

## The presence of don Bosco in the undivided diocese of mangalore before the arrival of the salesians

Philomena D'SOUZA\*

### Introduction

The original Mangalore vicariate, erected in 1674, comprised of a vast territory spread across from Karwar to Calicut on the western coast of India<sup>1</sup>. At different stages of its history, 11 new dioceses were carved out of it. But when I refer to the undivided diocese of Mangalore, I basically refer to the Mangalore diocese just prior to its division with the Udupi diocese which took place on 16 July 2012. The Mangalorean Catholic Community spread across the world mostly identifies itself as originally belonging to the geographical area of these two dioceses. As per the Catholic Directory of India 2013, the total geographic area of these two dioceses is: 9804sq.kms and the total Catholic population is: 325,000 forming about 8.33% of the total population; (this count of course excludes the Catholic Christians of Syro-malabar and Syro-malankara Rites as well as the Christians belonging to various other evangelical churches who also reside within the same geographical territory).<sup>2</sup>

The Diocese of Mangalore occupies a pride of place in the ecclesiastical map of India. From its inception as an independent diocese in 1887, it has given to the Indian and Universal Church more than 43 bishops and over 4,000 priests and religious men and women who are working through the length and breadth of India as well as in most countries of the world.<sup>3</sup> The diocese itself has adopted mission territories like Bidar in north Karnataka and Same in Tanzania.<sup>4</sup> The Mangalorean Catholic Community has shown much leadership in nation-building providing quality leadership in religious, secular, political, corporate, cultural and social fields.

In this context it is indeed interesting to explore the interest Don Bosco evinced in desiring to send missionaries to Mangalore as early as 1876 while it was still a Vicariate Apostolic. Although his dreams did not materialise in his life time and the Salesians set foot in Mangalore diocese as recently as 1997 (while the FMA in 1985), it is amazing to come across a variety of Institutions and Organisations, both religious, educational and cultural, named after Don Bosco already well-known in Mangalore as the Saint of youth.

This article initially presents Don Bosco's keen interest in sending his Salesians as missionaries to the diocese of Mangalore as it becomes clearer from an attentive reading of the *Memorie Biografiche* (MB). Although the project itself did not materialise, on hindsight it seems as if Don Bosco did succeed in coming into this diocese and reach out to a large portion of young people. In fact, we shall see a cross section of Institutions and Organisations associated with Don Bosco which were started mostly by the diocesan and/or religious clergy along with the co-operation of lay faithful which clearly proves the impact of Don Bosco's charism has had even beyond the FMA/SDB circles.

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\* Sr. Philomena D'Souza INB - India.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, pp.3-6.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *The Catholic Directory of India 2013*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore 2013, p.1367, p.2099; cf. *Kurpechimp*.108

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Kurpechim* pp.92-102, 172.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, p.113; *Kurpechimp*.117-122

## 1. The presence of Don Bosco in the undivided diocese of Mangalore

Mangalore was erected as a vicariate as early as 1645. But due to constant political instability, it would get tossed across between the Padroado jurisdiction of Goa and the Propaganda jurisdiction of Verapoly, often resulting in a situation of double jurisdiction. Hence, in 1840, under the leadership of Joachim Pius Noronha, a Mangalorean Catholic priest, and John Joseph Saldanha, a Mangalorean Catholic judge, the Mangalorean Catholics sent a petition to the Holy See to establish Mangalore as an independent Vicariate.<sup>5</sup> Conceding to these repeated requests, in 1853 Pope Pius IX declared Mangalore as an independent Vicariate Apostolic. From 1845 to 1873 three Carmelite Vicars Apostolic governed Mangalore.<sup>6</sup> During this period, the Mangalorean Catholics constantly sent up memorandums to the Holy See to send Jesuits to Mangalore to start institutions for higher education, since students frequently had to go to Bombay or Madras (which were almost a 1000kms away) for higher education.<sup>7</sup> When the Carmelites left Mangalore, it once again fell in a situation of *sede vacante*. In fact from 1873 when Bishop Marie Ephrem OCD died till 1878 when the Vicariate was entrusted to the Italian Jesuits of Venice province once again Mangalore experienced an “unsettled condition which seriously hampered the spiritual and temporal well-being of the region”.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.1 Relationship between Don Bosco and the Mangalore Vicariate in the MB

When we go through the MB it becomes clear that it is exactly during this period of *sede vacante* that Pope Pius IX is requesting Don Bosco to send his Salesians to Mangalore and Don Bosco seriously considers the possibility of accepting such a proposal.

The following are some of the references that we come across in the MB:

The MB Vol. XII (English edition) which deals with the year 1876 opens with Don Bosco’s cherished desire of establishing mission stations in India and Australia. It reads: “Undismayed by the difficulties of the English language, he felt that his sons could manage it through practice rather than theory. For a few months they were to master a vocabulary of common words; then they were to practice conversation in gradual steps; finally they were to perfect their pronunciation under a teacher”.<sup>9</sup>

He articulates his thoughts as follows: “I foresee that soon we shall have language courses here at the Oratory for the missions. We could proceed this way: all those desiring to work in the foreign missions would add to their curriculum the study of the Spanish, French or English languages [...] Thus I hope, we might achieve our goal with little trouble”.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, the topic returns once again in February 1876 when Don Bosco presents his Annual Report of the Congregation at the meeting of the Rectors. He speaks of the first missionary expedition which had left on 14 November 1875. He speaks of the numerous requests to open new foundations among which he mentions once again Australia, China and India.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, p.7; Cf. FARIAS p.92.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, pp.7, 17

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Indica*, Vol.25(1988)144, Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, St. Xavier's College Bombay.

<sup>8</sup> *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, p.8.

<sup>9</sup> CERIA E., *The Biographical Memoirs XII (1876)*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York 1980, p.4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* p.5.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Ibid* p.58.

In the months of April-May 1876, Don Bosco makes a long trip to Rome and has three audiences (on 15 April, 3 May and 11 May)<sup>12</sup> with Pope Pius IX who receives him with much benevolence. The real purpose of this visit was to obtain privileges from the Holy See which other Congregations enjoy that would help the Salesians to be more effective in their ministry.<sup>13</sup> However, besides granting the said privileges Pius IX also asks Don Bosco to take up the missions in India, China and Australia. Don Bosco is so happy that the very next day of his first audience viz. on 16 April 1876 (the Easter Sunday), he writes to Fr. Rua and reports quoting the words of Pius IX: “But missionaries are also urgently needed in Australia, India and China, where many mission stations are about to close for lack of personnel.<sup>14</sup> [...] Could you take over one or more missions in those lands?”<sup>15</sup> Don Bosco’s response was: “If Your Holiness will bless our students and pray for us, we could hopefully accept some soon. Father Bologna, one of our priests, and several others, who already know French and Spanish fairly well, are now studying English.”<sup>16</sup>

After 10 days, Don Bosco, still in Rome, writes to Fr. Cagliari, then in Argentina, telling him that the Holy Father had offered to the Salesians three apostolic vicariates in India, one in China, and one in Australia. Don Bosco writes that he has accepted one of them in India and had requested at least eighteen months to prepare the personnel. So he suggests Fr. Cagliari to attend to the immediate needs of the missions in Argentina and then return to Europe to establish one house in Rome, and then make a trip to India.<sup>17</sup>

Don Bosco returns from Rome on 17 May and on that very evening he gives a *Good Night* to his boys and shares with them the news about his audience with the Holy Father. Among other things, he tells them that the Holy Father had offered him “a vicariate in India, where there are vast harvests to reap”.<sup>18</sup>

About two weeks later, during the above-mentioned conference that was held on June 4<sup>th</sup>, Don Bosco gives a few more details about this project. He tells them that the Holy Father had offered the Salesians twelve apostolic vicariates in India which were about to fold up for lack of personnel. Each of them needed a bishop and priests. Since the Pope was insisting that Don Bosco accept one such vicariate, Don Bosco seriously considered it for a while and then said: “If such is your will, Holy Father, I accept it, but only after twenty months from the day I will receive all pertinent documents”.<sup>19</sup>

Don Bosco then addresses his audience and says: “Those of you who wish to go to India have twenty months to get ready”. Don Bosco clarifies further saying, “but remember that this means twenty months from the delivery of the pertinent documents which won’t arrive until September. Thus we have two years to prepare ourselves. [...]”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Ibid* pp.136, 149.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Ibid* pp.159-160.

<sup>14</sup> On 24 March 1876, the Vicariate of Mangalore was placed once again under Verapoly and Fr. Victor of St. Anthony was appointed Pro-administrator Apostolic Cf. *Diocese* p.8. This situation seemed to be very much present to Pius IX when he insistently keeps asking Don Bosco to accept at least one Vicariate of India. As the conversation proceeds it becomes clearer that Pius IX was referring to Mangalore.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *MB XII*, p.137.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Ibid*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Ibid* pp.147-148.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Ibid* p156.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Ibid* p.161.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Ibid*.

