



# PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

*Salesian Province of St. Joseph, Hyderabad*



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## Covid-19 and the Digital Re-evolution

Even before the advent of Covid-19, the world has witnessed the speed and scale of the digital revolution. Covid-19 has not only accelerated the spread of the digital revolution, but it has also led the humanity to re-evolve and re-invent itself within the digital space. Till recently the 'digital life' remained largely as an option, as something 'extra', and as strictly not essential for life. But today, due to the Covid-19 pandemic the 'digital' has taken the centre stage. The world is undergoing rapid digitalization. It has become all pervasive, to the extent that it is replacing our physical contact and encounters with virtual interactions. All of a sudden, the socialization is looked upon with trepidation. Philosopher Jean Paul Sartre's dictum, 'the other is my hell' seems to be the order of the day, although for a different reason. All physical interactions have come to a standstill, due to the fear of the virus and its contagion. All interactions have taken the virtual route.

Positively, the digital technology has come to our aid in this moment of enormous crisis. We live in times of great connectivity. The telecommunications and the Internet of Things have evolved to the extent that we are able to stay connected in real time and every place on earth has come next door. We cannot imagine the present Covid-stricken world without the digital technology or the social media. If the invisible virus has been spreading at lightning speed, the digital technology has been at the service of humanity in combating the virus. We are able to prevent it, cope with it and even conquer it using digital technology. Pope emeritus, Benedict XVI in his message for World Communications Day 2013, has said "The world of social communications, more and more has become a living environment for many, a web where people communicate with each other, expanding the boundaries of their knowledge and relationships."

The digital technology and social media helped humanity to roll back to normalcy to a great extent. Online classes, online meetings, video conferences, webinars, work from home, staying in touch with friends and family through telecommunication networks, entertainment at home through television, access to internet and instant information, etc., have helped us cope with the situation and limp back to normalcy, though not a hundred percent. In some areas, it has opened doors for a futuristic possibility of 'the digital way' in learning, working, relating and living. The communication platforms and social media networks have provided information and created awareness about the plight of the poor and those in need of help during the continuing Covid-19 crisis. As a result, people of goodwill have reached out in solidarity to the poor and the suffering. We too as a Province have utilized the digital technology to organize ourselves through various online meetings and webinars. Many communities and confreres have been reaching out to the faithful and young people through online Eucharistic celebrations, retreats and spiritual animation programmes. A good number of us are active on the digital play-ground offering youth services - accompanying young people and organizing many online meetings and competitions. Today we are not just using the digital technology. Every sphere of our life is affected by it:

positively and otherwise. The digital culture also brings with it several challenges. When we are excessively swamped by the digital culture, we may gradually lose the sense and the dignity of the other person. Virtual interactions, virtual learning platforms and workstations could estrange us from meaningful human interactions. Our engagement with the virtual world could lead to loneliness and depression. There is a sharp rise in the number of people affected by this overdose of the virtual/digital culture leading to stress and depression. In the recent past there is a spike in the number of suicides, even among the religious and priests.

Covid-19 has forced us to stay indoors, and for most part in our own rooms. Many of us have the so-called 'free time' in the absence of active ministry. This can favor the 'room culture' that leaves us all alone by ourselves. If we do not organize our time and set goals for ourselves for our growth, we could be lost in a virtual world. Some of us are already getting addicted to long hours of mobile conversations, continuous Internet surfing and at times visiting websites that are harmful. Long hours spent on virtual reality, social media platforms and social networks may gradually rob us of our ability to engage in meaningful relationships with others, of our ability to empathize, understand and even love. The quality of human life, lived in its fullness with all its experiences and affections, can be drastically reduced to 'functional relationships' leading to a 'robotic culture'.

We, humans are smart enough to assess the impact of the digital culture. If we are careful and cautious, we will use it to our advantage. The digital culture should enable us to face the challenges of the present crisis in the most effective way possible - using it for education, work, commerce, staying connected with our loved ones, reaching out to the needy, etc. We can utilize it effectively even to create public opinion and to encourage movements for social change. For instance, Greta Thunberg encouraged people to avoid large crowds and protest online, tagging their social media posts #DigitalStrike and #ClimateStrikeOnline. She tweeted: "We'll have to find new ways to create public awareness and advocate for change that don't involve too big crowds. Keep your numbers low but your spirits high and let's take one week at a time."

