

# PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

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

JS – 74/2023

1 March 2023

My dear Confreres,

Greetings from the Provincial House, Guwahati.

## EXTRAORDINARY VISITATION OF THE PROVINCE

Fr George Chalissery, the Extraordinary visitor has commenced the Canonical Visitation of the province since the beginning of February. On 31 January, on the feast day of St John Bosco, we concluded the Centenary year of the arrival of the Salesians in the northeast at the Provincial and the community levels and lowered the flag gloriously, pledging ourselves to carry forward the legacy with greater determination (dare) and fidelity (hope).

Fr George started the visitation with a solemn Eucharistic celebration and the animation of the Rectors/leaders of communities. He came to the Province in the name of the Rector Major and hence, all that he animates, observes and recommends assume great significance to the province. He does all these in order to invite us to be faithful to the Charism, the constitutions and our profession. The visit of the Superiors is a moment of grace because they appreciate, encourage, motivate and give recommendations. The grace and blessings of God come down to us bountifully when we implement and live the recommendations that he gives us. The visitation links the province to the Congregation and shows that Don Bosco loves us.

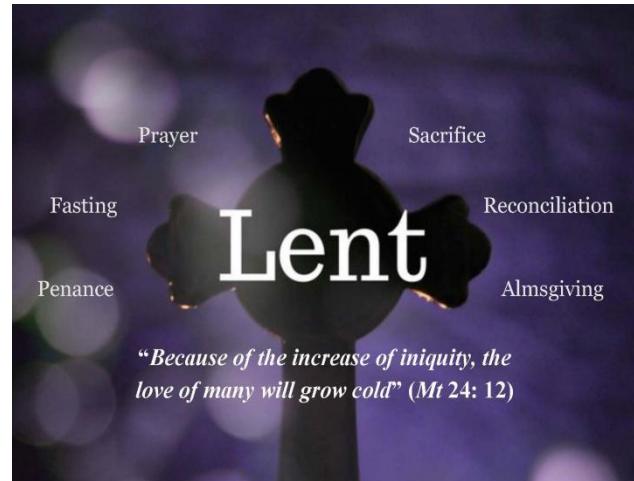
One of the salient features of his animation has been on the Strenna of the congregation for the year 2023. "**AS THE YEAST IN TODAY'S HUMAN FAMILY. The Lay Dimension of the Family of Don Bosco**," which, as the Rector Major explains, delves into the theme of the lay dimension of the Salesian Family, a family that always seeks to be faithful to the Lord in the "footsteps" of Don Bosco.

## SEASON OF LENT - MOST FAVOURABLE TIME FOR A CHANGE OF HEART

On the Ash Wednesday, we commenced the beautiful season of Lent. Ash Wednesday strongly invited us, "Remember Man, you are dust and into dust shall you return". Live your lives fully today though we are dust and always keep your eyes on eternity.

Pope Francis has given to the universal Church a beautiful message for Lent. I reproduce it *in totum* as I feel that he is the right person to lead and guide us on how to go through this season of prayer, fasting, alms giving and true repentance. Let our model be Jesus Christ who before his public ministry fasted and prayed for forty days and forty nights and also overcame the temptations of the devil.

"Dear brothers and sisters! The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all recount the episode of the Transfiguration of Jesus. There we see the Lord's response to the failure of his disciples to understand him. Shortly before, there had been a real clash between the Master and Simon Peter, who, after professing his faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, rejected his prediction of the passion and the cross. Jesus had firmly rebuked him: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a scandal to me, because you do not think according to God, but according to men!" (Mt 16:23). Following this, "six days later, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John his brother and led them away to a high mountain" (Mt 17:1).



The Gospel of the Transfiguration is proclaimed every year on the Second Sunday of Lent. During this liturgical season, the Lord takes us with him to a place apart. While our ordinary commitments compel us to remain in our usual places and our often repetitive and sometimes boring routines, during Lent we are invited to ascend "a high mountain" in the company of Jesus and to live a particular experience of spiritual discipline – ascesis – as God's holy people.

Lenten penance is a commitment, sustained by grace, to overcoming our lack of faith and our resistance to following Jesus on the way of the cross. This is precisely what Peter and the other disciples needed to do. To deepen our knowledge of the Master, to fully understand and embrace the mystery of his salvation, accomplished in total self-giving inspired by love, we must allow ourselves to be taken aside by him and to detach ourselves from mediocrity and vanity. We need to set out on the journey, an uphill path that, like a mountain trek, requires effort, sacrifice and concentration. These requisites are also important for the synodal journey to which, as a Church, we are committed to making. We can benefit greatly from reflecting on the relationship between Lenten penance and the synodal experience.

