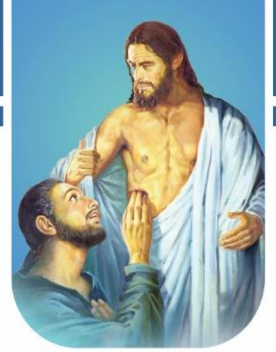




# Provincial Circular

## SALESIAN PROVINCE OF CHENNAI (INM)



INM-EV-CIR 01/03-2025

MARCH 2025

### Answering the Cry of the Poor: A Prophetic Call to Action

Dear Confreres,

Poverty is not merely an economic condition; it is a deeply human crisis that challenges the very fabric of society. It is a call to conscience, a test of justice, and a measure of our collective moral responsibility. As Pope Francis powerfully reminds us, “The measure of the greatness of a society is found in the way it treats those most in need, those who have nothing apart from their poverty.”

Despite notable progress in reducing extreme poverty, its reality remains stark and undeniable. Recent government statistics indicate that extreme poverty in India has declined to just 2.2% of the population based on the World Bank’s \$1.90-per-day standard (approximately ₹160). But can anyone truly live with dignity on ₹160 per day? This figure may reflect statistical optimism, yet it fails to capture the daily struggles of millions—rising food prices, precarious employment, lack of healthcare, and limited access to quality education. This meagre sum does not account for housing, medical expenses, or even basic nutrition, let alone the ability to dream of a better future. In such a reality, how should the Church respond to this universal and urgent crisis?

#### **The Church’s Mission: Justice, Solidarity, and Love for the Poor**

The Catholic Church has always placed the poor at the heart of its mission, not merely as recipients of charity but as bearers of God’s image and dignity. Addressing poverty is not just an act of goodwill; it is a Gospel imperative, a moral responsibility, and an essential element of Catholic social teaching. Jesus himself identifies with the poor, declaring: “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). Throughout his ministry, Christ showed special concern for the marginalized, the hungry, the sick, and the outcast. He not only provided for their material needs but also restored their dignity, calling them to a life of hope and renewal.

This mission of compassion and justice was embraced by the early Christian community, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles: “There was no needy person among them” (Acts 4:34). The early Church lived a model of communal solidarity, ensuring that resources were shared so that no one was left behind. This spirit of fraternity and social responsibility has inspired Catholic social action throughout history, from the formation of schools and hospitals to advocacy for labor rights and systemic reform.

## **Poverty: A Crisis of Dignity and Human Rights**

Poverty is multidimensional—it is not only a lack of money but also a deprivation of education, healthcare, opportunities, and human dignity. It is a form of social marginalization that leaves individuals vulnerable and excluded. Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, urges us: “Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor” (EG 187). This means that our response must go beyond temporary relief; it must address the root causes of poverty, advocate for justice, and work towards integral human development.

The Church's call to preferential love for the poor is not an abstract principle but a living reality—one that challenges us to move from charity to justice, from almsgiving to empowerment, from temporary assistance to systemic change. As followers of Christ, we are called not only to serve the poor but to stand with them, ensuring that their voices are heard, their rights are upheld, and their dignity is restored.

In a world where poverty continues to persist amidst growing affluence, the Church must remain a prophetic voice, reminding society that true greatness is measured by how we treat the most vulnerable. The Gospel is clear: to encounter Christ, we must encounter him in the poor, the suffering, and the forgotten—for in serving them, we serve the Lord himself.

### **Biblical Perspective on Poverty**

Sacred Scripture consistently underscores God's deep concern for the poor, calling for justice, compassion, and active solidarity. From the Old Testament to the teachings of Christ, the Bible reveals a divine mandate to care for the marginalized, defend their dignity, and uphold their rights.