In January 1877, Don Bosco once again has three papal audiences, on 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup>,<sup>21</sup> but we are not sure if there was any further conversation about the proposal regarding the missions of India. However, writing once more to Fr. Cagliario while still in Rome, he says: “Let us see what we can do about two requests I have received from the Holy Father”.<sup>22</sup> He goes on to elaborate about the new vicariate apostolic in Patagonia and rather abruptly proposes to Fr. Cagliario that he ask Monsignor Ceccarelli to head it. Then rhetorically he asks: “And what about Fr. Cagliario? We shall accept the vicariate apostolic of Mengador<sup>23</sup> in India, and Father Cagliario will be the vicar apostolic, Father Bologna the vicar general, and so on. According to Cardinal Franchi the vicariate numbers some three million souls. [...] We can easily train [...] ten priests and ten catechists for India. God will do the rest”.<sup>24</sup>

During the Annual Conference held on 5 – 6 February 1877, Don Bosco reiterates the proposal saying: “We have started negotiations for houses in India and Australia, and I must start preparing personnel, but there is no rush for that”.<sup>25</sup> Soon after, on 13 Feb.1877, writing to Father Cagliario reminds him once again: “Try to put all your affairs in order, and when you feel that things can run smoothly by themselves, set a date for your return, not later than next August, and let me know”.<sup>26</sup> Continuing the same letter he says that if there should be any formal requests for missionaries from Brazil or Paraguay to hold on till 1878. In the very next para, he clarifies the reason: he says, “The Holy Father has offered us an apostolic vicariate in India and another in Australia. For the moment I have agreed to send some missionaries to Ceylon in 1878”.<sup>27</sup>

However, by May 1877 there seems to be a complete change of plans. Writing to Cagliario from Turin on 12 May 1877, among other things Don Bosco declares: “**Since the number of houses is on the rise with a corresponding decrease in personnel, I shall shelve plans for Ceylon, Mangalore, Australia etc., until your return**”.<sup>28</sup>

Although Don Bosco makes a conditional statement *until your return*, the India project seemed to have been shelved for good at least as far as Don Bosco was concerned. It would take another 30 years for the Sons of Don Bosco to reach India. And finally when they do come in 1906, it would be neither Ceylon, nor Mangalore, but Tanjore in Tamilnadu.<sup>29</sup>

### 1.1.1 Possible Reasons for abandoning the Mangalore Project

It was indeed a very abrupt ending to a project which was gradually taking shape in the mind and heart of Don Bosco. It is obvious that Don Bosco had too many things on his plate. And yet, he seemed to have been keen on sending missionaries to India, even before he accepted the proposal of Pius IX in April 1876. And he had so much of regard and devotion to Pope Pius IX that he would have gone to any length even to fulfill a mere wish of the Holy Father.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. CERIA E, *The Biographical Memoirs XIII (1877)*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York 1983, p.5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid* p.19

<sup>23</sup> The footnote no.26 *MB XIII* p.19 corrects it saying, “Read Mangalore” [Author]. Cf. *Ibid*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid* p.61.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid* p.122.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid* p.123.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid* p.124.

<sup>29</sup> The first Salesian presence in Mangalore at Pavur is as recent as 1997, more than a hundred years later.

So could there also have been other reasons for abandoning the project? In the face of lack of documentation, we can only conjecture some hypotheses based on circumstantial evidence:

1. It could be that Don Bosco temporarily postponed the project since he knew he had still more than a year at his disposal, and perhaps, his lieutenant Cagliero could not take leave from Patagonia at such an early stage of its inception. Meanwhile, Pope Pius IX who had entrusted the project to Don Bosco passed away on 7 February 1878. In the changed circumstances, perhaps Don Bosco could not get the continued ecclesiastical support needed to proceed with such a venture. Hence he must have suspended the project indefinitely.
2. There is no documentation in the diocesan archives of Mangalore that supports any correspondence between Don Bosco and the diocese or the people of Mangalore. Perhaps it is Pius IX who directly offered this mission to Don Bosco being aware that the people of Mangalore were looking for a congregation that would cater to the education of their boys, and Don Bosco and his Salesians, would be able to live up to these expectations. Hence, perhaps initially Don Bosco himself was not fully aware of the real expectations of the people of Mangalore.
3. As we have seen earlier, since 1840 the Catholics of Mangalore were constantly sending memorandums to the Holy See to have the Jesuits to start institutions of higher education in Mangalore.<sup>30</sup> Thus we see Pope Leo XIII (who assumes office on 20 February 1878) as early as 27 September 1878 entrusts the Mangalore Mission to the care of the Italian Jesuits of the Venice province, and they land in Mangalore on 31 December 1878.<sup>31</sup> The people generously donate them the land and money needed to start St. Aloysius College which begins classes in January 1880.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps only at a later date, Don Bosco became aware of this huge expectation of the people of Mangalore and realised that he did not have the necessary human and material resources needed to undertake such a challenging venture or perhaps that his idea of foreign missions did not match with this sort of expectations.

## **2. Institutions and Organisations named after Don Bosco**

This part deals with the central theme of this research viz. mapping the different Institutions and organisations started in the name of Don Bosco in the undivided diocese of Mangalore before the arrival of the FMA and SDB. The Author personally visited these places and met the people who started or who are carrying on these works and gathered a lot of significant material that throws light on the beginnings of these activities. The entire research clearly brings to light the impact the figure and spirituality of Don Bosco has had outside the circle of SDB and FMA Congregations.

### **2.1 The Don Bosco Higher Primary School Shirva 1934**

As the history of Don Bosco Higher Primary School is intertwined with the history of Christianity in Shirva, here below I shall briefly give the background history of the school.

#### **2.1.1 The background history of Church Primary School Shirva 1898**

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<sup>30</sup>With the arrival of St. Francis Xavier, the Jesuits had come to India (Goa) as early as 1542. They started Colleges for University level education in Calcutta (1814), Trichy (1844), Bombay (1858), Bangalore (1858), etc. Hence, the people of Mangalore desired that the Jesuits take over the Mangalore Mission and start a University level College for the education of their boys.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, p.8; Cf. FARIAS p.113.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Official Website of St. Aloysius College Mangalore [www.stalloysius.edu.in/](http://www.stalloysius.edu.in/)

The Don Bosco Higher Primary School Shirva was originally started as "Church Primary School" on 1 February 1898 with just four standards. It was founded by Fr. Nicholas Cornerio of the Upper Church of St. Francis Xavier and housed in the building, south of the Church. It was meant to cater to the children of the surrounding villages.<sup>33</sup>

In 1910, Fr. Gregory I. G. D'Souza of the N.S. de Saude Church along with Fr. Casmir Fernandes of the Upper Church brought about the reconciliation between the two Churches and united the parish into one. As a result of the understanding reached between the parishioners of the two parishes, both the Padrovado and Propaganda churches were demolished and a new Church dedicated to N.S. de Saude was built in 1915. It was located close to the then "Church Primary School". Fr. Gregory I. G. D'Souza became the first parish priest of the unified Church and the new Correspondent of the school. He succeeded in raising the School to the level of higher primary school with eight standards. Thanks to his efforts, on 1 December 1919 the school got the permanent recognition from the government of Madras.<sup>34</sup>

### **2.1.2 The transformation of the Church Primary School Shirva (1898) into Don Bosco Higher Primary School in 1934**

In 1932, Bishop Victor Fernandes of the Mangalore diocese founded the Catholic Board of Education and brought all the parish schools under its management. Fr. Reginald Pinto who was the Correspondent and Parish Priest of Shirva, handed over the management of the 3 parish schools (located in three different places) to the Catholic Board without consulting the parishioners. There was much resentment and anger among the people of Shirva who felt a sense of betrayal by the Church authorities.<sup>35</sup> It is in this context that in 1934 Fr. Hillary Gonsalves, nicknamed *The architect of modern Shirva*, was brought in as the parish priest to pacify the people. Fr. Hilary worked for four decades in Shirva and brought about a veritable transformation of the place. He was ably assisted by Fr. Valerian Colaco as the Headmaster of the School. Both the parish and school records say that Fr. Valerian was an ardent devotee of Don Bosco and, therefore, in 1934 the name of the school was changed to Don Bosco Higher Primary School (DBHPS). Two facts make us believe that this change of name was not a casual one: 1. usually, most parish schools in Mangalore bear the patronal name of the Parish and the Shirva Parish has had a very historic and unique patron, the *Saude Mai*. 2. The year 1934 is very significant as it was the year of Don Bosco's canonisation. Hence possibly it must have been the conscious decision of the two priests to present the young people of Shirva with Don Bosco as their patron, a Saint born and brought up in a rural context and struggled for his early education, with whom the young people of Shirva could easily identify themselves. The school web-site in fact says that the period when Fr. Gonsalves was the Correspondent and Fr. Valerian Colaco was the Headmaster was the Golden Age of DBHPS. The school was much appreciated by the Education Department and it was a matter of

