



Provincial Circular

Province of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Auxilium Provincial Office Nongthymmai, Shillong - Meghalaya - 793014

CIR/EG/INS/54/2023

01.01.2023

My dear Sisters,

Loving greetings from Auxilium Provincial House, Nongthymmai!

Time seems to gallop at a faster momentum and we find ourselves again at the threshold of a New Year. At the very outset, I extend my warmest greetings of a Happy and Grace filled New Year 2023 to each of you. May the Blessings of God enfold you and your mission abundantly. The arrival of the new year is a special station in the flow of time that helps us understand that life continues to grow. “The Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift his face upon you and grant you peace” (Num 6, 24-25). With this ancient biblical blessing from the book of Numbers we enter the new year, confident that the Lord will watch over us and will be close to us, accompanying us day after day. We are just at day 1 of the New Year and therefore we can well ask ourselves this question: How can I start right the New Year 2023? What could be the secret that will keep me sail graciously the New Year ahead of me? To this, we can rightly say that it is only with God and in God. It is God, it is faith; it is knowing to acknowledge the great blessings of God with the certainty of His closeness – a God who walks with us, who cares for our lives, who gazes upon us with benevolence, a God who is interested in us, who forgives us, who awaits us because He still loves us. We are blessed with the grace to see the dawn of the New Year, to experience the precious love of God for us and to taste the goodness and mercy of God in the various circumstances and persons we will encounter ahead of us in the New Year.



As we embark upon this New Year, we are again reminded and invited to relive and revive the great virtue of HOPE- hope for a better way of living the will of God, hope to discover more profoundly the manifestations of God’s love, hope to rejuvenate our lives for a total self-giving to God, hope for a more authentic conviction that forms our life and conscience and that becomes a contagion of goodness to others as well. Our Faith should not consist only in accepting what God asks of us, but also in putting His Word into practice and to live Hope. In our modern times, in very many occasions, we find people who find harder to hope than to believe. People are lost in the wrong perceptions and misconceptions of ideals and virtues that puts down their Hope. As people called to be messengers of Love and Hope, we are vested with this great responsibility of infusing Hope to

others in the wake of this New Year, to encourage ourselves and others that there is a God who loves us so tenderly and who waits for our love in return. Perhaps this is an opportunity given to us by God to reenergize ourselves and others with beautiful and positive thoughts and attitudes that make the New Year truly a Blessing.

In the chaotic and frenetic environment of our days, many times we are lost in petty things that do not recognize the presence of God even in small little things and situations. The news of war, violence, hatred, jealousy and mere negative news and malicious judgment may pull us down to the ground level instead of rising and growing towards greater heights of moral ideals, intellectual creativity and faithful steps towards sanctity. This New Year gives us a Choice to choose for ourselves the kind of journey we wish to travel in the 365 days, the type of people we wish to get ourselves acquainted with, the category of associations we wish to get ourselves involved in, the quality of thoughts, words and deeds we wish to occupy ourselves with and above all the nature of attitudes that will guide and accompany us to form ourselves towards becoming a better human being and a more authentic Christian and consecrated person. The *Choice* is always *Ours*. There is a very famous saying: “*A falling tree makes more noise than a growing forest.*” As we embrace the blessings of God that will come in small and big ways in the new year, let us focus our minds, our hearts and our attention towards the forest that grows within us and outside us. Let us help ourselves shirk from mere negative news and conversations that come as a falling tree and let us be aware of the forest that grows in silence with all its potentialities. Let us look at the marvels of God’s love and the beautiful things around us. Let us not look at the tree that falls, but to the good that is in the world. Let us refrain ourselves from being slaves to the attitude and mentality that leads us to mere negative impressions and let us courageously learn to sing a *Te Deum* every day in our life in this New Year. It’s a new year, but it’s really new when Jesus is among us. It is new when it is dedicated to him and thus becomes a year of love and salvation. Thus, every past, present and future year will be a hymn of thanksgiving to the Lord for his works for us and for all humanity.

