



INM-KMJ-CIR 22/12-2018

DECEMBER 2018

## A CHRISTMATIC CHARISM – The Christmas Story from a SALESIAN Perception

### *Service. Presence. Communion. Consecration. Sanctity.*

Dear Confreres,

We have just begun the season of Advent, a time of spiritual preparation for Christmas! The historical origins of Advent are hard to determine with great precision. Despite a sketchy and contentious history behind the start of Advent, the importance of this season remains: **to focus on the coming of our Lord**. Therefore, on one hand, we are encouraged to celebrate the anniversary of the Lords first coming into this world and to ponder again the great mystery of the incarnation when our Lord humbled Himself, taking on our humanity, and entered our time and space to free us from sin. On the other hand, we recall in the Creed that our Lord will come again to judge the living and the dead and that we must be ready to meet Him.

In this Circular, I would like to reflect with you how the season of Christmas and our Salesian Charism can be linked together to give us a **Christmatic Charism** especially as we have begun intense preparation for our Provincial Chapter due next month, January 2019!

### Witness and Weakness

The fundamental aim of the theme of the GC28 is that of helping the whole Congregation to closely examine, as far as is possible, **what is and what ought to be** the *profile of the Salesian capable of responding to today's youth*, to all young people especially the poorest and most in need, those excluded and rejected, the weakest and those deprived of their basic rights. And this *in a world ever more complex and going through rapid changes*. If we seriously reflect on the beneficiaries of our Charism, don't we see it as *CHRISMATIC*, in the sense, that Jesus himself came for the poorest of the poor, the excluded, the rejected, the weakest and the marginalized? This is how the season of Christmas can remind us every year of our own Salesian Charism: we are professed Salesians to serve the poor youth just as HE was born to serve the poor and needy. But unfortunately, often we forget our commitment to witness because of our weakness!

**Quoting from the Acts of the General Council (N. 428) the Rector Major says:** The most evident weakness, which I would dare to say is common in apostolic religious life (or active religious life) in the whole Church, is **the weak manner in which we bear witness to the fact that we are consecrated persons, in other words God's witnesses**. Our life, more by what we are and not only by what we do, ought to make visible and transparent the humanity of God among the people. In fact, **we feel more comfortable doing things, being creative, managing and organising rather than through our way of living, praying, speaking and working bearing**

**witness to the fact that we are consecrated to God.** I would dare to say that this is our “Achille’s heel”. And we still must continue to grow in the coming years in **the sense of identity and of belonging** to our Congregation.

At one point Pope Francis told us about his concerns in regard to two large problems that are afflicting the Church. With exceptional force, he told us that these problems are called **clericalism and power-seeking**. By clericalism there is no intention to refer to the situation of Salesian priests. Instead, clericalism has a lot to do with believing that, by the fact of being a priest you have all the authority and everything has to pass through your hands. **It has to do with the temptation to careerism**. It is very much connected to the creation of a state of dependence – and there are confreres who love to have people who “are dependent on them”.

Pope Francis continues that the second danger is regarding the **temptation to power**. When I say ‘power’ I am not referring directly to authority. If this is exercised in an evangelical spirit of service, there is no danger of power-seeking... But when the responsibility, the office, the authority are exercised as power (not infrequently with a sense of pride) and lived as an exercise of power over others since they depend on our economic resources, or on our being able to employ them, or they help one or another just as they feel like it.... Well then, in these cases it is necessary to go back to living per the Gospel so as not to fall into the nets woven by the temptation of power. And we must not believe dear Confreres that we are immune to this danger. All of us and every day - starting with the one writing this, we must examine ourselves before the Lord with regard to this danger and ask His grace to live constantly in the dimension of gift and of simple and transparent service.