The Psalms beautifully depict God as the protector and defender of the poor:

“For He delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.” (Psalm 72:12)

The Book of Proverbs reinforces the virtue of generosity and justice:

“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed.” (Proverbs 19:17)

“Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.” (Proverbs 31:9)

In the New Testament, Jesus proclaims His mission as one deeply intertwined with the liberation of the poor:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.” (Luke 4:18)

Christ further identifies Himself with the suffering and marginalized, declaring:

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40)

His message is one of radical hope and reversal of worldly expectations:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” (Luke 6:20)

Jesus not only preached about the dignity of the poor but lived in solidarity with them, challenging His disciples—and the Church—to do the same. Inspired by this divine call, the Church has always sought to be a voice for the voiceless, defending the rights of the poor and working for a more just world.

### **Catholic Teaching on Poverty**

The Catholic Church has long been committed to addressing poverty through its rich tradition of social teaching. Encyclicals, Conciliar documents, and Papal exhortations provide deep insights into economic justice and the Church's role in advocating for the poor. Since Pope Leo XIII's ground breaking encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), Catholic social teaching has evolved into a comprehensive framework addressing the dignity of labour, economic inequality, and the moral responsibilities of society.

### **Key Church Teachings on Poverty and Social Justice**

#### ◆ ***Rerum Novarum*** (1891) – Pope Leo XIII

Considered the foundation of modern Catholic social teaching, this encyclical addressed the exploitation of workers, the need for just wages, and the rights of labourers. Pope Leo XIII emphasized that both the state and society have a duty to ensure justice for the working class.

#### ◆ ***Gaudium et Spes*** (1965) – Second Vatican Council

This pastoral constitution affirms that "The right to have a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family belongs to everyone." (GS 69). It underscores the moral obligation to assist the poor, not merely from surplus wealth but as a fundamental duty rooted in human dignity.

#### ◆ ***Populorum Progressio*** (1967) – Pope Paul VI

St. Paul VI introduced the concept of "integral human development," asserting that true progress extends beyond economic growth to encompass the full development of every person. He famously declared, "Development is the new name for peace," highlighting the need for structural reforms to uplift the marginalized.

#### ◆ ***Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*** (1987) – Pope John Paul II

This encyclical denounced economic disparities and called for global solidarity, urging nations to collaborate in building a more just and equitable world.

#### ◆ ***Centesimus Annus*** (1991) – Pope John Paul II

Marking the centenary of *Rerum Novarum*, St. John Paul II reaffirmed that "every economic decision has a moral consequence." He insisted that economic systems must serve humanity, rather than reducing people to mere instruments of profit. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church further emphasizes that the most vulnerable should be a primary concern.

#### ◆ ***Caritas in Veritate*** (2009) – Pope Benedict XVI

Pope Benedict XVI stressed that economic development must be holistic, stating: "Authentic human development concerns the whole person in every single dimension." He warned that without a spiritual foundation, human progress becomes directionless. His central theme,

“Charity in Truth,” underscores the necessity of ethical and moral considerations in economic and social policies.

✦ ***Evangelii Gaudium*** (2013) – Pope Francis

In this apostolic exhortation, Pope Francis critiques economic systems that foster exclusion and inequality, declaring: "An economy of exclusion and inequality kills. How can it be that it is not news when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?" His words challenge society to re-evaluate its priorities and economic structures.

✦ ***Fratelli Tutti*** (2020) – Pope Francis

This encyclical calls for a renewed sense of fraternity and solidarity, urging an economic model that prioritizes human dignity over profit. Pope Francis envisions a world where economies serve people rather than exploiting them.

Through these teachings, the Catholic Church continues to champion justice for the poor, advocating for systems that promote dignity, equity, and the common good.

### **Catholic Social Thinkers on Poverty**

Throughout history, several Catholic thinkers have profoundly shaped our understanding of poverty and the moral responsibility to address it.

✦ **Dorothy Day** – The co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, Dorothy Day embodied radical solidarity with the marginalized. She firmly believed that the Gospel calls us to serve all in need, stating, "The Gospel takes away our right forever to discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving poor" (*The Long Loneliness*). Her life and writings challenge us to embrace compassion without judgment.