As we begin in earnest the new year 2023, I would like to communicate to you that this year I have chosen the theme “***Make our community a privileged place of formation in the synodal style***” for the various animations of the Province. This theme is drawn from the invitation of GCXXIV that calls us to rediscover and relive the charismatic freshness of our Salesian Charism with joy and vitality as Mother Chiara herself said in her concluding address of the General Chapter XXIV: “*As a fruitful community enlightened by the presence of Mary, we have focused on three significant choices: to be in **continuous formation**, to **walk in synodality**, to network with a view to **integral ecology**. Three actions whose common thread is the quality of presence, that is our ‘being there’ as a people and as a community in the heart of the contemporary world. Therefore, we are called to live life as a vocation and to rediscover the Salesian charism in all its apostolic missionary dynamism.*” Truly, the community is the most privileged place to unify these important aspects to form ourselves as a synodal community that gives hope and life to our personal lives, the people whom we encounter and the mission entrusted to our care. In the community we are called to journey together to discern God’s will and ways that favour the growth and wellness of each individual member and the mission at large. The Church also calls the faithful to come together and journey as a family of believers through the Synod on Synodality which Pope Francis has extended

to 2024. This too gives us more opportunity as a community to make deeper reflections and take concrete commitments that will emphasize and strengthen our vocational identity as Christians and religious. Therefore, this necessarily reminds and invites us that that we become Christ-centered in our willingness to encounter one another in the community and in the mission in a spirit of openness, courage, humility and generosity. As we journey together in this New Year 2023, let us listen to the promptings of the Spirit and seek His guidance to open our hearts to prayerful listening, genuine encounter with Christ and discernment of God's will always. May the grace of God, the inspiration of the Spirit and the accompaniment of our Blessed Mother work in us and in the life of our community in order that we may truly form ourselves into a synodal community that witness the great love, mercy and benevolence of God.

On this first day of the year, we are celebrating with great joy throughout the Church the Solemnity of Holy Mary, the Mother of God, which is the key role of the Virgin in the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Lord and the feast that celebrates the fundamental grace that God granted to the Blessed Virgin: the grace of Divine motherhood. With this title the Church venerates Mary: in the second part of the simple, daily prayer of the Hail Mary: "Holy Mary, "Mother of God", pray for us sinners". Mary is the Mother of God because she conceived Jesus, true God and true man. Mary was chosen from the beginning of time to be the Mother of the Son of the Eternal Father, for this reason God enriched her with a multitude of special graces. He made her immaculate, filled her with grace, and took her with him body and soul to the glory of heaven. Mary lived in a constant



openness to God and to his Word. She knew how to discover God in the various events of her life. Precisely the Gospel too tells us that the Shepherds, after seeing the Child Jesus lying in the manger, recounted what the angel had told them about this Child. And all who listened to what the shepherds said were amazed. And the Gospel adds that Mary, for her part, kept all these memories and constantly meditated on them in her heart. It was this constant and faithful meditation on the mysteries of Christ that led Mary to love God in a unique and special way. Meditating on the wonders of God, the Virgin was filled with love for God.

It becomes obvious that in contemplating Mary we do not find her alone: Mary holds Jesus, her Son, in her arms. And she continues to show it to the disciples of every age and to us too. The Lord who decided to become a man among men, wanted to do it in our style, being born of a woman, as St. Paul emphasizes, to elevate a creature to the rank of Mother of God. For this reason, for having given us Jesus, the Son of God, as the fruit of her womb, all men have been elevated with the category of children of God by Mary. Our Lady is not only the Mother of God but also our Mother. This is a very comforting truth. By becoming the Mother of Jesus, Mary also became our Mother, of all of us who are the members of the Mystical Body of Christ.

The Church wants to present to us the figure of the Blessed Virgin at the beginning of a new year in order to offer her to us as the model of what our Christian life should be. She was not only the first

disciple of Christ, but at the same time she was the most gifted and faithful disciple. Mary therefore, teaches us to live our lives with total openness to the will of God. Those words that she exclaimed at the moment of the Annunciation: "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord: let it be done to me according to your word*", must be for us the program of our lives. Mary lived in her life the virtues of a true Christian. She lived the faith putting herself totally in God's hands and believing in his Word. She lived hope trusting in His love and mercy. She lived charity loving God and neighbours with all her heart. May the Blessed Virgin Mary bless the year that we have begun and help us imitate her virtues. May she, as a good Mother, guide and protect us. May she be the model that guides us to better live our dedication to Christ our God and Lord who was born among us so that we can achieve eternal life.