The fullness of our human life consists in our deep, profound relationships, interaction with others and being present physically, emotionally and spiritually to one another. Covid-19 will perhaps cement the road to a more digital world in the future. That in no way should make us less human. We, as leaders will have to move towards digital transformation. Today we find most young people living in the virtual space. This has brought about several challenges in their own personal lives, in their relationships, in their families and in the society at large. As youth ministers and shepherds of the young, we are to accompany our young people who are lost in the digital space. The Holy Father Pope Francis has invited the entire Church to use the different means of social communication to bring people to Christ (address to the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, September 2013). The primary aim of our youth ministry is to bring the good news of Jesus to young people and to bring young people to Jesus. Let this lock-down period enable us to explore and utilize the digital technologies for transformation of ourselves and our young people.

#### TEN GREEN COMMANDMENTS OF LAUDATO SI'

##### Commandment I - Take Care of Our Common Home in Peril

In our response to Laudato Si' year, we have decided to have the presentation of the "Ten Green Commandments of Laudato Si'" a book written by our confrere Fr Joshtrom Kureethadam, which is a commentary on 'Laudato Si', the encyclical of Pope Francis on caring for our common home. Commencing from this month of August, we will be reflecting on a commandment each in the ten

successive months. On the first Monday of every month, there will be a presentation of a commandment. Here is a brief summary of the first commandment. The first commandment "Take care of our common home in peril" describes the physical crisis of our common home. Earth is referred to as a 'common home' for all life introducing a paradigm shift in the way we have viewed the earth. This commandment invites us to reflect and examine the main physical manifestations of the crisis of our common home as outlined in the encyclical: pollution and waste, climate change and its impacts, the depletion of natural resources especially the scarcity of fresh drinking water, and the unprecedented scales of biodiversity loss. Pope Francis warns that we risk the danger of leaving an uninhabitable planetary home for future generations if we are not willing to change radically the course of our current civilization.

The program prepared by the Laudato si' sub-commission of the Province from July 2020 to May 2021 is attached to this Circular. I thank Fr Maliekal Jose, Fr Dasari Nireekshan and all their collaborators for their efforts, initiatives and animation in helping us live the Laudato Si' year more meaningfully and creatively through relevant interventions, lines of action and online presentations.

#### NEW VATICAN DOCUMENT ON PARISH REFORM

The Congregation for Clergy in Rome issued new instructions on parish reform on July 20, 2020 proposing ways to restructure parishes that face priest shortages and financial difficulties. The document states that the goal of parish reform is to move parishes from a "self-preservation" model to an evangelizing one. The document, entitled "The pastoral conversion of the parish community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the church," focuses primarily on questions of parish structure. The document aims to encourage parishes to think of themselves as missionary communities of evangelization. The guidelines do not publish new norms or policies for parish life, but they do encourage Catholics to think prayerfully about what their parishes are, and what they're for. Here are a few important themes. Please find the entire document attached to this circular.

The parish is a mission. The guidelines offer parishes "a call to go out of themselves, offering instruments for reform, even structural, in a spirit of communion and collaboration, of encounter and closeness, of mercy and solicitude for the proclamation of the Gospel." "Since its inception, the Parish is envisioned as a response to a precise pastoral need, namely that of bringing the Gospel to the People through the proclamation of the faith and the celebration of the Sacraments," the document says. To meet its mission, "a renewed vitality is required that favors the rediscovery of the vocation of the baptized as a disciple of Jesus Christ and a missionary of the Gospel." Especially in parts of the world where many people do not know or practice the faith, the document encourages parishes to discern how to think of themselves as missionary communities, and how to focus on proclaiming the Gospel to all who will hear.