I think this is **the first reflection that we can derive from this Christmatic Charism is Salesian Service**. The Christmatic Charism is that Jesus gave us a divine witness in his human weakness! The All-powerful God laid powerless in the forlorn manger! We have not become Salesians to foster our careerism or to exercise power through the positions that we hold at various levels. Instead, just as the Baby Jesus left his glory and majesty to become a frail and feeble child, yet still being focused on his salvific mission, we too should be able to put aside all that can be reprehensible to our consecrated life and mission, be it in our manner of attire, the personal gadgets we use, the rapport with our lay collaborators, not treating them as subordinates but as equals, thus seeking to be **Christmatic Salesians** adhering fervently to the special charism of Don Bosco. Today people listen to witnesses rather than to teachers and preachers and if they listen to teachers and preachers, it is because they are also witnesses.



### **“God with us” and “We with them”**

*“The Virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel” (which means “God with us”).*

Matthew 1:23

We firmly believe that the celebration of Christmas is God’s becoming a human person in Jesus, in desiring to be *Emmanuel*, God with us. God could not get any closer. The Incarnation is foundational for all believers: because Jesus became one of us, we and our everyday lives become the privileged place of meeting the divine

and becoming one with God. **We are to find God in others and be Christ for others.** People sometimes express regret that the true meaning of Christmas has been lost amidst the consumerism and excess so often associated with it. In the Gospel of St. Matthew (2:2-12) we read of the journey of the Magi to present their gifts to the baby Jesus. These gifts had a special significance, acknowledging the identity and future mission of Jesus. The Chrismatic Charism in reality, however, tells us that the greatest gift we can give is the gift of our time and attention. Impersonal, material gifts will soon be forgotten, but time spent with a person, showing that you value and care for them, means so much more and will leave them with memories to value forever.



**The second reflection we can learn from this Chrismatic Charism is Salesian Presence.** ‘God with us’ should remind us that we need to **“be with them”**. How often our physical presence with the young is brought into focus! We do a lot of planning for the mission, for the welfare of the young entrusted to our care. But the very same young people find it very difficult to sometimes even see us! This is not because we don’t want to be with the young. Often it is because we fail to see them as God’s gifts to us! We think of them only as beneficiaries and that they have only material requirements. Therefore, we do everything possible to ensure that they get the best possible attention that we can provide them. But I think when we realize that we are mutual gifts for each other, and that they also can enrich us, then only will our Salesian presence be more real, more regular and more reverential.



### **The Holy Family and the Salesian Community**

Christmas is also a time when we reflect on the Holy Family, a family whose love for each other and faith in God helped them to overcome great trials and suffering. For us who live a vowed religious life, *Community* is an arena in which we explicitly celebrate and live out the mystery of the Incarnation, our discipleship, and our consecrated life. Certainly, we religious are not the only ones to live in a community. In the “day-to-dayness” of living together, families experience God and come to grow in relationship with God and each other. As is true in families, so in religious life, considering the needs of others and “getting along” can be demanding and sometimes even lonely. God is to be found in the middle of the messiness and struggle to live together as well as in the good times that bring a feeling of support and connectedness. What is distinctive is the fact that religious choose to

live out their consecrated life in community and give public witness to a life based on a covenant with each other as well as with God.

**The third reflection we can learn from this Christmatic Charism is Salesian Communion.** Jesus could have come to us as an “individual”; there was no need for him to have been born in a family! Still, he chose this way to show us that living in a community (or in a family) is for everyone and especially for us Salesians, our pathway to holiness! Our Constitutions stress adequately on the importance of living as a community. Perhaps we need to stress likewise on living in communion within the community as well! Unless we are able to love and accept our confreres as well as the youth entrusted to our care, our communion will only be in the cloud..! Our charism is such that the youth and those around us are quick to realize if we live and work disingenuously with the confreres in of our community. Jesus loved and accepted even Judas as part of his inner circle! No greater example is needed for Salesian Communion.