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. TAURO Benedict, *Don Bosco Hiriya Prathamika Shale Shirva*, in *Vidyasagara, Centenary Souvenir 1898 – 1998*, pp.37-41.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. **Official website of Shirva Parish**: [http://www.ourladyofhealth.com/our\\_parish/our\\_history.htm](http://www.ourladyofhealth.com/our_parish/our_history.htm)

<sup>35</sup> It is known as the *black spot* in the history of Shirva. After the Sunday Mass, the people forcefully locked the parish doors and appropriated its keys and tension prevailed for over two months. Cf. FERNANDES Julian, *A Hundred Years of Blessings*, in *Centenary Souvenir of Our Lady of Health Church Shirva 1915-2015. Visit also the Official website of Shirva Parish*.

prestige to get admission in this school.<sup>36</sup> The school also has given a large number of priestly and religious vocations to the Church in India.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.1.3 The Growth and Impact of Don Bosco Higher Primary School Shirva

For many decades, DBHPS Shirva was the only school offering quality education to a large number of surrounding villages. As such it has been instrumental in holding aloft the torch of Christian education beyond the barriers of caste and creed. It has laid strong foundation providing ground for a large number of students to come out of their narrow village surroundings and become leaders holding strategic posts both in Church and civil society as public policy makers.<sup>38</sup> At the height of its glory it had nearly 1000 students on its rolls with 25 divisions and 27 teachers and was known for its excellent standard in both curricular and co-curricular activities.

In order to continue further education, other Institutions were added to the campus: St. Mary's High School (Kannada medium) in 1947, St. Mary's Pre-University College in 1972, St. Mary's Degree College in 1980, Don Bosco English Medium Higher Primary School in 1983, Don Bosco Kindergarten School in 1985, Don Bosco English Medium High School in 1992 and St. Mary's Post-Graduation Centre in 2009.

Although the focus of my study is only DBHPS (which was the first Don Bosco Institution in the diocese), I also visited the other three Don Bosco Institutions in the campus. All the four DB institutions have their own school Anthem referring to Don Bosco as their patron. A large statue of Don Bosco with two young people is located in a very prominent place in the campus. I was told that the feast of Don Bosco is celebrated with much fanfare and devotion. The combined strength of the four institutions is about 1050 students of whom 511 are Catholics. The Principal and staff of all four institutions is largely composed of catholic lay teachers, a good number of whom are also the past pupils of these very Institutions. Thus we can see that true to Don Bosco's educational goals DBHPS has indeed formed its pupils into *Good Christians and honest citizens*.

Incidentally in 2007 the Parish invited the Salesians of the Konkan Province (INP) to begin a community in Shirva and gifted them a piece of land Donated by one of its parishioners. The Centre is fittingly called Don Bosco Youth Centre and the SDB have begun a pre-aspirantate and a boarding to cater to local vocations. Regular youth camps and youth activities have already made them quite popular among the parishioners. The FMA too arrived in Shirva in 2013 and have opened a boarding basically to facilitate the education of girls coming from the backward areas of North Karnataka and look after the Ladies hostel of the College.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Vidyasagara, Centenary Souvenir 1898 – 1998*, p.38

<sup>37</sup> Cf.

[http://www.ourladyofhealth.com/our\\_institutions/Don\\_bosco\\_kannada\\_medium\\_hr\\_pri\\_school/history.htm](http://www.ourladyofhealth.com/our_institutions/Don_bosco_kannada_medium_hr_pri_school/history.htm)

<sup>38</sup> Among its many illustrious pupils we can count: Archbishop Alphonsus Mathias of Bangalore, Bishop Salvadore Lobo of Baruiapur, Bishop Isidore Fernandes of Allahabad, Bishop Anthony Fernandes of Bareilly, Fr. Julian Fernandes SJ, the principal of St. Aloysius College Mangalore and the provincial of Karnataka Jesuit province, Sr. Apoline Monis SCCG, the Provincial of the Sisters of Charity, Shri Sundara Hegde, the Deputy Central Intelligence officer, Mr. Wilfred Nazareth, the Electrical Engineer of Karnataka Government and a large number of well-known professors, doctors, engineers and social agents. The school has also given to the Church a good number of very promising priestly and religious vocations. Cf. *Vidyasagara*, pp.16-43.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Diocese of Udipi Directory 2015*, pp.71, 90.

Thus Don Bosco arrived in this place more than 70 years earlier and opened the way for the arrival of his Sons and Daughters.

## 2.2 Don Bosco Aided Upper Primary School Kayyar 1935

From the Mangalore – Kasargod Highway about 9kms eastwards from Uppala, a narrow winding road skirting lush green villages of a hilly region leads to Kayyar. Even today, it appears to be a long and tedious journey. Around the majestic gothic style Church dedicated to Christ the King and the stately building of the Don Bosco Aided Upper Primary School one hardly notices a few houses. Today, the parish has about 248 families with 1214 Catholics.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, it required the far-sighted missionary imagination for someone to begin a Church and a school at this place. That was Fr. Luis Furtado, the founder of the Christ the King Church and Don Bosco Elementary School. The church was blessed in 1934 and the school began on 12 September 1935. It was the policy of the then bishop Victor Fernandes that every Parish Church should start at least a primary school to cater to the education of the population. And since the school would be frequented by people of all castes and religion, indirectly it would become a place of pre-evangelisation. That is what seemed to be the mission of the Don Bosco School.

The school started on 12 September 1935 with 4 standards and 3 teachers having just 71 pupils on its roll. In 1958, the school was raised to the level of an upper primary school adding 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> standards. Presently there are around 550 students and the work is in progress to raise the school to the level of a high school. The student population is composed of 70% Hindu, 15% Muslim and 15% Christian.<sup>41</sup>

A statue of Don Bosco placed prominently on the school building dominates the place. The school anthem sung by the pupils everyday explicitly refers to Don Bosco's childhood and his dream at the age of 9. The song presents Don Bosco as the father of the poor and orphan children, which can instantaneously create bonds of empathy with the educator saint.<sup>42</sup> The present Principal, Mr. Luis Monteiro, says that every Monday a prayer service is conducted in honour of Don Bosco, thus helping the pupils to imbibe his values and every year, the feast of Don Bosco is celebrated on 31<sup>st</sup> January with much enthusiasm.

However, we are left with the basic question – why was the school named after Don Bosco? As we said in the case of Shirva two reasons stand out: 1. the school was given the name of Don Bosco despite the fact that the newly erected Church was dedicated to Christ the King. 2. Don Bosco was canonised on 1 April 1934, just a year previous to the foundation of the school. Although there are no records that specify the reason, it seems obvious that the choice of the school patron saint was by no means a casual one. Perhaps Don Bosco was perceived by the founders of the school as an educator saint who would appeal to the rural and non-catholic population of the surrounding villages. The school celebrated its Platinum Jubilee in 2010. In fact, the photographic documentation of the Platinum Jubilee, which was celebrated at a public function, clearly shows the goodwill enjoyed by the Christian community even among the people of other faiths, as many prominent non-Christian leaders preside over the function. Evidently the Don Bosco school has done a lot of good work earning the respect of the Hindus and Muslims in the neighbourhood.

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, p.62.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Vidyamrita – Platinum Jubilee Souvenir 1935 – 2010*, pp.27-30; 69-70.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Ibid* p.6.



Presently, there is a Salesian Parish at Pavur about 17kms from Kayyar. They arrived in 1997 and their pioneering work among the socially backward Koraga Christian Community is much appreciated. In fact, in 2005 they started the Don Bosco English Medium School affiliated to the CBSE Board. However, it is interesting that as in the case of Shirva, Don Bosco arrived in this region more than 60 years before the arrival of the Salesians.<sup>43</sup>

### 2.3 St. John Bosco Church Kelmbet 1959

Like Kayyar, Kelmbet too is located in a hilly region about 2.5kms inside from the main road. Currently, it belongs to the Udupi diocese, the town being about 32kms away. The beginnings of this Church has an interesting story narrated by Fr. Fredrick Mascarenhas<sup>44</sup> who was then a boy and part of the group:

Kelmbet was then part of the Belman Parish which is about 8kms away. People had to walk the entire distance through fields and forest, crossing streams and rivers. One monsoon season in 1957, a group of 6-7 boys who set out to the Church for Sunday mass, got lost in the jungle. It rained non-stop the whole night and the boys did not return. The anxious parents were convinced that their children had been swept away in the swollen stream. Thankfully, the boys found their way and returned the next morning. It is then that the people of Kelmbet insisted that a chapel be built in Kelmbet and they be given the facility of a Sunday Mass. The Parish Priest of Belman Fr. Nicholas J. Pereira responded positively to this petition of his flock and presented their request to Bishop Basil S.T. Peres who had come on a pastoral visit from 8 – 10 January 1958. Seeing the spiritual needs of the people of Kelmbet who had to travel long distances on foot, the Bishop granted their request. It was decided that a chapel be built in honour of St. John Bosco in Kelmbet to meet the spiritual needs of the people.<sup>45</sup> It was as if Don Bosco himself had come to the jungles in search of his lost boys to take care of them!