The Eucharist and the poor should be central to parish life. "The celebration of the Eucharistic mystery is 'the source and summit of the whole Christian life' and accordingly, the essential moment for building up the Parish community," the guidelines instruct. The Mass should be the center of parish life, the document says, and the place from which the parish receives its mission. In the Mass, the parish "welcomes the living presence of the Crucified and Risen Lord, receiving the announcement of the entire mystery of salvation." And, the document says, the poor should be invited to the heart of parish life. "A 'sanctuary' open to all, the Parish, called to reach out to everyone, without exception, should remember that the poor and excluded must always have a privileged place in the heart of the Church," the document says. "The Parish community

evangelizes and is evangelized by the poor, discovering anew the call to preach the Word in all settings, whilst recalling the 'supreme law' of charity, by which we shall all be judged."

Territoriality matters, but can't be a limit. Most parishes are defined by territory. With few exceptions, a parish is, properly speaking, the communion of the baptized within the limits of a certain territory, which is defined by the bishop. In the West, that concept has mostly been forgotten, Catholics tend to go to Mass at the parish where they feel most welcomed or fed, and despite encouragement from some bishops, many Sunday Mass goers don't know about parish boundaries. The Congregation for Clergy's guidelines recognize that reality. "Increased mobility and the digital culture have expanded the confines of existence," the guidelines state, "people are less associated today with a definite and immutable geographical context, and "digital culture has inevitably altered the concept of space, together with people's language and behavior, especially in younger generations." But the document insists that territoriality matters. That "interpersonal relationships risk being dissolved into a virtual world without any commitment or responsibility towards one's neighbor."

Still, the guidelines say, a parish's mission doesn't end at its territorial boundaries. In light of a changing world, "any pastoral action that is limited to the territory of the Parish is outdated." In short, the guidelines urge Catholics to think of their parishes as a community, with obligations of neighbors to one another, who share a mission to proclaim the Gospel together, beyond the limits of their own community.

Structures are for mission, but bureaucracy kills. The guidelines emphasize that while the parish needs policies, programs, and structures to fulfill its mission, it must "avoid the risk of falling into an excessive and bureaucratic organization of events and an offering of services that do not express the dynamic of evangelization." To overcome a tendency towards bureaucratization and formalization of the Church's sacramental and catechetical life "conversion of structures, which the Church must undertake, requires a significant change in mentality and an interior renewal, especially among those entrusted with the responsibility of pastoral leadership." The guidelines also urge dioceses to consider developing new structures and roles that can coordinate activity between parishes, especially those in close geographic proximity to each other.

Responsibility for the parish mission belongs to everyone, but each has a role to play. The document emphasizes the co-responsibility of clergy, religious, and laity for the mission of the parish in the world. But the document also emphasizes that each person work for the Kingdom in the role to which he is called by baptism and vocation. The guidelines emphasize that the parish pastor is entrusted with the full "care of souls" in the parish, a role unique to priests. The document acknowledges a canonical provision that allows lay people to be entrusted with pastoral care in a parish because of a shortage of priests, but emphasizes that such a situation should be rare, and "a temporary and not a permanent measure," that can only be used when there is a true lack of priests. "We are dealing here with an extraordinary form of entrusting pastoral care, due to the impossibility of appointing a Parish Priest or a Parish Administrator, which is not to be confused with the ordinary active cooperation of the lay faithful in assuming their responsibilities." "Furthermore, it would be preferable to appoint one or more deacons over consecrated men and women or laypersons for directing this kind of pastoral care," the guidelines suggest.

The document takes care to urge against the “clericalization of the laity” so frequently warned about by Pope Francis, in which laity are urged to take up roles more typically occupied by priests. At the same, the document says that laity are called to give their lives to the mission of the Gospel and the work of the Church. Laity are called “to make a generous commitment to the service of the mission of evangelization, first of all through the general witness of their daily lives, lived in conformity with the Gospel, in whatever environment they are in and at every level of responsibility; in a particular way, they are called to place themselves at the service of the Parish community.” The guidelines also encourage a vision of deacons as ministers of service, rather than as assistants to parish priests, and of religious men and women as contributors to the evangelizing mission of a parish through the witness of their religious consecration.

“Outgoing dynamism” - The guidelines conclude with a call for “outgoing dynamism” that directs parishes toward an evangelizing mission, the task of the entire People of God, that walks through history as the “family of God” and that, in the synergy of its diverse members, labors for the growth of the entire ecclesial body. It urges that “the Parish might rediscover itself as a fundamental place of evangelical proclamation, of the celebration of the Eucharist, a place of fraternity and charity, from which Christian witnesses can shine for the world.”