✦ **Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez** – A key figure in liberation theology, Fr. Gutiérrez emphasized that poverty is not merely an unfortunate condition but a result of systemic injustice. He insisted, "Poverty is not fate; it is a condition. It is not a misfortune; it is an injustice." His work calls for structural change to ensure dignity and justice for all.

✦ **St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta** – A living testament to selfless love, St. Mother Teresa reminded the world that true charity is found in action. She famously said, "At the end of life, we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, or how many great things we have done. We will be judged by: 'I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was naked, and you clothed me, I was homeless, and you took me in.'" Her legacy challenges us to see Christ in the poor and respond with concrete acts of love.

These Catholic social thinkers and several others continue to inspire us to view poverty not as an abstract issue but as a call to action, demanding both personal charity and systemic transformation.

### **St. John Bosco – A Father to the Poor and Needy**

Our beloved founder, St. John Bosco, was born poor and lived in solidarity with the poor. His first hand encounters with the destitute youth of Turin shaped his mission—not just as an act of charity, but as a transformative response to poverty. Don Bosco's genius lay in his preventive approach, ensuring that young people were not only rescued from hardship but also equipped for a future of dignity. He understood that poverty could not be alleviated merely by providing temporary relief; it required education, skills, and opportunities to break the cycle permanently. In response, he established schools, workshops, and vocational training centers, empowering young people to become self-sufficient, responsible citizens.

As Salesians, we are heirs to this vision. Our mission is not only to meet immediate needs but also to address the root causes of poverty through holistic formation.

### **The Preventive System – A Response to Poverty**

Don Bosco's Preventive System, built on Reason, Religion, and Loving-Kindness, provides a profound framework for confronting poverty:

- 1. Reason** – We must analyze the social and economic factors that perpetuate poverty, developing effective and evidence-based interventions that create lasting change.
- 2. Religion** – Our faith calls us to recognize the God-given dignity of every person, especially the poor, and to work for a society where justice and fraternity prevail.
- 3. Loving-Kindness** – Every effort to combat poverty must be rooted in genuine love and care for the poor, following Don Bosco's example of compassionate accompaniment rather than mere assistance.

### **Our Call to Action**

As members of the Church, we are all summoned to respond to poverty in three essential ways:

#### **a) Charity** – Responding to Immediate Needs

We are called to offer direct assistance to those who suffer. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us: "Love—caritas—will always prove necessary, even in the most just society... There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help." (Deus Caritas Est, 28)

#### **b) Justice** – Transforming Unjust Structures

True Christian service goes beyond aid; it seeks to change systems that oppress and marginalize. Pope Francis urges us: "Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor." (Evangelii Gaudium, 187)

#### **c) Conversion of Heart** – A New Way of Seeing Wealth and Poverty

Genuine transformation begins within us. To create a more just world, we must reshape our own attitudes toward material wealth and human dignity. Pope Benedict XVI warned: "The external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast." (Homily, April 24, 2005)

The work of St. John Bosco continues in us. We are called to educate, uplift, and transform lives, ensuring that every young person, especially the poor and abandoned, finds hope, opportunity, and a future.

## **Conclusion: A Renewed Commitment to the Poor**

Dear Confreres, as disciples of Christ and sons of Don Bosco, let us renew our unwavering commitment to alleviating poverty, following the example of Jesus, who became poor so that we might become rich in grace (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9). Inspired by the Gospel and Catholic social teaching, may our efforts help build a world where justice, fraternity, and human dignity prevail, ensuring that no one is deprived of the necessities for a dignified life.

As we navigate the complex realities of poverty in India as mentioned in the statistical data in the introduction, we are called to respond not only with compassion but also with the creative and pastoral charity that characterized Don Bosco. Our approach must be twofold: immediate, in addressing the urgent needs of the poor, and strategic, in creating sustainable solutions that break the cycle of poverty. Pope Francis reminds us: "The fight against poverty and hunger must be fought constantly and on many fronts, especially in its causes."