The D'Mello family of Kelmbet donated 6½ acres of land for the construction of the Church. Thanks to the hard-work put in by Fr. Nicholas Pereira and his assistant Fr. Gregory D'Souza together with the enthusiastic support of the people within a year the chapel was erected. Fr. Fredrick specifically mentions that both Fr. Nicholas and Fr. Gregory loved each other and worked together setting an example to their flock. The Vicar General Msgr. A.V. D'Souza blessed the chapel on 28 March 1959 dedicating it to St. John Bosco and on the following day, 29 March 1959, the Easter Sunday, Fr. Nicholas Pereira offered the first mass. In 1961 a presbytery was constructed and on 1 May 1962, an independent Kelmbet Chapel was canonically erected as decreed by Bishop Raymond D'Mello annexing the border areas belonging to the parishes of Belman, Kirem and Paladka.<sup>46</sup> In 1964, the chapel was raised to the status of a parish and on 11 April 1964, Fr. Gregory D'Souza was appointed as its first parish priest. Fr. Gregory D'Souza along with the generous support of the parishioners built the present edifice of the Church which was inaugurated on 22 April 1970. People physically carried the water that was needed for construction from a pond in the gorge below.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, p.91.

<sup>44</sup> Much of the information regarding this parish is drawn from a personal interview of the Author with Fr. Fredrick Mascarenhas held on 20 July 2015. Presently, Fr. Fredrick is the Parish Priest of Our Lady of Dolours Church Udupi which is also the Bishop's house of the Udupi Diocese. There have been 9 priests and two Religious Sisters from his paternal grandfather's family.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Decree of erection of Kelmbet Chapel issued by Rev. Bishop Raymond D'Mello on 21 April 1962*, in Parish Archives of Kelmbet.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

### 2.3.1 The Role of Fr. Gregory D’Souza in the growth of St. John Bosco Parish Kelmbet

Although geographically insignificant, vocations have flourished in Kelmbet and so far it has given over 32 priests and 22 Sisters to the Church.<sup>47</sup> Fr. Fredrick attributes this to the quality of spiritual enthusiasm infused by its first parish priest, Fr. Gregory D’Souza. Fr. Fredrick says that not only Fr. Gregory was a great devotee of St. John Bosco and nurtured this devotion in the parish, but in many ways, he personified Don Bosco. He was dynamic and friendly, loved children, played with them and provided opportunities for their growth. He was generous and would share whatever little he had. He was kind and would go out of his way to help the poor. He was humane and gentle, yet firm on principles. Inspired by his very attractive persona, about 14 boys joined the priesthood during his period from 1964 to 1971.

A life-size statue of Don Bosco was bought from Simon and Co., and the life of Don Bosco itself had a great influence on the people. The liturgy was well animated and people often would offer Thanksgiving masses (with band) for favours received through the intercession of their patron St. John Bosco. The parish feast was celebrated on 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday in January with much fervor and fanfare.<sup>48</sup>

Another witness of the time Mr. Alex J. D’Mello of Taccode corroborates: “Fr. Gregory D’Souza was a very talented priest. He was the Assistant to Fr. Nicholas Pereira of Belman. When the new church was built, Fr. Gregory was appointed as the first Parish Priest. During the takeover ceremony from Fr. Nicholas, Fr. Gregory as parish priest couldn't contain his emotions and sobbed inconsolably. Before every mass for 15 minutes he taught us hymns, both Konkani & Latin. During his time he sorted out many family disputes as I vividly remember one case when a certain member of a family refused to pay the Church contribution. However, Fr. Gregory took it upon himself to help the affected family. As children we used to love him. I still cherish his smiles [...]. As I remember him even after 45 years let the future generations read and relish this comment attributed to his memory”.<sup>49</sup>

### 2.3.2 The handing over of the Kelmbet parish to the Salesians

At the time of its Silver Jubilee in 1989 there were 140 families with 1300 Catholics. It was still a flourishing parish and the Silver Jubilee was celebrated with much solemnity. The Jubilee Anthem referred to Don Bosco as the patron of the parish and guide of the young. However, due to its remoteness, little by little, the younger families began moving out of Kelmbet in search of work and quality education for their children. In fact, presently Kelmbet has only 121 families with just 407 Catholics, most of whom are elderly.<sup>50</sup> In the year 2000, Fr. Reginald Pinto, the last diocesan priest who served Kelmbet, received a visit from Fr. Charles Lobo sdb, who was one of his relative and the provincial of the New Delhi (INN) province. Seeing the lonely life of a diocesan priest living in a remote area, he suggested that the parish be handed over to a Salesian community. Thus the negotiations began and in 2003

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. *The Golden Jubilee Souvenir, St. John Bosco Church Kelmbet 2014*.

<sup>48</sup> Most parishes in Mangalore have been assigned a particular Wednesday to celebrate their patronal feast. Kelmbet parish was assigned the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday in January since the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday in January is assigned to Karkal-Attur which is a well-known pilgrim centre.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. <http://wikimapia.org/6864492/St-John-Bosco-Church-Kelmbet-Bola>

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Diocese of Udupi, Directory 2015*, pp.23-24.

the St. John Bosco parish Kelmbet was handed over to the Salesians of the Konkan (INP) province.<sup>51</sup>

The Salesians of the Konkan province, since the time of their arrival, have undertaken a number of initiatives to revitalise the parish. Besides the regular youth activities and camps, they have started the “Don Bosco Boys’ Home”, to facilitate the education of boys from remote areas. In 2014, they celebrated the golden jubilee of the parish with a large public function and to mark the occasion, they also started the Don Bosco English Medium High School.<sup>52</sup>

Thus here too Don Bosco preceded the Salesians and prepared the way for their coming in his own inimitable way.

#### **2.4 Konkani Natak Sabha and the Don Bosco Hall Mangalore 1943**

The Konkani Natak Sabha, whose patron is Don Bosco, is the gift of a priest with sensitivity towards youth and culture. It was Fr. George Albuquerque Pai SJ,<sup>53</sup> a professor of chemistry at St. Aloysius College, who on one Friday evening of March 1943 noticed a group of lively youngsters sitting on a hillock near Jeppu and having fun. He approached them, got into a conversation and proposed the idea of forming a Konkani dramatic society for the greater glory of God and for the service of people through the development of Konkani culture. The youngsters, although initially hesitant and skeptical, were soon won over to the cause and thus was born the *Konkani Natak Sabha* (KNS) or Konkani Dramatic Society. It was indeed a heaven sent boon to the youngsters wearied by the travails of WWII and the turmoil of Independence that had gripped the nation.

As the Jesuit superiors of Fr. George did not give him permission to take up the responsibility of KNS, he approached the Capuchins of St. Ann’s Friary and within the same year of its inception the administration of KNS was handed over to the Capuchins. It was agreed that the Capuchins would be the ex-officio presidents of KNS and they continue to guide it even today. Among these Fr. Philip Neri OFM Capuchin rendered service for 26 years, and in its early years, he exercised a seminal role in the shaping and development of KNS.

The explicit motto of KNS is: “Through theatre to Religion” (*Natak Dwarin Dharmic Sadhan*). Fundamentally it was conceived as an apostolate of the stage aimed at bringing together the energies of young people for the enrichment of Konkani culture and fostering of individual talents, but also of interpreting Church’s social doctrine and topics related to faith and morals. It was proposed that every parish in the city start units comprising of active youngsters, not merely drama writers and actors. These members were expected to be present at a General Body meeting to draft rules for the society; the objective of KNS being uplifting of the mother tongue Konkani,<sup>54</sup> and foster the cultural, social and moral

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Sandesh* in *The Golden Jubilee Souvenir, St. John Bosco Church Kelmbet 2014*.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Diocese of Udupi, Directory 2015*, pp.24,72.

<sup>53</sup> Fr. George Albuquerque Pai was born in 1882, joined the Society of Jesus in 1906 and was ordained in Rome in 1918. It could be that he had come to know of Don Bosco while he was studying in Rome. Cf. *Konkani Natak Sabha, Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1943-1968, p.21*.