#### SAD DEMISE OF CL MATHANGI AKILESH BABU

All of us were shocked and saddened to hear of the news of the sudden demise of our young confrere, Cl Mathangi Akilesh Babu on July 15, 2020 at P.T. Paruru. It was heart-breaking to see him end his life in such an abrupt and shocking manner. He was suffering from many psychological hurts right from his childhood and was vexed with life, as he had written in his letter. We express deep sentiments of oneness and gratitude especially to the Community of PT Paruru for dealing with this tragedy courageously with the support of confreres from Guntur, Mangalagiri, Pezzonipet and Gunadala. We offer our deep condolences and prayerful support to his dear parents, his brother and family members.

Cl. Mathangi Akilesh Babu was born on August 11, 1996 at Bommuluru, Krishna Dt. Andhra Pradesh. He was a pre-novice at Gunadala from May 2016 to May 2017 and a novice at Sacred Heart Novitiate, Manoharabad from May 2017 to May 2018. Having made his first profession on May 24, 2018, he moved to Don Bosco Philosophate, Karunapuram for studies in philosophy. After completing his philosophical studies, he was sent to Don Bosco Mission, P.T. Paruru for the first year of Practical Training, where he took this extreme step. In his Salesian journey he has not expressed or revealed anything about the suffering that he was enduring due to childhood hurts. We pray for our deceased confrere, Cl. Akilesh that God, in his abundant mercy and love, may grant him eternal rest.

#### CONTINUED PRECAUTIONS IN THE MIDST OF COVID

As you have been already informed, our confrere, Fr Donthireddy Raja, having been treated for Covid infection at St. Theresa’s Hospital, Hyderabad is now back in the Community at DBNJ Ramanthapur under an extended period of house quarantine. As we pray for him, let us continue to extend our prayerful support to all our senior and sick confreres, who are more vulnerable to this infection. Fr Joseph Abraham is stable at the moment after overcoming a serious complication in the recent past about which all confreres had been duly informed. Fr T.D. John is recovering well. Fr M.T. Sebastian has returned to PARA after being treated at St. Joseph’s Hospital, Guntur for chest congestion. Kindly continue to keep them in your prayers, as the rapid spread of Covid-19 is a concern for all of us and especially for the sick and elderly confreres who are more vulnerable to the contagion. Fr Michael the senior most confrere of the Province is

healthy and happy at Gunadala. Fr Chacko and Fr T V Thomas are also doing well, thanks to their respective communities for extending such wonderful care and love to them.

I commend to your prayers all our confreres in other Provinces, who are recovering from Corona virus infection. We have already received the grim news of the Corona virus infection of 9 of our confreres of INC Province including Fr Pauria, the Provincial, the Vice Provincial and the Economer of the Province. Let us pray for their speedy recovery. Fr K.M. Jose, Provincial of the Chennai Province has recovered and is in the Provincial House, while the Vice Provincial, Fr Bosco Lourdasamy was serious, but now he too is on the road to recovery. Let us assure them of our prayers.

In the light of the spread of Corona virus infections to which our Provinces are also badly exposed, it is very important that we take necessary precautionary and preventive measures. I would like to remind each one of you dear confreres to be responsible for your own health and take all the safety precautions. I invite all the rectors and in-charges to remind the confreres of the community to restrict their movements and to take precautions. Let us practice what we know best - prevention. Kindly heed to the following directions.

### 1. Isolation Facilities in the Province

Don Bosco Navajeevan Ramanthapur and BIRD building in Guntur have been proposed as the isolation facilities of the Province to take care of confreres who show mild symptoms of Covid-19. These facilities can be fitted with necessary equipment; we can avail ourselves of the services of a local medical team from hospitals like St. Theresa's Hospital in Sanathnagar, Vijay Maire Hospital in Hyderabad and St. Joseph's Hospital in Guntur based on a prior agreement with them.