January 1 is also a day in which the Church dedicates to prayer for peace. Peace, like the entire creation, is a grace of God that has been entrusted to us so that we can manage it, carry it out and enjoy it as Pope Francis said "*Peace is above all a gift.*" We are fortunate to begin taking the first steps of this year on the path to peace. This year's message of Peace from Pope Francis is titled "No one can be saved alone. Combatting Covid-19 together, embarking together on paths of peace". The pontiff notes that all crises are interconnected, yet "the virus of war is more difficult to overcome than the viruses that compromise our bodies, because it comes, not from outside of us, but from within the human heart corrupted by sin." Pope Francis went on to say that "we are called to confront the challenges of our world in a spirit of responsibility and compassion." This day calls for our attention to unite in communion and prayers for Peace in the world and in every human heart, to strengthen the ideals of peace around the world and to become agents of Peace. As we spend this first day of the new year praying for Peace, let us declare our longing for peace and commit ourselves to examine and to renounce all kinds of discord and hostility, all verbal or physical violence, internal or external, in our communities and families, in our encounters and mission, and in all contexts of life in order to become the authentic agents of a peaceful world. Let us intensify our prayers in particular for peace for all nations and continents, especially for Ukraine.



Salesian Holiness

The month of January brings to us the nostalgic feelings of celebrating the Salesian month with a number of Salesian models of Holiness. The Salesian Family is blessed with a number of saintly examples that become models for us to imitate in life. The secret to the success of Don Bosco's educative mission (which has as its prime objective the salvation of souls) was his intense spirituality, an inner energy which made the love of God and neighbour an inseparable aspect that had led many beneficiaries of the Salesian Charism to the altars of sanctity. We have in this month some valiant examples to prove that the System of Don Boco's education still holds a significant and prominent place in forming young people and others on the road to holiness.

Blessed Titus Zeman: Titus Zeman's story is an excellent example of faithfulness to Don Bosco's charism, especially through the zeal and love shown to save the vocations of young Salesians under the Communist regime. He lived his life of suffering with a great spirit of sacrifice as an offering to God. So strong was his conviction to serve God even if he had to face all sorts of challenges for the sake of the Kingdom that he dared to say *"Even if I lose my life, I do not consider it a waste, knowing that at least one of those whom I have saved has become a priest to take my place."*

Blessed Luigi Variara: He is a figure who stands out for his extraordinary fidelity in the ways inspired by God. A Salesian missionary who lived in Colombia for 28 years, dedicating himself to leprosy patients in Agua de Dios. He transformed the sadness of the hospital with Salesian joy, with music, theatre and sport in the lifestyle of the Salesian oratory. He founded the first religious community made up of people affected by leprosy or daughters of leprosy patients. He died offering his life for his people by a total dedication of his life to the sick and to the Institute, combining in himself and in the most unlimited religious obedience both fidelity to the work that the Lord asked of him and submission to the orders of his Superiors.

Blessed Laura Vicuña: Laura Vicuna is a famous model which we are well acquainted with. A young girl who offers her life for the salvation of her mother. Doing everything for her mother's salvation was Laura's constant concern. For this reason, she intensified prayer more and more, she sought all the opportunities for sacrifice which she carried in her heart as a great secret that only the Lord knew. She shunned the temptations of her stepfather with great difficulty in order to keep up her virginity and her authentic faith. Laura's offering for the conversion of her mother was accepted and the young girl passed away peacefully after saying these last joyful words: "Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Mary! Now I can die happy!" As a summary of her life, on her tomb is written: "Eucharistic flower of Junín de los Andes, whose life was a poem of purity, sacrifice, and filial love." She shows us that we can all access holiness and have a spiritual strength to live for God and His glory.

St. Francis de Sales: St. Francis de Sales is an amazing figure of simplicity and humility. He preached, he corresponded, he published, both defending the faith and guiding souls. His teaching was gracious—revealing God's grace, graceful in style, graced by what is often called sweetness, humility, gentleness, simplicity, a down-to-earth approach. In word and deed Francis attracted people to himself and thus to the Gospel's message. He possessed a mine of wisdom from which we can draw the depth of his faith as he said: "Faith is the celestial ray that makes us gaze at God in all things and all things in God"; "Let's say this: God is the painter, our faith is the painting, the colors are the word of God, the brush is the Church"; "Faith is the great friend of our spirit and can rightly speak to the human sciences"; "Salvation is indicated by faith, prepared for hope, but is given only to charity"; "Temptations against the faith go straight to the intelligence to induce it to dispute, to speculate and to dream".