<sup>54</sup> It is important to remember that at this point in time the Konkani language had no State sponsorship. The official language of the State was Kannada and the Hindus in Mangalore spoke Tulu. Children did not study Konkani in school and therefore, basically it is the Catholic Church that kept alive the language by its policy of using it as a means of communication since the Mangalorean Catholic community spoke this language.

accomplishment of the society in general.<sup>55</sup> To facilitate such an objective, about 3 years later, on 11 December 1946, KNS was registered under the Society's Registration Act 1860.<sup>56</sup>

#### 2.4.1 The development of Konkani Natak Sabha and the founding of the Don Bosco Hall

KNS staged its first drama, titled *Vignant Jeek* (Triumph in Trial), written by one of its members Mr. M.P. D'Sa, to packed audience on 19 September 1943 at the Academy Hall of St. Aloysius College. On popular demand it had to be staged twice more. Thus began the glorious innings of this Association that was destined to gift Mangalore and the Konkani world with hundreds of artists of national renown in the field of drama, music, singing, story-writing, public speaking and literature.<sup>57</sup> There were social plays, historicals, comedies and tragedies, besides the religious plays, bringing out dramatists, composers and musicians. It soon became apparent that KNS needed to have a place of its own to stage these dramas and conduct its various activities. Therefore on 31 March 1947 a piece of land was purchased at a cost of Rs.33,000 and on 19 September 1948 the foundation stone for the Don Bosco Hall was laid. Now that the things were taking shape for the first time KNS celebrated the feast of its patron St. John Bosco with due solemnity on 31 January 1949, imploring the "sportsman-saint" to help them through their endeavour. Fr. Philip Neri OFM Capuchin, the then president, often encouraged the members to trust in divine providence saying, as it had happened in the case of St. John Bosco, even impossible things could become reality.<sup>58</sup> Thanks to much effort in fund-raising the building was completed and on 19 September 1951, the 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary of KNS, the majestic Don Bosco hall was inaugurated by the District Collector Sri A.R. Ranganathan. It was truly a glorious day for all those who loved art and culture in the city.<sup>59</sup> With a seating capacity for 1000, it turned out to be a veritable boon to the city bringing together people from all walks of life and all strata of society. In fact, the following are just two of the many letters of appreciation that KNS received which can give us an insight into the quality of service rendered by KNS:

Ex-Vicar Capitular, Msgr. William Lewis wrote on 7 March 1965: "I had the pleasure of witnessing many a performance in the Don Bosco Hall under the patronage of the Konkani Natak Sabha. The Konkani Natak Sabha does serve the community by its educative and cultural dramas, with wholesome recreations and heart elevating musical entertainments. And this is the *need of the times to keep our youngsters away from the dangers that beset them*".<sup>60</sup>

Archbishop of Calcutta, Msgr. Albert V. D'Souza, who was earlier the Vicar General of Mangalore, wrote on 16 March 1959: "The Konkani Natak Sabha with its Don Bosco Hall, is not merely a recreational centre as it would appear at first sight. It is an apostolate; not a purely religious one, but one that is bound to raise the moral and cultural tone of the citizens of Mangalore and its suburbs. It is open to the public of all castes and creeds. We have every reason to be grateful to the organisers of the Konkani Natak Sabha not only for having provided us with educative, elevating and wholesome recreation, but also for having placed at our disposal an up-to-date stage for performances and a spacious and well furnished hall for social functions".<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Cf. *Ibid.* pp. xvii, 7.

<sup>56</sup>Cf. *Ibid.* p.45.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Konkani Natak Sabha, Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1943-1993*, pp.19-21, 41-48.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. *Konkani Natak Sabha, Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1943-1968*, pp.46-47.

<sup>59</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, p.41 Italics mine.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p.40.

## 2.4.2 Some significant dramas and activities staged at Don Bosco Hall

Having its own all-weather hall, the cultural activities of KNS multiplied many-fold. Some of the significant religious plays staged were: *The Trial of Cardinal Mindzenty* (thrice in 1949 – 50); *Our Lady of Fatima* (13 times in 1951 – 52), *Passion Play* (15 times in 1954)<sup>62</sup>, *The Seraph of Assisi* (twice in 1954), *Birth of Christ* (9 times in 1961 - 1962), *Passion Play* (12 times in 1964), *Triumph of Martyrs* (1968), *The story of Virgin Mary* (1988), *Bernadette Soubirous* (1989), *Joan of Arc* (1990), *13 Miracles of St. Anthony* (1991), *St. John of the Cross* (1992), *Don Bosco* (in 1993, the year of the Golden Jubilee of KNS), *Tobias* (1994), *David and Goliath* (2000) and hundreds of other big and small plays. By the time of its Golden Jubilee KNS had written and acted over 150 dramas of different hues, thus accomplishing its motto “Through theatre to Religion”.<sup>63</sup>

## 2.4.3 The contribution of KNS to Konkani language and culture

Even prior to India’s independence, KNS ventured to place itself at the service of Konkani language. It has contributed a lion’s share in developing Konkani drama, song and music. Its service was so significant that even the Vatican appreciated its efforts for the apostolate of the stage under the motto, “Through Theatre to Religion” and bestowed the *Bene Merenti* medals on 4 November 1956 on two of its senior most members – Mr. M. P. D’Sa, the drama-writer and S.S. Rasquinha, the actor-artist. From 1964, KNS introduced Singing Competitions attracting large number of competitors, children and adults, men and women. Thus there arose musical families, outstanding singers and confident singing poets and composers. In addition, elocution, short-play, fancy dress, drawing and essay competitions have nurtured talents and brought to lime light many individuals in society. By the time it celebrated its Golden Jubilee it had given to the society innumerable artistes, script-writers, poets, composers and actors. The members and office bearers of KNS served selflessly for the language, drama, music and the Konkani society.<sup>64</sup>

It is indeed a matter of pride that all this great achievement was done under patronage of Don Bosco. In fact, the Don Bosco Play that was staged during the Golden Jubilee year was a mega-play of 3 hours duration which the people enjoyed thoroughly. Thanks to KNS, the people of Mangalore perceive Don Bosco as a Saint of youth who loved all that the young people loved. In fact, the work of KNS is very significant for the people of Mangalore who early on in their history have made a lot of sacrifice and fought many a battle to preserve their language and culture.

## 2.5 Don Bosco Club and Don Bosco Hall Udupi 1958

The Don Bosco Club Udupi was born on from the heart of Fr. Sylvester D’Souza who was the Assistant priest of Our Lady of Dolours Church Udupi. He was supported whole-

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<sup>62</sup>The passion play was like a course of Lenten sermons and meditations. The first show was presided over by Cardinal Valerian Gracias with a special message from the Holy Father himself saying, “Holy Father cordially imparts promoters, players, and audience apostolic blessings”. *Ibid*, 50; The drama was performed 15 times. The 14<sup>th</sup> performance was presided over by Rev. Martin Lucas svd, the Papal Internuncio to India.

<sup>63</sup>Cf. *Konkani Natak Sabha, Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1943-1968*, pp 118-122; Cf. *Konkani Natak Sabha, Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1943-1993*, pp.85-87.

<sup>64</sup>Cf. Cf. *Konkani Natak Sabha, Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1943-1993*, pp.29-31.

heartedly by Fr. Gaulbert Noronha, the parish priest. Fr. Sylvester was young and energetic; he exuded joy and optimism, and had uncanny ways of attracting young people to faith formation.<sup>65</sup> It was his brainchild to found the club when he saw young people coming to the Church and lingering on to play volley ball or cricket. He believed that the formative years of a man's youth may be considered the crucial period of his life. So he named the club after St. John Bosco, the apostle of youth, in the intent to provide the right atmosphere and necessary guidance in the shaping of young minds.<sup>66</sup>

Besides, there was something else happening in that small town, Udupi, famous Hindu pilgrim Centre and renowned for its vegetarian cuisine. With Manipal, a University township<sup>67</sup> coming up in 1953, Udupi began rapidly gaining prominence with an influx of young students from all over South India seeking admission in its colleges. In fact, thus writes Fr. Gaulbert in one of his fund-raising appeals: "At this time, a well-equipped club where our young men could spend their spare time in reading, playing games or exchanging views is an absolute necessity. If our young boys could be induced to frequent the club and employ their leisure hours in improving their mind and body, it would keep them out of mischief, evil company and questionable past-time".<sup>68</sup>

Thus began the interesting story of Don Bosco Club Udupi which was started in view of bringing together the boys and young men of the parish and provide them with wholesome recreation. It was inaugurated on 11 October 1958 and included both young boys and young adults. St. John Bosco being the patron of youth was consciously chosen as the patron of the Club. The main objective of the Club was to unite the Catholics in undertaking religious and social projects. To this end the following means/activities were proposed:

- To cater to the physical well-being by offering indoor and outdoor games;
- To have a Library and a Reading Room to cater to intellectual formation;
- To strengthen sodalities and begin Study Circles to enhance spiritual formation;
- To stage dramas and other cultural activities to foster social welfare;
- To reach out to those in need and help children in their education.