In his "retreat" on Mount Tabor, Jesus takes with him three disciples, chosen to be witnesses of a unique event. He wants that experience of grace to be shared, not solitary, just as our whole life of faith is an experience that is shared. For it is in togetherness that we follow Jesus. Together too, as a pilgrim Church in time, we experience the liturgical year and Lent within it, walking alongside those whom the Lord has placed among us as fellow travellers. Like the ascent of Jesus and the disciples to Mount Tabor, we can say that our Lenten journey is "synodal", since we make it together along the same path, as disciples of the one Master. For we know that Jesus is

himself the Way, and therefore, both in the liturgical journey and in the journey of the Synod, the Church does nothing other than enter ever more deeply and fully into the mystery of Christ the Saviour.

And so we come to its culmination. The Gospel relates that Jesus “was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light” (Mt 17:2). This is the “summit”, the goal of the journey. At the end of their ascent, as they stand on the mountain heights with Jesus, the three disciples are given the grace of seeing him in his glory, resplendent in supernatural light. That light did not come from without, but radiated from the Lord himself. The divine beauty of this vision was incomparably greater than all the efforts the disciples had made in the ascent of Tabor. During any strenuous mountain trek, we must keep our eyes firmly fixed on the path; yet the panorama that opens up at the end amazes us and rewards us by its grandeur. So too, the synodal process may often seem arduous, and at times we may become discouraged. Yet what awaits us at the end is undoubtedly something wondrous and amazing, which will help us to understand better God’s will and our mission in the service of his kingdom.

The disciples’ experience on Mount Tabor was further enriched when, alongside the transfigured Jesus, Moses and Elijah appeared, signifying respectively the Law and the Prophets (cf. Mt 17:3). The newness of Christ is at the same time the fulfilment of the ancient covenant and promises; it is inseparable from God’s history with his people and discloses its deeper meaning. In a similar way, the synodal journey is rooted in the Church’s tradition and at the same time open to newness. Tradition is a source of inspiration for seeking new paths and for avoiding the opposed temptations of immobility and improvised experimentation.

The Lenten journey of penance and the journey of the Synod alike have as their goal a transfiguration, both personal and ecclesial. A transformation that, in both cases, has its model in the Transfiguration of Jesus and is achieved by the grace of his paschal mystery. So that this transfiguration may become a reality in us this year, I would like to propose two “paths” to follow in order to ascend the mountain together with Jesus and, with him, to attain the goal.

The first path has to do with the command that God the Father addresses to the disciples on Mount Tabor as they contemplate Jesus transfigured. The voice from the cloud says: “Listen to him” (Mt 17:5). The first proposal, then, is very clear: we need to listen to Jesus. Lent is a time of grace to the extent that we listen to him as he speaks to us. And how does he speak to us? First, in the word of God, which the Church offers us in the liturgy. May that word not fall on deaf ears; if we cannot always attend Mass, let us study its daily biblical readings, even with the help of the internet. In addition to the Scriptures, the Lord speaks to us through our brothers and sisters, especially in the faces and the stories of those who are in need. Let me say something else, which is

quite important for the synodal process: listening to Christ often takes place in listening to our brothers and sisters in the Church. Such mutual listening in some phases is the primary goal, but it remains always indispensable in the method and style of a synodal Church.

On hearing the Father's voice, the disciples "fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Rise, and do not be afraid.' And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone" (Mt 17:6-8). Here is the second proposal for this Lent: do not take refuge in a religiosity made up of extraordinary events and dramatic experiences, out of fear of facing reality and its daily struggles, its hardships and contradictions. The light that Jesus shows the disciples is an anticipation of Easter glory, and that must be the goal of our own journey, as we follow "him alone". Lent leads to Easter: the "retreat" is not an end in itself, but a means of preparing us to experience the Lord's passion and cross with faith, hope and love, and thus to arrive at the resurrection. Also on the synodal journey, when God gives us the grace of certain powerful experiences of communion, we should not imagine that we have arrived – for there too, the Lord repeats to us: "Rise, and do not be afraid". Let us go down, then, to the plain, and may the grace we have experienced strengthen us to be "artisans of synodality" in the ordinary life of our communities.