The challenge before us is great, but so is our Salesian mission to the young, especially those most in need. Don Bosco never turned away from the overwhelming struggles of his time. Instead, he responded with faith, creativity, and an unshakable commitment to transforming lives through education and love. Let us draw strength from his example, ensuring that our ministry remains a beacon of hope and opportunity for the poor.

May Mary Help of Christians and St. John Bosco guide us as we strive to be faithful to our charism and responsive to the signs of our times. As we journey through this season of Lent, may our hearts be ever more attuned to the cries of the poor and the suffering, seeing in them the very face of Christ.

## **News from the Province**

### **Good Bye Dear Fr. Sebastian Francis SDB**

#### ***The Friend of the Poor and the Needy***

The Salesian Province of Chennai (INM) mourns the loss of Rev. Fr. Sebastian Francis SDB, who passed away in the early hours of February 15, 2025, at 4:30 a.m. in Polur due to a massive heart attack. Fr. Sebastian, who was serving as the Rector of Don Bosco Agro-Tech, Polur, was 65 years old at the time of his passing. His untimely death was a great shock to the confreres of Chennai Province, his community members, students, and all those whose lives he touched through his dedicated service and pastoral ministry.



Fr. Sebastian Francis was born on 30 June 1959, in Rangoon, Burma (now Yangon, Myanmar). Drawn to the Salesian charism from a young age, he entered the Salesian Congregation and made his First Profession on 24 May, 1983 at Nazareth Bhavan, Siliguri. His lifelong commitment to the Salesian way of life was affirmed through his Final Profession on 24 May, 1988 at Don Bosco Shrine, Ayanavaram. On 27 December, 1991, he was ordained a priest at Our Lady of Velankanni Church, Shastri Nagar, Vysarpadi dedicating himself entirely to God and the service of youth, especially the poor and marginalized.

Throughout his ministry, Fr. Sebastian held various key roles in different Salesian communities. He was a zealous educator, compassionate pastor and legal advocate, always striving to uphold justice and the rights of the underprivileged. From 2010 to 2015, Fr. Sebastian

embarked on a missionary journey to Sri Lanka, where he worked at DB Tech, Kilinochchi. His roles included being In-Charge of ADMA, Principal, Correspondent, Liturgical Animator, Assistant Director, and Vice Principal. His tireless efforts in war-affected Sri Lanka provided education, spiritual nourishment, and hope to many young people striving for a better future. From 2021 to 2023, he served as Provincial Councillor while simultaneously holding key roles at Chennai - Broadway Refuge and later at Polur - Sacred Heart Church. His tenure as Vice Rector, Parish Priest, Correspondent, and Dean of Studies further demonstrated his firm commitment to pastoral ministry.

People and confreres have witnessed his firm dedication to the mission. Every moment of his life was focused on its growth, sustainability and well-being. His selflessness was inspiring, as he prioritized the mission's interests above all else. Fr. Sebastian meticulously planned each activity, ensuring that every effort counted and none were wasted. Notably, he conducted business dealings with integrity, never seeking to exploit others for personal gain. His commitment to fairness and transparency earned him respect from all who interacted with him. Fr. Sebastian's work ethic was remarkable. He rested for only five hours daily. His focus was solely on productivity, with no time for leisure or entertainment. Except for mission-related tasks, he rarely left the campus. He was constantly on the move, assigning tasks to others to ensure their time was utilized effectively and generated income. He was selective about attending functions, only participating in events he deemed worthwhile, prioritizing his mission work above social obligations. Fr. Sebastian was renowned among INM Salesians for his tireless work and preference for manual labour. He deeply valued individuals who toiled physically and instilled in students the importance of manual work, preparing them to become skilled labourers. He frequently quoted Don Bosco's golden words to the boys: "work, work, work" and "work, bread and heaven." These phrases became a mantra, emphasizing the dignity and value of hard work. His own example and enthusiasm inspired the students to adopt a strong work ethic and appreciate the dignity of labour. Fr. Sebastian's thoughts were deeply reflective, spiritual, and rooted in social concern, always prioritizing the marginalized. His ideology was firm, and those who shared his passion for the poor and needy would never disagree with him. He presented strong proposals, employing a win-win strategy that benefited all parties.