The Club had a governing body of 15 members. The Parish Priest was the Director; the Asst. Parish Priest would be the President. Then there would be a general secretary, a treasurer, 4 joint secretaries to head the areas of indoor and outdoor games, library and drama, and 7 members of the committee. The Executive committee would meet once a month. In 1961, the club had 100 young adults and 25 adolescents. The membership of the Club was open not just to the parishioners of the Udupi Church, but to all the parishes of the Udupi region. The idea was to make it into a model club like the one of Mangalore. Admission fee for the young adults was Rs.0.50 and for the adolescents was Rs.0.25. The annual subscription of Rs.1 was only for the older members.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> "While I was still very young, I vividly remember Fr. Sylvester visiting our school in Alangar-Moodbidri. Children would swarm around him like bees on a honeycomb. He would begin by saying funny jokes and stories and then invariably switch to Catechism questions. He always had a pocket full of goodies to distribute like balloons, sweets or trinkets. He was nicknamed the "balloon father" and it was simply a feast just to be around him. In fact, years later when I came to know of Don Bosco, it seemed to me as if I had always known him" – Sr. Philomena D'Souza.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. D'SOUZA Sylvester, in *Foreword to the Souvenir* probably dating 1963 (The Souvenir is not available).

<sup>67</sup> In June 1953 Dr. TMA Pai, founded the Kasturba Medical College which grew up to be an International University Township under the aegis of Manipal Group of Educational Institutions. It began receiving students from all over India, and within a decade, it began attracting students coming from other Asian countries and later also from all parts of the world.

<sup>68</sup> NORONHA Gaulbert in *An Appeal for the Udupi Parish Hall* dated 1960.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. NORONHA & DSOUZA, in *Don Bosco Club Mahet Patr*

The following things were already in full swing by 1961: There was a modest library with 500 odd books in English, Konkani and Kannada. The Reading Room was subscribing 12 periodicals. Once a month the young and the old would gather together for a Study circle discussing topics ranging from purely theological to questions of political and social interest. It was hoped that “interested boys could gain deeper insight into religion and morals and thus arm themselves effectively to combat the enemies who seek to destroy man’s faith in God”.<sup>70</sup> Reporting about the functioning of the Study Circles in his Foreword to a Souvenir in 1963, Fr. Sylvester says, “Judging from the results we can proudly claim that our Study Circles have been a great success”.<sup>71</sup> Besides the Club would be animating many religious and social functions like the Catechetical Day, Mission Sunday, Good Friday, Easter, Christmas, Children’s Day, Workers’ Day, Pope’s feast, Parish feast, Club Day on January 31<sup>st</sup>, Independence Day, Republic Day and two or three dramas per year. Thus within 2½ years, the club had successfully organised more than 40 odd events.<sup>72</sup>

### 2.5.1 The Don Bosco hall

In the joint letter of Frs. Gaulbert Noronha and Sylvester D’Souza, dating 15 July 1961, the plan for the building of the Don Bosco Hall was outlined. Its purpose would be to stage dramas and hold cultural activities, to screen educative and religious films, to conduct free medical camps and offer free legal aid to the needy and have a Catholic Information Centre “where our non-Catholic friends could obtain an insight into the Catholic faith and have their doubts cleared”.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, plans were afoot to help needy students with board and lodge facilities and publish a Newsletter to enhance communication and bonding with members who were working abroad.<sup>74</sup>

Among the signatories besides the names of the two priests, there are also the names of the Executive committee members, among whom we notice the name of Oscar Fernandes<sup>75</sup> as an Outdoor Sports Secretary.

The initial proposal was “to extend the [existing] stage to house the club and also provide accommodation to people during dramatic entertainments. It [was] estimated that the building extension and some new furniture would cost Rs.20,000/- and the amount [would] have to be collected only by donations”.<sup>76</sup> The permission to build a new hall was cleared in 1963.

The impact of this club on youngsters could be gauged by the testimony of Mr. Oscar Fernandes, presently a Member of Parliament. He says, “*When you talk of a youth movement the first thought goes to Don Bosco. A popular youth Magazine of our times was Don Bosco and all of us used to subscribe to it. Don Bosco was known for his passion and love for youth. Naturally when we wanted to start a youth club the choice of the name was Don Bosco. The*

<sup>70</sup> NORONHA Gaulbert, in *An Appeal*

<sup>71</sup> D’SOUZA Sylvester, in *Foreword to the Souvenir* 1963.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. NORONHA & DSOUZA, in *Don Bosco Club Mahet Patr*

<sup>73</sup> NORONHA Gaulbert, *An Appeal*

<sup>74</sup> Cf. NORONHA & DSOUZA, in *Don Bosco Club Mahet Patr*

<sup>75</sup> Oscar Fernandes is a senior member of the Congress Party. He has represented the Udupi Constituency in the Parliament winning a record 5 times consecutively. He has also been a Rajya Sabha Member and was a Cabinet Minister for Youth and Sports affairs in the Rajiv Gandhi Cabinet, and later, Minister for Transport, Roads and Highways in the Manmohan Singh Government.

<sup>76</sup> NORONHA Gaulbert, *An Appeal*

*main task was to channelise the energy and activity towards building the society, the parish, the youth and the country. We started enrolling all the youth as Members of the club. Come Christmas, we would be ready with musical instruments, go house to house singing Christmas Carols, raising funds for the club and Don Bosco Hall, Library, indoor games and church activity. Apart from supporting the church and youth activity, on the whole the Udupi Don Bosco Club turned into an ideal moulding ground for the youth. I am proud, like many other youth, to be a product of Don Bosco.*"<sup>77</sup>

## **2.5.2 The Closure of the Club and the Hall**

On 1 May 1968 Fr. Sylvester D'Souza who was the heart and soul of this club was transferred to the newly built Christ Church at Manipal.<sup>78</sup> The Club still continued its activities along the already set guidelines, but looks like it was missing the guidance of Fr. Sylvester. The minutes of the meeting of 31<sup>st</sup> March 1976 unanimously suggest inviting Fr. Sylvester to be part of the Executive Committee. The minutes of 14 April 1976 indicate that Fr. Sylvester did not respond to this invitation<sup>79</sup> and so there is one more suggestion to have him as a permanent invitee to the Executive Committee. Subsequent minutes do not indicate that Fr. Sylvester attended any of the Club meetings except the Silver Jubilee Celebrations on 1 January 1984. The Club was closed down soon after and the name of the Hall was changed to Parish Hall.

Glancing through the minutes of the meetings from 1976 to 1984 it gives the impression that gradually, the Club was drifting away from its initial vision and focus. It began focusing on fund-raising activities to support its different programmes. Hence they began to rent out the Don Bosco Hall for different social and commercial activities. Consequently, it appears that there were propriety issues between the parish and Club regarding the use of Don Bosco Hall. Besides, the older members were migrating to other cities in search of better employment prospects and the Club did not attract new membership like before. Perhaps all these above issues coupled with the lack of proper guidance unfortunately led to the closure of the flourishing Don Bosco Club and the Don Bosco Hall in Udupi.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Testimony of Mr. Oscar Fernandes given on 3 September 2015. It appears from the above testimony that the club was receiving a magazine called *Don Bosco*. Perhaps it was the *Don Bosco's Madonna* published by the Don Bosco's Shrine Bombay.

<sup>78</sup> While Fr. Sylvester was still the Asst. Parish Priest of Udupi, realising that the Catholic students coming to Manipal from different parts of India did not have the facility for Sunday Mass nearby, met Dr. TMA Pai and organised regular Sunday Mass in English. Later on, he managed to buy a plot of land in Manipal and built the Christ Church, a hostel and a Youth Centre with Counselling facilities to meet the needs of College-going young people. He also organised the Mangalore Unit of the AICUF (All India Catholic Universities Federation) and invited Catholic University students from all over Mangalore to be its members, with the objective of developing Christian leadership. He has also animated the YCS (Young Christian Students) and YCW (Young Christian Workers) units. At his death on 23 July 2008 a large number of people with great emotion acknowledged that they owe their leadership and organizational skills to the formation they received in the Don Bosco Club, at YCS, YCW and AICUF thanks to Fr. Sylvester D'Souza. They described him as an ever welcoming friend of children and youth, a beloved pastor kind-hearted to the poor, a man of dialogue between different faith communities and a passionate lover of nature. Cf. [www.christchurchmanipal.org](http://www.christchurchmanipal.org); [http://www.daijiworld.com/chan/ob\\_disp.asp?oid=2209](http://www.daijiworld.com/chan/ob_disp.asp?oid=2209); [http://www.daijiworld.com/news/news\\_disp.asp?n\\_id=49024&n\\_tit=Mangalore%3A+Fr+Sylvester+D%27Souza+\(80\)](http://www.daijiworld.com/news/news_disp.asp?n_id=49024&n_tit=Mangalore%3A+Fr+Sylvester+D%27Souza+(80))

<sup>79</sup> Between 1970 to 1978, Fr. Sylvester was completely engaged in building single-handedly the Youth Centre and Hostel facilities at Manipal. Cf. [www.christchurchmanipal.org](http://www.christchurchmanipal.org)

<sup>80</sup> Cf. DON BOSCO CLUB UDUPI, *Minutes of the Executive Committee Meetings from 1976 – 1984*. Manuscript.