### **The Christmas Crib and our Religious Consecration**

There is a special revelation of God’s majesty in the helplessness of a child. It is a revelation of love, the same love that would leave Jesus no less helpless on the cross. It is in part the depth of God’s love, shown in his costly involvement with humanity that is a new and radiant vision of his glory. Christmas is most profoundly a matter of wonder, amazement, and awe. It is of course the crib that will help us to appreciate the mystery. But there are several ways of approaching a crib. During this Christmas season, there is the custom of visiting the cribs in the various churches: there we find an exuberance of imagination, a variety of ways of presenting the nativity scene, often with dozens of figures and buildings which allow us to recapture the miracle that is taking place in the very ordinariness of daily life in Palestine, even if it is an inculturated Bethlehem! But any crib, even the simplest, can speak to us. ‘Speak’ may seem a strange word! A crib is silent, nothing moves. But even as we allow ourselves to be drawn into its silence, it speaks to our hearts. It takes time for a crib to address us. We need to stay before it, not saying prayers, but allowing the sense of wonder and astonishment to overwhelm us, to allow the crib to speak to our hearts rather than to our heads, its very stillness having a resonant eloquence.

**The fourth reflection we can learn from this Christmatic Charism is Salesian Consecration.** The Crib presents to us very vividly the vows we have publicly professed for the first time and renewed again and again: chastity, obedience and poverty. The chastity and purity of Joseph and Mary enabled them to be the chosen ones. They were chaste even before they were chosen! And they continued to be in the same state even after their salvific call. Their obedience to God was not just once and for all, but at almost every moment of their earthly life. Mary did not just say “Yes” and live her life as if God would take care of everything. She said “Yes” continually in spite of the hardships involved in her sorrowful journey till the foot of the Cross. Joseph said “Yes” to take Mary as his wife. He said “Yes” to undertake the precarious journey to Bethelhem with his heavily pregnant wife. He said “Yes” to get up in the middle of the night and flee to Egypt in order to protect the new-born Saviour and his mother. Their utter state of poverty is witnessed in the very Crib itself! No further explanation is

needed in this regard! We need to be very conscious of our consecration. This consciousness needs to be expressed in our Identity, Visibility and Credibility of our daily Salesian life. **We are consecrated Salesians everywhere, everyday, for everyone at everytime and in every way!**

**Key Traits of a Salesian (Source: Const. Arts:10-20)**



While we are reflecting these past months on the 'Profile of a Salesian' with respect to 'What kind of Salesian for the youth of today?', I would like to bring back to mind some of the salient traits which we Salesians need to aspire to. This will serve as an examination of conscience as we prepare for Christmas and begin to **GIFT-WRAP** the best of ourselves this Christmas for the young entrusted to our care:

A **special concern** for the welfare of young people wherever we are.

**Loving kindness and a welcoming attitude** – lived out in openness, cordiality, readiness to make the first approach and to put others at ease with our friendship, respect and patience.

**Optimism and Joy.** There is no place for discouragement in the face of difficulties, but a calm and serene acceptance of whatever is good.

**Work and temperance** or learning how to balance tireless energy and hard work with simplicity and moderation. It also means knowing how to control the promptings of the heart in order to remain even-tempered and serene.

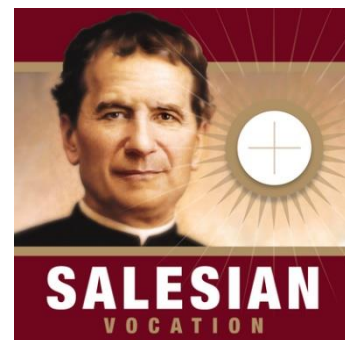
**Acceptance of daily routine with cheerfulness.** "Here we make sanctity consist in doing our duty cheerfully."

**Creativity and flexibility** - hallmarks of Salesian presence in our works among the young.

**A realistic perspective on life** coupled with our **attentiveness to the promptings of the Spirit** manifested through the signs of the times.

Our educative method - '**The Preventive System**' – is a system based entirely on reason, religion and loving kindness, a unique spiritual and educational experience of working with and through the young for their and our salvation.

**Deep trust in God and a constant listening to His will** are the spiritual foundations of our work. In this way we strive to keep alive our collaboration in God's creative and loving action in history.