Dear brothers and sisters, may the Holy Spirit inspire and sustain us this Lent in our ascent with Jesus, so that we may experience his divine splendour and thus, confirmed in faith, persevere in our journey together with him, glory of his people and light of the nations".

### **HE CALLS US - WE KNOW NEITHER THE DAY NOR THE HOUR**

Tragedy struck the Church, particularly the Diocese of Bongaigaon and the Fatima Congregation when, on 26 February evening, Fr Mathew Das, Parish Priest of Barama, Sr. Melamine Dantes, Sr. Promila Tirkey, Sr. Rossie Nongrum, Mr. Mairan (Teacher) and the driver were killed on the spot inside the bolero by a cement-laden truck, presumably due to a brake failure at Sumer, Barapani, Meghalaya.

On behalf of everyone in the province, I sent letters of deepest condolences, prayers and sympathy to Bishop Thomas Pullopillil, the Vicar General, Diocese of Bongaigaon and the Regional Superior, Fatima Congregation, assuring our closeness and prayers in this moment of crisis and tribulation. I recalled the services of Sr Promila Tirkey and thanked her and the congregation for the yeoman services that she rendered to the children who came from the most difficult backgrounds.

Let us accompany the Bishop, the faithful and the clergy of the Diocese of Bongaigaon, the family members of all the deceased and all the members of the Fatima congregation that God may fill them with His grace and fortitude to accept the most challenging reality

to life and faith. May the Lord who summoned them to his heavenly throne, send many good and zealous vocations to continue the mission that they started.

## TEAM VISIT - HYDERABAD - TO GROW MORE VISIBLE IN OUR SALESIANITY

The Team Visit wherein Fr Angel Fernandez Artimo, Rector Major and his General Council will animate and review the implementation of GC 28 in the South Asia region will take place in the Provincial House, Hyderabad from 1 to 3 March 2023. All the Provincials and their Councils from the South Asia will take active part in the Team visit animation, deliberation and later in implementation. From 5 to 6 March, there will be the SPCSA Assembly and the SPCSA Council will take place on 7 and 8 March.



**SOUTH ASIA TEAM VISIT  
HYDERABAD**  
01 MARCH – 04 MARCH 2023

28 February	Arrival
1-3 March	Team Visit
4 March	Conclusion/Outing together
5 March	Departure

**THEME FOR THE TEAM VISIT  
FORWARD TOGETHER ON THE PATH OF GC28**

Themes to be discussed:

- 1) Growth in Charismatic Identity in Salesian life. Vocation Promotion & Formation of Salesians
- 2) Renewing Youth Ministry focused on the poorest of the poor while taking care of sustainability of mission
- 3) Co-responsibility for the mission: with Laity, (EPC, SEPP) and the Salesian Family
- 4) Identity of Salesians in South Asia: Consolidation or Expansion (re-structuring)
- 5) Collaboration and Synergy with the Congregation in Human Resource (Brief input)

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2. Renewing Youth Ministry, focused on the poorest of the poor while taking care of sustainability of mission
3. Co-responsibility for the mission: with laity, (EPC, SEPP) and the Salesian Family
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The themes that will be studied and the lines of action devised, should once again ignite our desire to live the deliberations of the GC 28 and become the yeast in today's world. Our people need to see us more as spiritual leaders than administrators. Seeing our austere and tireless life in fraternal communities, the youth must get inspired to follow our way of life. Initial and ongoing formation to be shepherds must go on and on. At times, some have ended up being mere administrators, rendering services which today is dwindling in quality. While there could be many qualified laity to share our mission, there is resistance to training them and especially empowering them to function fully.

## **FR JOAN LLUIS PLAYA AND DR DAGMAR ANIMATED THE SALESIAN FAMILY**

Fr Joan Lluis Playa, Delegate of the Rector Major for the Salesian family, accompanied by Dr Dagmar Klöva, World delegate of the Volunteers of Don Bosco (VDB) visited the Provinces of Shillong and Guwahati from 20 to 25 February 2023. Fr Playa who is from Spain visited Fr Alfred Marzo in Shillong on 23 February. On 24 February, he and Dr Dagmar animated the Salesian family representatives on the Salesian family and on the Volunteers of Don Bosco.