His ministry in Maranodai (1996-2002), Kallakuruchi district, was a remarkable one. He built up the faith community by constructing churches and grottos, and he improved the livelihood of the village by approaching government offices and securing funds to help the needy. No wonder the whole village was present at his funeral. Their tears demonstrated how much Fr. Sebastian meant to them. He strengthened the youngsters of the village by sending them to study at Salesian institutions and helped them overcome their negative outlook on life. The people and future generations are grateful to him for the impact he had on their lives in Maranodai.

The passing of Fr. Sebastian is an immense loss to the Salesian Province of Chennai. While we grieve his departure, we also celebrate his incredible life and enduring contributions to the Salesian mission. His spirit will live on in the many lives he touched and the institutions he strengthened with his leadership and vision. As we bid farewell to our dear Fr. Sebastian, let us find solace in the words of Scripture: "Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your Lord." (Matthew 25:21)

May his soul rest in eternal peace. Let us continue to pray for him, that he may find his eternal reward in the loving embrace of our Heavenly Father.

Rest in peace, dear Fr. Sebastian Francis SDB. You will always be remembered with gratitude and love.

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### **Updates of GC 29**

On 16<sup>th</sup> February 2025, the 29<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Salesian Congregation was declared open by Fr. Alphonse Owoudou, the Chapter Moderator at the Salesian Mother House at Valdocco. The General Chapter 29 is being attended by 269 members. There are the 227 members who have the voting rights, among them are 14 General Councillors, the Procurator General and the Rector Major Emeritus. The largest group is made up of the Provincials and Delegates of the 92 Provinces, subdivided by Regions: 32 from Africa-Madagascar, 22 from America South Cone, 27 from East Asia-Oceania, 33 from South Asia, 36 from Central-North Europe, 27 from Interamerica, 29 from the Mediterranean, as well as 2 representatives from UPS (Salesian Pontifical University) and 3 confreres from the Generalate in Rome (RMG). There are 11 interpreters and 7 translators who work tirelessly to ensure understanding between the participants in the five official languages of the congregation.

The members are divided into six commissions and we are happy that the delegates of our province are playing important roles in these commissions: Fr. L. Don Bosco (Communication-English 1), Fr. Stanislaus Swamikannu (President- English 2) and Fr. John Alexander (Secretary-English 2). On 25<sup>th</sup> March the new Rector Major of the Congregation will be elected and from that same afternoon until 29<sup>th</sup> March, the Vicar, the Sector Councillors and the Regional Councillors will be elected. Let us continue support all the Chapter members with our sincere prayers. We request all the communities to recite the prayer for the General Chapter 29 during the Lauds/Vespers.

### **Diaconate Ordination**

The province is happy to announce that this year four of our scholastics will be ordained Deacons on the 19<sup>th</sup> March (Wednesday) at Votive Shrine, Kilpauk, Chennai by Most. Rev. Neethinathan Antonisamy, D.D, Bishop of Chengalpattu. Let us pray for these young Salesians as they move closer to the Altar of God.

The following are the candidates and they will be serving the following communities during the summer:

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|---|--|
| <b>Br. Arokia Dass Lourdusamy</b>       | <b>- Thennangudi – Sacred Heart Parish</b>               |
| <b>Br. Arokia Johnpaul Arokiasamy</b>   | <b>- Polur – Sacred Heart Church</b>                     |
| <b>Br. Arul Prasanth Nathan</b>         | <b>- Broadway – St. Francis Xavier</b>                   |
| <b>Br. Clement Arokiaraj Sebastiane</b> | <b>- Mumbai – Borivali – St. John Bosco Church (INB)</b> |

We wish them God’s choicest blessings and promise them our continued prayer for their diaconate ministry.