While it is true that local communities are already taking care and necessary precautions and social distancing norms are being followed, it should be stressed that each confrere takes responsibility for his movements outside the community and personal hygiene so as not to throw the entire community into the danger of contagion. Every community must ensure that the basic medical kits are available in the Community consisting of thermal screens, oximeters, sanitizers, masks, medicine, etc.

In addition to these directions, proposals and suggestions, it should be remembered by all that prevention is better than cure and that any treatment for Covid is very expensive running into thousands of rupees per day. At the same time, let every confrere be assured that the Province will do its best to take care of any sick confrere.

### 2. Dangers of Social Isolation

In the absence of our regular ministries, kindly engage our young confreres in formation and also our young priests in creative activities that help them to be occupied and to grow as human beings and Salesians. If you notice that they are overly passive, look disturbed, are confining themselves for long periods to their rooms, etc. the leaders of communities should consider it their duty to reach out, offer support and accompany them in the best way possible. We have to be aware of the fact that in this situation of social isolation, zero activity/ministry, excessive amounts of free time, etc., our confreres also can be lured into so many unhealthy practices and relationships especially on social media platforms. We have to keep our eyes open and protect our confreres from these internet-related dangers.

### 3. Avoid unnecessary Travel

I have already instructed all the confreres to avoid home holidays and also not to travel for various functions at home or in the parishes. The other members of the community deserve to stay safe in these circumstances. Hence I strongly urge you dear confreres to avoid all travel which is not essential.

#### 4. Staff salaries:

- The Province has so far used a two-pronged approach in these months of lockdown and pandemic: those working regularly in our offices, institutions are paid their regular salaries; those who are not teaching or who take only a few online classes per day or who work from home, etc., are paid 50 percent or 70 percent of their salary as per the local resources of the communities.
- However, this approach may have to change in the future, especially from August 2020. The proposal is that wherever our staff members (teachers, catechists, instructors, etc.) are not attending to their duties, we can consider the possibility of contributing Rs. 3000 thousand in rural areas and Rs. 4000 in urban areas for the month of August 2020 towards their sustenance.
- A social analysis of our staff members is to be made and discussed by local communities and proposals of contribution to the staff, to be made depending on their resources and possible income in the future.
- While we are keen on taking care of our staff members, we should be careful not to make any promises of continuous financial help. Our financial help to our staff members has to be reviewed every month and a decision has to be made by communities corresponding to their financial status.
- And so all communities are requested to discuss and make their proposals to Fr Provincial, who with his Council will finally take a call on this issue.
- It is important to do this exercise so that the entire Province can have a uniform policy across our schools and institutions avoiding scandalous disparities between one institution and another.

#### 5. Annual auditing

- Our practice has so far been that our bills are vouched and an official audit statement is prepared by auditors (excel sheet) and sent to the Ministry. We can now expect that this practice may be completely dropped in the future, making it necessary for the Economist's office staff to vouch the bills and send an excel sheet to auditors, who will then send it to the respective Ministry.
- Therefore, internal auditing is a good practice which we have already started and it will certainly address the above-mentioned challenge.
- We can even think of having internal audit every quarter, vouch the bills, close that financial quarter and give corrections as well, making the entire process expedient and less burdensome.
- In this regard all the communities are encouraged (Rectors and Administrators) to keep the bills and documents ready as per the directions given you in April 2020 from Economist's office.
- These bills and documents will be collected from respective communities, brought to Provincial House for vouching and an excel sheet will be prepared and sent to auditors.
- Every confrere and community is once again encouraged not to flout the regulations that have been put in place, about which so many reminders have been given: TDS has to be deducted; more than Rs. 10,000 cannot be paid in cash; issuing cheques to individuals in their name without Accounts Payable is equal to self cheque, etc.

#### 6. Common IDs

Common IDs have been created for all the offices of the Communities and official communication will have to happen only through these IDs. However, a window period is provided till November

2020 after which these IDs will fully come into effect and all official communication will happen through these email IDs only. These email IDs will be printed in the new Province Directory as well.