## 2.6 Don Bosco Club Puttur 1967

Situated some 60kms southeast of Mangalore by the foothills of the Western Ghats, in many ways, Puttur resembles Shirva. The imposing structure of the *Mai De Deus* Church (1830) dominates the landscape. In and around the Church campus are a host of educational Institutions,<sup>81</sup> the pivotal among them being St. Philomena's College that was started in 1958 by Fr. Anthony Patrao, nicknamed *The Founder of Modern Puttur*. Fr. Patrao arrived in Puttur as a Parish Priest in 1939 and one by one began establishing educational institutions for girls and boys. Convinced that the young people of rural Puttur had equal rights to quality educational facilities, just like those brought up in the city of Mangalore, starting from the Primary to University degree level, he established eight educational institutions and a hospital. He was the Parish priest of *Mai De Deus* Parish from 1939 to 1975, and it was during his time that *Don Bosco Club, Puttur* was born.

### 2.6.1 The Beginnings and the Vision of Don Bosco Club Puttur

The vision and the beneficial influence Don Bosco Club Udupi had on the youngsters seem to be the motivating factor in the starting of Don Bosco Club, Puttur. And as in the case of Udupi, here too it was a young Asst. Parish priest, Fr. Cyprian M. A. Lasrado who took the initiative supported whole-heartedly by Fr. Anthony Patrao, the Parish Priest. Thanks to St. Philomena's College and other educational institutions, Puttur at this time was a growing town bustling with youngsters coming from many distant villages and parishes. It is to serve the needs of these youngsters that Don Bosco Club Puttur was founded on 16 April 1967.<sup>82</sup>

In a small room on the second floor of the old Church building, a group of 15 youngsters gathered under leadership of Fr. Cyprian M. A. Lasrado, the Asst. Parish Priest. They were full of wonder, expectations, energy and enthusiasm. Fr. Cyprian placed before the eager-eyed youngsters his dream of having a youth club that enhances the social development of youngsters by providing education, sports and healthy recreational facilities.

The idea was accepted enthusiastically and the Club was placed under the patronage of Don Bosco, the youthful saint, with the motto: Toil and Smile.

The objectives of the Club would be:

- a. to enhance personal and Spiritual growth of the members;
- b. to build unity and solidarity among the Catholics;
- c. to deepen one's Catholic faith and live it with commitment;
- d. to participate actively in all parish activities and work for social well-being;
- e. to serve Konkani language and culture through drama, music and literature

Means to achieve the above objectives are:

- Monthly meetings to enhance exchange of ideas, plan, discuss and decide;
- Library and Reading Room to inculcate good reading habits;
- Organising drama and musical performances in Konkani and other languages

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<sup>81</sup>The following is the list of *Mai De Deus* church run Institutions: 1. Mai De Deus Higher Primary School 1939, 2. St. Victor Girls' High School 1942, 3. St. Victor English Medium School 1970, 4. St. Philomena High School 1949, 5. St. Philomena PU College, 6. St. Philomena College 1958, 7. St. Philomena College Centre for PG Studies 8. St. Philomena Boys' hostel, 9. St. Philomena College Men's hostel, 10. St. Philomena College Women's Hostel.

<sup>82</sup>Cf. CUTINHA John, *Report of Don Bosco Club Puttur 1967-1977* in Souvenir, Decennial Celebration, Don Bosco Club, Puttur, Santosh Printers, Puttur 1977.

- Organising spiritual retreats and the study of Sacred Scripture
- Inviting Resource persons to give talks on various relevant issues
- Felicitating people who have shown exceptional achievement or given exceptional contribution to society.<sup>83</sup>

## 2.6.2 The Structure and functioning of Don Bosco Club Puttur

The Club was registered under Society's Registration Act on 7 September 1988 and has a Constitution of its own. As such its accounts are audited every year. It has a structure similar to International Rotary Club or Lions' Club. It has a President, Secretary, Treasurer and 10% of its members form the Governing Body. Presently, the Club has 159 life-members and 20 ordinary members. It is open to members who are not necessarily parishioners of the *Mai De Deus* Parish or even those who move out of Puttur, but want to retain their membership. The meeting of the Governing body is held once a month. The Club has an office and a meeting hall of its own. When the Diocesan youth movement ICYM (Indian Catholic Youth Movement) began to organise the youth in different parishes, Don Bosco Club redefined its membership as open to those people who want to serve the young post-ICYM, as the ICYM has the age-limit of 28 years. Thus Don Bosco Club, although initially started by young people and for young people, transformed itself into an association that offers youth ministry through cultural activities. The Club has its own motto, logo and anthem all explicitly dedicated to Don Bosco. The Club Day is celebrated with much solemnity on the 31 January. The term of office-bearers is one year and so far starting with Mr. Baptist Madtha, the Club has had 45 presidents.<sup>84</sup>

Thus begins the saga of a very vibrant club which has become an important reference point in Puttur town, and today it is on the threshold of its Golden Jubilee celebrations that are due in 2017.

## 2.6.3 The Programmes and Activities of Don Bosco Club Puttur

The Club has managed to attract many eminent people who contribute generously towards its varied activities.

Some of the very salient programmes and activities of the Club are:<sup>85</sup>

1. **Spiritual Care:** Organising Youth Retreats and assisting during the Eucharistic procession organised in honour of Christ the King.
2. **Educare:** The club has an Educational fund which is used for the following activities:
  - The Club prepares talented Catholic youngsters for competitive exams to be able to enter professional colleges;
  - Prepares young Catholics with potential leadership qualities for IAS, IPS exams so that the Catholics can enter civil services and make a difference in government administration;

<sup>83</sup>Cf. Constitutions of Don Bosco Club, Puttur p.4; Cf. MASCARENHAS Sherry, *Brief Report on the functioning of Don Bosco Club Puttur* & Cf. DSOUZA Cecilia, *Don Bosco Club Puttur is 25 Now*, in Silver Jubilee Souvenir, Don Bosco Club Puttur. Thomson Printers, Puttur 1992.

<sup>84</sup>Cf. *Ibid*; Also Interview of the Author with Mr. Charles Furtado, Mr. Pravin Pinto and Mr. Royce Pinto on 22 July 2015.

<sup>85</sup>Cf. *Ibid*; FS Darbe, *Don Bosco Clubbachim Falhabharit 25 Vorsam*, in Silver Jubilee Souvenir, Don Bosco Club Puttur. Thomson Printers, Puttur 1992.

- Felicitates those who have scored high marks in Board exams at SSLC, PUC and Degree level;
  - Offers educational support to poor school and college-going students, including professional college fees.
- 2. Sports:**
- Organises State-level Volley ball tournament;
  - Offers coaching in Shuttle Badminton and Cricket and conducts local level tournaments;
  - Offers in-door games facility like chess and carom.
- 3. Talent Cultivation:**
- Organises dramatics, elocution and fancy dress contests;
  - Organises Christmas programmes such as Christmas tree, Christmas Crib and Christmas Carol Contest;
  - A sub-committee named “Don Bosco Music Party” organises music shows and trains young people in musical performances;
  - Stages socially relevant dramas in Konkani, Tulu and Kannada languages.
- 4. Culture:**
- Felicitates significant achievers in the fields of Music, Sports, Education and Social Service;
  - Has a Library and a Reading Room with periodicals to stimulate intellectual curiosity and creative writing.
- 5. Publication:**
- Since its Silver Jubilee in 1992, DonBosco Club has begun publishing a Konkani monthly magazine called *Putturchem Neket* (Star of Puttur). It has youth-centred and people centred themes like Career guidance, Alcohol de-addiction, AIDS, Drugs, Media, Internet, Relationships etc and a circulation of 1000 printed copies and 400 e-copies, both of which are distributed freely. Every issue has a particular theme which draws people’s attention. It also provides a platform for many budding writers to sharpen their skills.
- 6. Social Service:**
- Availing various Govt. schemes for the poor and networking with CODP (a diocesan Social work organization) by the time of its Silver Jubilee, Don Bosco Club built over 175 houses for poor people at the cost of Rs.875,000/-;
  - Networking with the Welfare Society, it assisted in digging wells and aiding farmers in agriculture;
  - Conducted programmes on Natural Family Planning and Responsible parenthood;
  - Networking with Jaycees, it has organised programmes on Self-employment and Income generating activities;
  - Periodically it offers medical help to the deserving poor people;
  - It has reached out to people affected by floods and other calamities.

The impact of the good work done by this Club was such that two other neighbouring parishes invited them to help them start Don Bosco Clubs: 1. *Saib Salvador* Church Agrar, about 35kms towards north and Sacred Heart Church Ukkinadka about 30kms towards west. The group at Agrar is still quite active, but is affiliated to the ICYM (a National Youth Movement), and the one of Ukkinadka is unfortunately closed down.

