committee. The school's facilities, including dormitories, dining halls, activity areas, and administrative support, were essential in accommodating such a large gathering while maintaining expected standards of comfort and safety.

The collaborative effort required for an event of this magnitude demonstrates the strength of the Don Bosco network in northeast India. Schools and institutions across the province contributed participants, resources, and expertise to ensure the camp's success. This inter-institutional cooperation reflects the unity of purpose that characterises the Salesian educational mission and its commitment to youth development.

The 15th Mini Boscoree featured a meticulously planned daily schedule that combined traditional scouting activities with competitive elements and cultural programmes. The camp began

on 30 June with arrival and registration, followed by four action-packed days of structured activities designed to challenge participants while fostering personal growth and team building.

Day One (1 July) commenced with the traditional BP practice at 6.30 am, followed by breakfast and camp inspection. The highlight was the Opening Ceremony at 10.00 am, featuring a March Past Competition that showcased the discipline and coordination of participating troops. The day included Drawing & Art Competition, Folk Dance Competition, and concluded with Sing Song activities and contingent leaders' meetings.

Day Two (2 July) began with Yoga Morning, emphasising physical and mental well-being. The day featured a Route March combined with Fun & Intellectual Activities, Patrol-in-Council sessions, and Folk Song Competition. The evening culminated in a spectacular Campfire with Coral Registration, providing opportunities for participants to showcase their talents and build lasting friendships across institutional boundaries.

Day Three (3 July) focused on practical scouting skills with Exhibition (Handicraft) and Colour/Party Competition, demonstrating the creative abilities and technical skills of the participants. Kit Inspection ensured proper maintenance of equipment, while the Flag Ceremony Competition tested ceremonial precision. The day's pinnacle was the Grand Campfire, a

celebration of scouting spirit and camaraderie.

Day Four (4 July) concluded with an All Faith Prayer-Flag ceremony, emphasising the inclusive nature of scouting, followed by the Closing Ceremony, flag lowering, and National Anthem before departure. However, the Scout Masters' Training continued.

The various activities served multiple purposes: developing self-reliance and problem-solving abilities while creating opportunities for teamwork and leadership development. The competitive elements were integrated throughout the camp to encourage excellence while maintaining the spirit of fair play and mutual support that characterises scouting.

The camp is a strategic investment in building both current and future leadership within the scouting movement across the Salesian network. This comprehensive programme tackles the vital need for high-quality adult leadership while also nurturing the next generation of scouts and guides who will uphold the movement's values and traditions.

The Scout Masters' Training addressed contemporary challenges faced by youth leaders in today's rapidly evolving educational environment. Modern scout leaders must navigate the complexities of engaging young people who have grown up immersed in digital technology, finding ways to keep traditional scouting activities relevant

and appealing while adapting methods to resonate with current youth culture. The training programme provided these leaders with improved communication strategies for effectively conveying character development principles and core values in ways that genuinely connect with the experiences and perspectives of today's young people.

The creation of the Don Bosco Scout and Guide District establishes a crucial organisational framework that improves coordination, standardised training procedures, and consistent programme delivery across the extensive Salesian network. This structural progress boosts the overall quality of scouting experiences while ensuring that participants are well prepared for participation in larger national and international scouting events.

While the logistical arrangements were overseen by the Confreres of the Salesian community of Barpeta Road, the training and daily management of the camps were carried out by the Scouts & Guides/NCC/NSS commission of the province under the leadership of Fr Solomon Dennis Joseph and other members, including Fr Saju Karyil, Fr Nicodim Aind, Fr Siby John ALT, Fr Joseph Paulianmung, along with Fr Francis Charuvila LT of Dimapur province, Mr AR Lazer ALT from Guwahati and a host of others.

The five-day intensive programme serves various strategic aims beyond immediate skill development. Participants build confidence through

challenging activities, gain practical leadership skills, and establish lasting networks of friendship and cooperation that extend beyond geographical boundaries. These connections prove invaluable as young people progress in their scouting journey and may assume leadership roles themselves.

The long-term impact extends well beyond the event's duration through a strong multiplier effect. Returning participants become passionate ambassadors within their home institutions, sharing experiences and motivating peers to engage more actively with scouting activities. Meanwhile, trained Scout Masters and Guide Captains return with improved skills that directly enhance the quality of leadership and training they offer to young people under their care.

This investment in adult leadership capacity building delivers ongoing benefits for programme quality and organisational sustainability across the region. The enhanced leadership standards ensure that scouting programmes stay effective while adapting to changing youth needs and societal shifts.

Furthermore, the event strengthens inter-institutional bonds across the Salesian province of Guwahati, fostering a cohesive sense of shared mission that extends beyond scouting activities to include the broader educational and character development goals central to Salesian pedagogy. This increased

collaboration and unity of purpose build a stronger foundation for delivering comprehensive youth development programmes that align with Don Bosco's educational philosophy while meeting the specific needs of young people in modern India.

The programme's success ultimately helps build a strong pipeline of capable leaders who have both the technical skills and inspiring qualities needed to guide future generations through meaningful scouting experiences that encourage personal growth, social responsibility, and spiritual development.

As participants returned to their home institutions with new skills, renewed enthusiasm, and strengthened connections with peers from across the region, they became ambassadors for the values of service, leadership, and community engagement that define both scouting and Salesian education. The 15th Mini Boscoree serves as a powerful reminder that through structured programmes combining discipline, creativity, competition, and community, the Don Bosco network continues to uphold its mission of shaping young people who are prepared to make positive contributions to their communities and to society as a whole.



Mini Boscoree



ING NEWSLINE CONGRATULATES THE JUBILARIANS 2025

SILVER JUBILEE OF FIRST PROFESSION



Fr Xavier Beck



Fr Pradeep Ekka



Fr Sebirense Islary



Fr Punit Kumar Lakra



Fr Batholomew Marak



Fr Justin Narzary



Fr Anugrah Tete



GOLDEN JUBILEE OF FIRST PROFESSION



Fr Thomas Anikuzhikattil



Fr Francis Kalariparampil



Fr Thomas Koitharaputhenpura

SILVER JUBILEE OF ORDINATION



Fr Nicodim Aind



Fr Roland Halge



Fr Alex Kattakayam



Fr Peter Pazhayamkottil

GOLDEN JUBILEE OF ORDINATION



Fr Joseph Puthenpurackal



Fr Joseph Thelekatt