**The final reflection we can learn from this Christmatic Charism is Salesian Sanctity.** A deeper study on the above Salesian traits would make us understand better that the Christmas Season can serve as a constant reminder to renew our pledge towards holiness. The Holy Family had a deep trust in God and heeded constantly to HIS will. Who can deny their attentiveness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit! Joseph had to work to provide for his family and we can be sure that both Mary and the boy Jesus did their part as well, accepting their daily routine with joy and optimism. Their concern and welcoming attitude could be seen at

the Visitation and the wedding at Cana. The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple shows their realistic perspective on life while the entire episode of the finding of the boy Jesus who was lost in the Temple makes known very subtly yet quite evidently how the Preventive System was followed! Their flight to Egypt reveals their flexibility while the very fact of the Incarnation itself divulges the essence of creativity! What more must we do therefore to acquire sanctity? Thus, the Christmas Story is indeed a Christmatic Charism for us Salesians. Celebrating Christmas, we actually celebrate Salesianity!

## NEWS FROM THE PROVINCE

### SALESIAN FAMILY MONTHLY RECOLLECTION

This month we will be having the monthly recollection together with the members of the Salesian Family. Each community (or nearby communities) can plan accordingly and spend an evening together in prayer and fellowship. I exhort the Rectors/Leaders to do the needful so that this monthly recollection can strengthen the bonds of the Salesian Family in the neighbourhood.

### INM ORDINATIONS

*You are Specially Invited*

The Salesian Province of Chennai is immensely glad to invite you to thank God and rejoice at the Priestly Ordination of Eight of her Sons this year. Your fraternal presence and fervent prayers on this auspicious moment in the life of these Salesians will be a great blessing and encouragement to them.

Eight Deacons to be conferred the Sacrament of Priesthood by  
**Most. Rev. Dr. George Antonyamy, DD**  
 Archbishop of Madras - Mylapore  
 On Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> December 2018 at 5.30 p.m.  
 Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Perambur, Chennai.



**Charles Grace**  
*To you the image of God in essence.*  
 28<sup>th</sup> Dec 2018 10.30 a.m.  
 St. Anthony's Church,  
 Uthangarai, Krishnagiri Dt.



**Joe Anand**  
*To to me to live is Christ.*  
 28<sup>th</sup> Dec.2018 10.30 a.m.  
 Mary Help of Christians Church  
 Utiyur kuppam.



**Immanuel Messiah**  
*'Look I am with you always.*  
 30<sup>th</sup> Dec 2018 5.00 p.m.  
 St. Valenor Church  
 Irundai.



**Arulandam Neethimani**  
*To 'Sre and 'To Sre' Min.*  
 28<sup>th</sup> Dec 2018 5.30 p.m.  
 St. Theresa of Child Jesus Church  
 Madama Nagar, Sembium.



**Malayappan Arun**  
*'Spring Service to Christ.*  
 28<sup>th</sup> Dec 2018 5.00 p.m.  
 Our Lady of Victory's Church,  
 Periyakolappalur.



**Xavier Sagayaraj**  
*'Your Kingdom Come.*  
 28<sup>th</sup> Dec 2018 5.30 p.m.  
 Mary Help of Christians Church,  
 Basin Bridge.



**Suresh Xavier**  
*'You are my servants, I have chosen you.*  
 28<sup>th</sup> Dec 2018 5.30 p.m.  
 St. Anthony's Parish,  
 Kariyandai.



**Victor Sundaram**  
*'In 'Min.*  
 28<sup>th</sup> Dec 2018 11.00 a.m.  
 St. Francis Xavier Church,  
 Pudur, Trupattur.