### **Annual Retreats: A Sacred Time for Renewal**

The annual spiritual retreats are sacred moments set aside for spiritual renewal, deep reflection, and an intimate encounter with the Lord. They offer us a privileged opportunity to listen attentively to the Word of God, discern His will more clearly, purify our hearts and restore our relationship with Christ and rekindle our commitment to the young. The Annual Retreat schedule has already been shared with all confreres. In the month of March, two retreats have been planned namely:

a) **21<sup>st</sup> March to 26<sup>th</sup> March 2025** at Becchi Don Bosco, Kavrapettai, preached by Fr. Suresh Felix

b) **29<sup>th</sup> March to 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2025** at Becchi Don Bosco, Kavrapettai, preached by Fr. Jesudoss Periyannagayam.

We request all the retreatants to be present the previous evening for the orientation talk.

***NB: It is obligatory that each confrere should attend any one of the annual retreats organized by the province, even if they have participated in a spiritual retreat in other retreat centres during this academic year.***

### **Chronicles of the Community**

In accordance with article 176 of our constitution, and regulation 178, the Rector/Leader of the community should keep the archives in order and up to date and compile or see to compiling of the house chronicle. It can be done by the Rector or anyone assigned by the Rector/Leader of the community. This is essential for each institution to remember our legacy in the past and for our province who are on the road to our centenary celebration in 2034.

### **A New Digital Face for the INM Province: Revamped Website Now Live!**

With great joy, we announce the successful revamp and update of the **INM Province website**: [www.donboscochennai.org](http://www.donboscochennai.org). Thanks to the **tireless efforts of Bosco Information Service (BIS)** and the dedicated Salesians who spearheaded this initiative and to **BoscoSoft**, Yelagiri Hills for their invaluable cooperation in making this project a reality.

We encourage all confreres to explore the website regularly for the latest **news, updates, and activities from the province and its communities**. We request the BIS Correspondents of each community to send the news regularly with photos to Fr. Sathish Paul (9655446908/inmbis@inmsdb.com). A special **login feature** on the homepage is exclusively reserved for confreres. You can access additional features using your **INM App credentials (username and password)**.

May this renewed digital platform strengthen our communication, foster collaboration, and continue to be a source of inspiration for our Salesian mission!

### **Prayers for Our Students Facing Public Exams**

As the month of March approaches, it brings with it a crucial milestone in the academic journey of our students—the public examinations. **As** hundreds of young minds from our Salesian institutions prepare to take this important step, let us uphold them in our prayers, asking the Lord to grant them clarity of mind, confidence, and success in their endeavors.

On behalf of the Province, we extend our best wishes and heartfelt blessings to all our students. May they excel in their examinations and continue to grow in wisdom, knowledge,

and virtue. We thank all the teachers and Salesians who have tirelessly worked in preparing them for the public exams.

**Rest in Peace!**

**Rev.Br. George Joseph SDB** (aged 86) belonging to the Province of Trichy passed away on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2025. We offer our heartfelt condolences to the Provincial and the Confreres of Trichy province.

**Important dates and events in March 2025**

DATE	EVENTS
3, 4	Monthly Recollection
19	DBTC Diaconate Ordination @ Votive Shrine, Kilpauk, Chennai
21-26	Annual Spiritual Retreat 2 @ Becchi, Kavaraipeitai
29 - April 3	Annual Spiritual Retreat 3 @ Becchi, Kavaraipeitai

Fraternally in Don Bosco,



**Fr. Edwin Vasanthan SDB**  
INM Economer



Date: 01.03.2025

Place: Chennai – 10