Participants from the Salesian family included the Salesian Sisters (FMA), the Missionary sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC), Sisters of Mary Immaculate (SMI), the Salesian Co-operators, the Past Pupils and the ADMA. While Fr Playa animated on the Salesian family in general, Dr Dagmar explained in detail about the Volunteers of Don Bosco which included the call to be a Volunteer of Don Bosco, the spiritual life, the aspirantate, the vows, its structure, its secular nature and the apostolate of the members.

## **YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER - PASSION FOR CHRIST AND FOR HUMANITY**

On 24 February (friday) 2023, the Province celebrated the new Priests' Day. The Lord has blessed our province with five new priests this year in the persons of Fr Jyotish Beck, Fr Richard Barla, Fr Silverius Amsong, Fr Ravi Prabhat Ekka and Fr Rajib Lakra. There are two deacons who are preparing themselves for the day of their ordination.



During the celebration, held in the lawn of the Provincial house, the confreres and others who gathered for the occasion, prayed for the new priests, thanked the Lord of the harvest for their vocation, encouraged them to live their religious life and priesthood to the full, without compromises and assured them of our fraternal help and support.

While Fr Jyotish Beck was the main celebrant, Fr Ravi read the Gospel and Fr Richard preached the homily. Fr Rajib Lakra proposed the vote of thanks at the end of the Mass.

In the homily, Fr Richard spoke at length about the power and the greatness of the priest. Quoting Deuteronomy 10: 8, he said that "The Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister and to pronounce blessings in His name". Describing a priest, he said that a priest is the

messenger of the Lord, sent by God and acts on his behalf, God's instrument, and a servant of God.

A priest is chosen by God to be with Him and to be sent out. Priests are chosen not due to their merits but solely because God's loves the one who is called. He is chosen and anointed. He has the power of deliverance, to forgive, to offer sacrifice, to be the face of God, to pray on behalf of people as Jesus did, to bless the people on behalf of God, to teach wisdom and guide the people in their faith.

He concluded using the words of Don Bosco, saying that "the priesthood is the highest dignity to which a person can be raised, for to the priest is given the power to change bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Christ, the power to forgive sins.... such a person should be just like an angel, a totally spiritual person. A Priest should possess all the virtues, especially outstanding charity, humility and chastity... a most lively faith, most ardent charity and yes, good example is essential. Let us remember that a priest never goes to hell or to heaven alone, but always well accompanied".

After the Eucharistic celebration, there was a short felicitation programme, which was followed by a festive dinner.

### **REGIONAL MEETING AND SALESIAN FAMILY DAY IN TURA**

On 24 February, 2023, the Salesians of the Garo Hills region assembled in big numbers at Bosco Mount, Rongkhon, Tura and welcomed Fr George Chalissery, the extraordinary visitor. He animated the Salesians on community fraternity, the practice of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and answered the questions that were asked by the confreres.

After the regional meeting, the Salesian family day was also celebrated in the same venue, during which all the Salesian family members working in the region participated in large numbers. Some of the family members welcome Fr George with mufflers, bouquet of flowers and other gifts.

The apostolic boys of Bosco Mount presented a song and a dance. Fr Charles Deepen Lakra, Province Secretary then took a session on the Strenna of the year, after which Fr George animated the gathering, dwelling at length on the Salesians' Project Africa which was started some years ago and today, has borne much fruits. He said that all the members of the Salesian family were involved and active in the Project Africa. He also answered some of the questions that the confreres and others asked.

The celebration concluded with a family dinner for all.

## **ANNUAL SPORTS DAY BROUGHT 18 CARE SCHOOLS TOGETHER AT LUNGUNG, KOKRAJHAR**

The Annual Sports day of the Staff and students of the CARE schools in Kokrajhar and Chirang districts of Bodoland was truly a memorable and exciting event. On 23 February, about one thousand and five hundred CARE school students came together for a day of sports, games and competitions at Lungsung, Kokrajhar. The rain in the previous night and in the morning hours of that day brought down the dust for the air and gave the children as well as their parents a perfect day to play games and enjoy.



It was a beautiful sight to see the marching contingents from the 18 schools, when the children tried their best to march well and smart. After the march past, the students put up aerobics and dance displays to the admiration of the spectators. Next, the teachers organised the finals of a few sports and athletic events, such as the 100 m, 200 m and 400 m races, the frog race, the relay race, the biscuit race and the bow and arrow competitions. The final sports event was the tug of war between the Staff and the Managing committee members, both for male and female separately, which brought lots of cheer and excitement to the students.