### EIGHTH SALESIAN BROTHERS CONGRESS

The 8<sup>th</sup> Salesian Brothers Congress of South Asia will be held from 30 December 2018 to 3 January 2019, at Don Bosco Skill Mission, Bangalore. Together with the Salesian Brothers we are invited to reflect on the theme 'Salesian be a Faithful Witness.' We pray that this Congress turns out to be a great inspiration for all of us and a moment of choicest blessings for all our dear Salesian Brothers. We wish the Preparatory Team all the very best as they prepare for this important national event. I wish all the Salesian Brothers of our Province, God's choicest blessings, as they celebrate the Salesian Brothers' Day on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2018, the Feast Day of Bl. Philip Rinaldi. It is highly exhorted that all our Salesian communities meaningfully celebrate the Salesian Brothers' Day when we pray in a very special way for all our Salesian Brothers and find meaningful ways to promote vocations to the Salesian Brotherhood.

## NATIONAL BOSCOREE

The 13th National Boscoree will be held at Nasik from 30<sup>th</sup> December 2018 - 03<sup>rd</sup> January 2019. Our Province will be very well represented. I thank all the Salesians and Staff involved in the planning of this mega-event and we wish all the participants from our institutions a very meaningful experience.

## SOLIDARITY WITH GAJA CYCLONE AFFECTED

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2018, I had already sent the INM Appeal for those affected by the Gaja Cyclone which inflicted destruction on the Delta region. It will be a witness value if all our communities respond generously so that we can truly express solidarity with our unfortunate brothers and sisters in this time of calamitous need.

## SDB STRENNA 2019

Our Rector Major, Rev. Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime, is extending his invitation to all of us with his Strenna 2019, '**So that My Joy may be in you (Jn 15: 11): Holiness for you, too.**' Our Rector Major insists on an essential reality of holiness on a day to day basis. Daily sanctity must become a reality in our lives, when the Salesian (Christmatic) Charism is lived to the full. The PowerPoint Presentation of the Strenna 2019 will be sent to your email which you can make use for your personal and community reflection.

## REST IN PEACE

**Rev. Fr. Peringalathu Joseph SDB** (63) of IND died on November 29, 2018. Our heartfelt condolences to the Provincial Fr. Jose Kuruvachira and the confreres of Dimapur Province.

**Mr. T.I. Kurian (87)**, father of Fr. Joy Kurian, passed away on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2018. Our prayerful sympathies to Fr Joy and the family members.

**Mr. Abishegarayer**, brother-in-law of Fr. Paulraj Maniam, died on 11<sup>th</sup> November. Our sincere condolences to Fr. Paulraj Maniam and the family members.

## Conclusion



**The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception** on 8<sup>th</sup> December recalls to mind Don Bosco's first encounter with Bartholemew Garelli. This encounter was to be the beginning of Don Bosco's mission to the young. As we celebrate this memorable Feast let us thank our Mother Mary for being with us and guiding us in every step of our Mission. Let us humbly and sincerely acknowledge with Don Bosco that "She did it all".

**It is December 1842: Don Bosco had no place to gather the boys to practice carol singing, so they practiced right on the streets – those same streets that the boys knew so well. The carol**

had even been written on a glass window pane! Never before had the good citizens of Turin seen such a spectacle as they did then! Along the elegant streets of Turin, a group of boys were singing a Christmas carol and a priest was directing them! The music was a bit unsophisticated, but those boys sang it with so much love that it moved all who heard it. **Those boys lived their Christmas walking, just like Joseph and Mary** when they set out on a journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. In Bethlehem, they would experience what it means to live in a foreign land: having no room for them in the inn. Don Bosco's boys, too, were looking for a place where they would find protection so they could grow, far away from all worldly perils. **Don Bosco searched with them and committed his very life to find it.**

As I wish each one of you my dear confreres a Joyful Christmas, I hope and pray that all the discussions we had in our communities in preparation for the Provincial Chapter which is just a month away, will make each one of us, special gifts



for the young this Christmas, just as we recite in the Prayer for the PC: As we re-commit ourselves for young people, their world and their situation, help us to realize that **a life of grace lived and nourished in HIM, is the most precious gift that we can give to them.**

Wishing you a Joyful Christmatic Charism Christmas!

Yours affectionately,

**Fr. K.M. Jose SDB**  
Provincial

Date: 02.12.2018

Place: Chennai - 600010