Blessed Bronislao Markiewicz: He is the founder of the male and female Congregations of San Michele Arcangelo. The meeting with Don Bosco led him to join the Salesians and to commit himself to the care of defenseless children and young people in a town in Poland. At 18, Bronislao lost his faith. "I wanted to adhere to the opinions of my professors. – He will write later – With faith

in God, I lost the peace of soul and the sense of inner harmony. I was invaded by sadness.” In desperation, Bronislao resorted to the great Polish writers. Moved by one of them, he fell to his knees and exclaimed: "My God, if you exist, let me know you!... Let me see the Truth, and I will spend my life in an action of grace!... The experience of struggle will produce a revived faith, a strengthened charity and hope, a lively desire to live in humility, as in the life of the Blessed who would often repeat to his boys: "Without humility, without acceptance of humiliations, you will not find the Lord Jesus neither in prayer, nor in fasting, nor in weeping, nor in watching".

St. John Bosco: Don Bosco, our Father and Founder is a Saint par excellence for all times. He lived the beatitudes in an emblematic way. Don Bosco, who loved God and the Lord Jesus so much, tried with all his strength and throughout his life to bring God closer to young people and to prepare them for life. He welcomed them with an open heart, offered them a home, education, work and God. Don Bosco sings with his life of his love for young people, his strong desire to bring them to an encounter with Jesus Christ, his commitment to educate them to be "good Christians and honest citizens". Don Bosco became a saint because he nourished his own life and the life of others with God. At his school we learned the art of knowing and loving God, to be nourished by His Love and to pass it on to others. May our Holy Father and Founder, great friend and lover of the youth teach and inspire us with His wisdom to love and serve God ever better and with greater love in life especially in our educative mission among the young people.

Through these holy examples in our Salesian Family, we recognize several particular aspects of the Salesian charism that is often marked by simplicity and by being joyful and cheerful. They become the example of cheerful holiness and they have paved the path of Holiness set by St. John Bosco. Article 45 of our Constitutions says that *...in the lives of the Saints, God shows himself to us and speaks through them. Let us entrust ourselves to them, seeking example in their lives and help in their intercession, certain of sharing with them in the one communion of the Church.* May we learn from their lives and examples so that we too may become models of holiness in our generation.

Unity Octave

In the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the Church invites us to invoke this great gift from God through ecumenical prayer in which all Christian denominations pray together for the attainment of full unity which is the will of Christ himself. *“Christian unity is the fruit of God's grace and we must prepare ourselves to welcome it with a generous and open heart”* reminds Pope Francis. Seeking and praying for Christian Unity is the fulfilment of Christ’s prayer that we may be one, and his commission to proclaim the Gospel to all people. This week becomes for us an occasion to seek the forgiveness of God for the sin of disunity. It is a time to remind ourselves of our need to turn to God for his grace to move us to repentance and to unity.



The theme of this year's celebration is "***Do Good, Seek Justice.***" The theme is inspired by Isaiah 1:12-18, which laments a lack of justice among the People of God. Yet it also promises redemption by encouraging acts of justice. Like Isaiah, we hope to inspire a renewed desire and effort for justice among the Christian peoples around the world. As we unite in communion for this special intention of unity, let us remind ourselves of our common Christian commitment to justice and mercy, and let us pray that the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, (January 18-25) will be full of moments of conversion of heart through our ecumenical encounters, so that "all may be one."

Family News and Communications

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI entry into Heaven: While the whole world spent the last day of the year 2022 in thanksgiving to God, the Lord came to visit the Church in a unique manner taking to Himself the precious soul of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI at 95 years of age. We owe our gratitude to God for the life of such great pillar of the Church, the Vicar of Christ who has stood tall to keep up the faith of the Church and to guide the flock entrusted to his care. We have lost a great soul on earth, a giant of faith and a lover of God's people but we have another intercessor in Heaven. We offer him the gift of our prayers for the repose of His soul and may he bless our Holy Father Pope Francis and the needs of the Church from Heaven.