In my Chief Guest's address, I was able to appreciate the staff and the students for taking an active part in the day's event. I invited the students to take equal interest in studies too. Fr Thomas Lakra was especially invited to deliver a special speech on the occasion. The event came to a close with the distribution of prizes and certificates and the lowering of the flag. I thank all the Confreres - Fr Francis Basumatari, Fr Pascal Dungdung, Fr Thomas Lakra for their presence on the occasion. My special thanks goes to Fr Jayaprakash, Fr Ignatius Gari and all the Staff of Bosco Reach Out who organized the programme excellently.

To end the day, the Staff and the students were treated with a sumptuous lunch. Our gratitude goes to Childaid network, Germany for their sponsorship of CARE schools. During the competitions, we could identify a few students who showed great potentiality to develop their sports abilities and skills if given the opportunity and training.

## **SALESIANS FROM THE FORMATION DEPARTMENT VISIT OUR PROVINCE**

Fr Jose Kuttianimattathil and Fr Francisco Santos from the formation department in Rome paid a short visit to our province from 24 to 27 February. They visited the prenovices at Dotma, reaching there in the evening, after they left Guwahati for Dotma from the airport soon after landing. They were able to animate the prenovices in the evening and in the morning of the following day.

They then proceeded to Hubert D'Rosario Missionary aspirantate and from there, visited the Assam Don Bosco University, Tapesia on the way to Sacred Heart theological college, Mawlai. They returned to the Provincial House on 26 evening and left the province for Kolkata in the morning flight of 27 February morning. We thank Fr Jose and Fr Francisco for their short but sweet visit to our province.

## **CONCLUSION**

Don Bosco told us to substitute acts of penance with the acts of obedience. One confrere told me jokingly that his community does not need Lenten penance, as the entire year is a penance to be in the community due to inner fighting, gossiping and intolerance. Lent is the season of deep prayer, forgiveness, fasting, almsgiving and change of heart.

The annual budget has to be prepared with as much detail as possible. It needs to be a community responsibility and needs to be passed by the House council. The dates for the budget presentation has been sent to you by the Economer. Kindly ensure that the time line is followed.

I request all the communities to pay great attention to the observations and recommendations of the visitation. The Catechists' training has been organised only in the BTR region. I request other regions to kindly ensure that this annual event is done well.

I entrust all our communities and confreres to the care of the heart of Jesus. May our blessed Mother, the Help of Christians and St John Bosco intercede for us so that we may emulate the suffering servant and never complain about some of the daily challenges and difficulties that we meet on our pilgrimage. May God bless you all.

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco,

**Fr Januarius S Sangma, SDB**  
Provincial



MARCH 2023		
Date	Day	PROGRAMME
1	Wed	Hyderabad – Team Visit
2	Thu	Team Visit
3	Fri	Team Visit
4	Sat	Team Visit
5	Sun	Team Visit
6	Mon	Team Visit
7	Tue	Team Visit
8	Wed	Team Visit
9	Thu	Hyderabad>>Guwahati
10	Fri	Guwahati – Catechism Teachers' Training (in local languages) – Fr Basu
11	Sat	Guwahati – Catechism Teachers' Training/Meeting of Sports Academy, Guwahati
12	Sun	Guwahati – Catechism Teachers' Training
13	Mon	Guwahati
14	Tue	Guwahati
15	Wed	Guwahati >>Barpeta Road >> Bongaigaon
16	Thu	<b>Regional Meeting</b> (SDB – Bodoland Region) Kokrajhar at 4.00 pm Salesian Family Day, Bodoland Region, Kokrajhar, 6.00pm (Conference 6.00 – 7pm; interaction 7.00 – 7.30 pm) Dinner for all.
17	Fri	Dotma – Prenovitiate and Parish
18	Sat	Ramfabil
19	Sun	Gojapara >> Guwahati
20	Mon	Guwahati: Sports Academy Meeting
21	Tue	Guwahati >> Haflong
22	Wed	Haflong
23	Thu	Diphu
24	Fri	Diphu >> Guwahati
25	Sat	Holy Mass – St Mary's Guwahati – Opening of Pre-aspirantate Year, Provincial Council Meeting, Provincial House : Admission to Vows
26	Sun	Tangla: Bhutiamari Chapel Blessing
27	Mon	Tangla>>Kumarikata
28	Tue	Sashipur
29	Wed	Guwahati
30	Thu	Guwahati>> Shallang
31	Fri	Shallang