#### UPCOMING PROVINCE MEETINGS

August 03	Webinar on the First Green Commandment of Laudato Si'
August 10	Provincial Council with Young Priests
August 11	Provincial Council
August 13	"Getting to know the Green Alliance" Presentation by Rev. Fr Silveira Savio, INB Provincial
August 15	Solemnity of the Assumption of the BVM and Independence Day
August 17	Clerics/Brothers' Online Meet
August 21	Death Anniversary of Fr V.T. John
August 27	Death Anniversary of Fr Benjamin Pudota

#### SALESIAN SANCTITY IN AUGUST

August 02	Blessed Augustus Czarторыski, priest
August 25	Blessed Maria Troncatti, FMA
August 26	Blessed Ceferino Namuncura, lay person

#### CONDOLENCES

We offer our heartfelt condolences:

- to all our confreres and to the family members of CI Mathangi Akilesh Babu who died on July 15, 2020;
- to the Provincial and confreres of the Province of Kolkata at the death of Fr Mathew Manianchira on July 17, 2020 and Fr Jose Aymanathil on July 19, 2020;
- to the Provincial superior and the FMA sisters of the Province of Madras at the demise of Sr Victorina Gnanapragasam on July 21, 2020;
- to the Provincial and confreres of the Province of Dimapur at the unexpected death of Fr Joseph Kaippallimyalil on July 27, 2020.

May the Blessed Lord in his mercy receive them into His heavenly inheritance and grant us the constant support of their intercession!

#### CONCLUSION

In 1950, five years after the end of the carnage of the Second World War, Pius XII promulgated the doctrine of the Assumption. A few years before millions of human beings, made in the image and likeness of God had been consigned to oblivion and literally gone up in smoke. The doctrine of the Assumption teaches the value of an individual human life to the rest of humanity. The Pope declared in the apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* that 'the Immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever Virgin, on completing the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul to heavenly glory.' The human being who most reflected the splendor of her Son's humanity and his obedient response to the Father's will did not undergo separation from him. She who was at his side on the Way of the Cross and who accepted the role of Mother of the Church at the foot of the cross was called to his side in heavenly glory. Preserved by grace from the alienation of Original Sin she was never separated from him.

We live in an atomized society conditioned by the notion of the 'selfish gene' bound up always in the lonely competitive struggle for survival. Yet, our lives begin in the closest possible association with another human being: our mothers. The bond between mother and child begins and is deepened even in the womb. Our mother is everything to us. We depend on her for warmth, nourishment and are soothed by the reassuring beating of her heart. We are linked to our mothers through the placenta which is constructed of cells from both mother and child. It is a joint creation. Through it life-giving elements are shared. Recent medical research has suggested that cells migrate through the placenta between the mother and the fetus, taking up residence in many organs of the body. Cells from one person may integrate into the tissues of another, even into the brains of a separate individual. In the world of gregarious solitude in which many live it may come as a surprise to realize that we are closer to another than we ever knew. This union also characterized the relationship of the Lord to his mother.

The resurrection of Christ proclaims that his body did not know decay. The Assumption of Mary proclaims the same truth. Mary was taken up to be where Christ is: 'where I am you may be also.' (Jn.14.3) Mary's assumption is dependent upon the ascension of Jesus. Mary is related to her Son through the grace of election and purity which she enjoyed from the first moment of her creation. The maternal filial relationship enjoyed by the Lord with his mother is an image of that unity within the Trinity: an exchange of giving and receiving, of loving and witnessing. Mary's Assumption is a consequence of her maternal relationship to her Son, that life and that flesh in which they shared cannot know decay. Their communion was of the closest and not even death can separate them.

"Mary, who is a human creature, one of us, reaches eternity in body and soul", said Pope Francis. This is why we invoke her as the "Gate of Heaven". "There she awaits us, just as a mother waits for her children to come home". We are like pilgrims on our way home to Heaven. Seeing that "in paradise, together with Christ, the New Adam, there is also Mary, the new Eve, gives us comfort and hope in our pilgrimage down here". May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Gate of Heaven, help us daily to fix our gaze with confidence "on the place where our true home lies".

Wish you all a very happy feast of Assumption and a meaningful anniversary of our Independence Day.

Yours in the Lord,



Fr Thathireddy Vijaya Bhaskar,  
Provincial