May I remind the communities to offer Holy Mass and prayers for the repose of His soul.

Annual Spiritual Retreat: The Annual Spiritual Retreats 2023 will soon begin with the first group on 3 January 2023. Let us send ahead our prayers for the fruitfulness of all the retreats especially as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the centenary of the arrival of our pioneers to North East India. Kindly may I remind all the sisters who will participate in the second retreat (20-27 January 2023) to arrive at FMA Outreach on 20 January 2023 latest by lunch. The retreat will be followed by a day of animation on 27 January 2023. The participants can depart on 28 January morning after the Holy Eucharist.

Congratulations: We extend our heartiest Congratulations and prayerful assurance to Fr. Don Bosco Lourdusamy SDB who was appointed Provincial of Chennai Province. May the Lord and our Blessed Mother guide and assist him in this noble mission of animation.

National Conference: There will be a National Conference for the Province Co Ordinator for Education & Principals organized by the PCI on the Theme: "*Network to Promote Global Compact on Education*" from 27 to 29 January 2023 at Dum Dum, Kolkata. Sr. Runita Borja and her team will be the resource persons. Sr. Joplin Suchiang, Sr. Madona Lytep and Sr. Brigitha Marak will participate from our Province. We wish them all the best and pray for the fruitfulness of the meeting.

Chain of Prayer: In preparation for the Centenary Celebration of the arrival of our 6 pioneers to North East India, this year we will offer a chain of prayers for each member of our Province entrusting each other to the divine grace of God and assistance of our Blessed Mother that sustained by the prayers of each other we may truly become agents of love and joy to one another and to the mission. May this special year of celebration enthuse in us greater faith and passion to give

ourselves unreservedly for God and His service following the example of our faithful and zealous missionaries.

Prayers for the sick and the departed

We extend our prayerful support to all the sick ones, through the intercession of Our Blessed Mother, especially our sick sisters, relatives of our Sisters and members of the Salesian Family. We remember in our prayers particularly:

- The Sister of Sr. Celibon Maslai
- The Sister of Sr. Sinjak Marak.
- The father of Sr. Jenita Nongbri
- All our Sisters who are recuperating after their treatment in the hospitals especially Sr. Beronica Lamare, and
- For all the sick relatives of our Sisters.

We also offer our heartfelt condolences and prayers to all our Sisters who have lost their dear ones in the past month and all the members of the Salesian Family. May the departed ones enjoy the loving embrace of God forever in His Kingdom and may all those who mourn their passing away be consoled by the strength and grace of God. We offer our heartfelt sympathy and prayerful support particularly to:

- Sr. Celestina Phawa at the passing away of her sister on 8 December 2022. The deceased is also the maternal aunt of Sr. Catherine Phawa.
- Sr. Liza Kharkongor at the sad demise of her brother on 20 December 2022.
- Fr. Provincial and the confreres of Shillong Province (INS) at the passing away of Bro. Pynshngainlang Hahshah SDB on 18 December 2022.

Feasts of the month

01 January – Mary, Mother of God /
Day of Prayer for Peace
08 January – Blessed Titus Zeman
15 January – Blessed Luigi Variara
18 January – Unity Octave
22 January – Blessed Laura Vicuña

24 January – St. Francis de Sales
25 January – Conversion of St. Paul
26 January – Republic Day of India
30 January – Blessed Bronislao Markiewicz
31 January – Solemnity of Don Bosco

As I conclude, I would like to remind ourselves of the motherly and saintly exhortations of our Holy Mother, St. Maria Domenica Mazzarello who invited us to *be humble before God and others*. This is the virtue that has proven to be the one that enables us to inculcate all necessary qualities and to come close to everyone and everything very easily. While we strive to walk and journey together in love and communion, in unity and synodality, let the words of Mother Mazzarello

continue to remind and guide us in our daily life of this new year as she said “*Let us be genuine Sisters and let the New Year be for all one of new life*” {cf. Conference of Mother Mazzarello..., FMA Constitutions page 472 ff.}

Once again, I wish you all God’s blessings of **Love, Peace, Hope, Joy** and everything that is good in the New year 2023 and a very Happy Feast of all the Salesian Saints in this month of January.



With assurance of prayers and loving accompaniment,
Affectionately,

Sr. Elizabeth George FMA
Provincial