Thus in the words of a parishioner, Ms. Cecilia D'Souza, Secretary of the Parish Council, "*Don Bosco Club has contributed in a big way to make Puttur a peaceful, joyful and love-filled town*".<sup>86</sup>

## 2.7 Don Bosco Youth Association Agrar 1983

Agrar, like Shirva, is one of the older parishes of Mangalore, and Christianity in Agrar goes back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century; the first Church dedicated to *Saib Salvador* was built in 1702. Its circumference was so large that later on, eight other churches were carved out of it. Agrar is situated in a hilly region on the banks of river Netravati, about 35kms northeast of Mangalore. And just like its lush-green landscape, it has been also a flourishing nursery of vocations gifting the Church with 3 bishops, over 60 priests and 100 Religious women.<sup>87</sup>

### 2.7.1 The beginnings of Don Bosco Youth Association Agrar

The beginnings of youth association in Agrar date back to 1967 when Fr. Casmir D'Sa began the Christian Youth Movement (CYM) on 22 January 1967. It functioned fairly well for nearly eight years helping out in parish activities, staging socially relevant dramas, offering voluntary service to the flood-victims when Netravati overflowed in 1974. However, by 1976, it was closed down.<sup>88</sup>

Hence in 1980, the Parish Pastoral Council took the initiative to start another youth group. It was envisioned as a social and cultural group with four objectives:

- To reach out to the poor;
- To involve parishioners in parish activities;
- To nurture youth leadership;
- To live a life motivated by love, discipline and self-reliance.<sup>89</sup>

It is in this context that the group came in contact with the Don Bosco Club Puttur and decided to model itself after it. The Rules and Regulations of Don Bosco Club Puttur were borrowed and studied. Accordingly, with their guidance **Don Bosco Club Agrar** was founded on 27 January 1983. To attract young people, it was decided to provide good indoor and outdoor games facility and a good library to be able to spend leisure time in useful activities. For the first time an Education Fund was established so as to reach out to young people in need. Thus sports, education and social outreach to the poor seemed to be the focus of the group.<sup>90</sup>

### 2.7.2 Programmes and Activities of Don Bosco Youth Association Agrar

During the years immediate to the formation of the Don Bosco Club, a lot of importance was given to sports activities. From 1985, the International Year of Youth, deanery level Tournaments began to be organised. Constant encouragement and participation in these sports activities brought to the fore immense talent that about five of these young people grew up to be contestants at national and international levels.

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<sup>86</sup> DSOUZA Cecilia, *Don Bosco Club Puttur is 25 Now*, in Silver Jubilee Souvenir, Don Bosco Club Puttur. Thomson Printers, Puttur 1992.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. DSOUZA John Cyril, *Porzalchem Agrarchem Daiz* in *Tri-Centenary Sourvenir, Agrar Church*, 2002, pp.33f.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. DSOUZA John Cyril, *Yuva Sakat, Amchem Don Bosco Yuva Sanchalan* in *Tri-Centenary Sourvenir, Agrar Church*, 2002, pp.174-175.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. *Ibid* p.175-176.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. *Ibid* p.178.

Another area that was given prominence was the use of the stage: A number of socially relevant dramas in Konkani, Tulu and Kannada were enacted attracting people of all faiths. These dramas mobilised much energy and leadership among young people and offered healthy entertainment to the rural people. Especially, it fostered community spirit among people of all faiths.

In the 1990s when the diocesan youth movement began organising young people in the parishes, Don Bosco Club Agrar became affiliated to ICYM Mangalore. While accepting the norms and policies of ICYM, it still retained its name as Don Bosco Youth Association Agrar. Now its focus became youth development with the motto: *Lead to Serve*. The number of its members fluctuate between 35 – 40. The ratio between working youth and students is 50:50.

The following are some of the programmes and activities carried out by Don Bosco Youth Association, Agrar:

- Involvement in the Parish through liturgical animation, celebration of *Monti fest* and *Vodlem fest*;
- Organising youth conferences and leadership camps;
- Organising Taize prayer experiences;
- Holding APL (Agrar Premier League) tournament once a year;
- Organising tele-games for the entire parish;
- Celebrating Childrens' Day, Mothers' Day, Elders' Day, Independence Day etc.
- Visiting Old-age homes, Orphanages;
- Organising blood donation drive;
- Offering voluntary service in the parish.<sup>91</sup>

Travelling about 60kms, the group had gone to Shirva to visit the Relic of Don Bosco and treasures this experience. Speaking about the youth of Agrar, the parish priest Fr. Gregory D'Souza says, "*The youth of Agrar is sincere, hardworking and honest; they are focused on a goal and well-respected in the diocese. Thrice they have been declared as the best youth group in the diocese and quite a few of them have held top leadership positions even at the diocesan levels. Many of them occupy good positions in society even later on like Judge, Pilot etc.*"<sup>92</sup>

It is obvious that they have been well-groomed right from the beginning. An article in the parish magazine written on the occasion of the Tri-centenary celebration of the Parish concludes saying, "*It is a matter of pride for us that our youth are growing up to be promising future citizens and exemplary Christians*".<sup>93</sup> Well, there is every reason to believe that St. John Bosco too is equally pleased with this youth group.

## **Conclusion:**

Doing this research has been indeed a very moving experience. It stands witness to the relevance and attraction exerted by Don Bosco's charism and spirituality in different settings and different parts of the world. It is also moving to think that in desiring to send his Salesians to Mangalore, God led Don Bosco to remember these people, a tiny population in the huge Indian sub-continent. For reasons best known to God himself, these plans did not materialise, but with the canonisation of Don Bosco, his spirit seemed to have hovered over this diocese. Exactly from 1934 onwards we see a cross section of Institutions and

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<sup>91</sup>Cf. *Ibid* pp.178-179.

<sup>92</sup>Cf. Interview of the Author with the Parish Priest and the leaders of the youth group on 22 July 2015.

<sup>93</sup>Cf. DSOUZA John Cyril, *Yuva Sakat*, p.179.

organizations – 5 schools, 1 Church, 5 youth clubs, 2 halls and 2 mega-plays on the life of the Saint – all dedicated to St. John Bosco, clearly perceived as the patron of youth, started in the diocese largely by the diocesan clergy together with the lay faithful. Most of these works reached the peak of their glory much before the arrival of a Salesian presence in the diocese (the FMA arrived in 1985 and the SDB in 1997).

There seem to be a certain pattern in the way works associated with Don Bosco came into existence. In most of these cases, it has been a team work of two priests: Frs. Hilary Gonsalves and Valerian Colaco in Shirva, Frs. Nicholas Pereira and Gregory D’Souza in Kelmbet, Frs. George Albuquerque Pai sj and Philip Neri OFM cap. in Mangalore, Frs. Gaulbert Noronha and Sylvester D’Souza in Udupi and Frs. Anthony Patrao and Cyprian Lasrado in Puttur; and interestingly in most of these cases it is the younger priest who was directly in contact with the youth perceived a felt need and proposed it to the senior priest who gave his whole-hearted support and collaboration. The positive influence of priests like Frs. Philip Neri Cap., Gregory D’Souza and Sylvester D’Souza who imaged Don Bosco in their very persona was definitely a crucial factor in the flourishing of these works. This brings us three important lessons viz. 1. Youth pastoral is always a community endeavour; 2. Often the younger members who are directly in touch with the young perceive the need better, but if the work has to have a lasting and far-reaching impact, it should be supported and guided by the senior members and work together as a team; 3. No technique or skill can substitute our primary calling to be images of Don Bosco in the carrying out of our mission.

Most of these Don Bosco works have flourished because they followed, perhaps intuitively, the axiom of don Bosco, ‘Love what the young people love’. In fact, KNS has articulated very succinctly when it says, “Through Drama to Religion”. Thus things which attract young people – drama, music, sports and cultural activities – become the means to draw them to their ultimate goal: God. Most of the Clubs integrate also two other dimensions: 1. the spiritual through the study of Sacred Scripture, youth retreats, library and Reading Room facilities 2. the social through outreach programmes towards those experiencing disasters, networking with social agencies and honouring significant achievers in society. Thus they offered a holistic formation and have accomplished a yeoman service in preparing *Good Christians and honest citizens* for the Church and society.

The association of Don Bosco with Konkani language and culture is indeed quite interesting. The Mangalorean Catholic Community has suffered much owing to its allegiance to its language and culture. Hence Don Bosco’s association with this language somehow allows him to be perceived as ‘our Saint’, thus facilitating the enculturation of his charism and spirituality.

It is indeed amazing to see Don Bosco’s appeal even in so-called non-Christian contexts. The type of works and cultural activities associated with him also reveal the image of Don Bosco not only as a Patron of youth, but also as the *Saint of a secular spirituality* who can penetrate beyond any barriers and reach out to even those people who may possess no faith in God at all. From this we may also conclude that the “Brand Don Bosco” has the appeal of presenting God in a very attractive and non-threatening manner. Perhaps, we need to present, enhance and discover new ways of strengthening the so-called *spirituality of the courtyard* of our beloved Father and Founder. Reaching out to young people of different cultural background and religious contexts Don Bosco has truly proved his own popular saying, “*It is enough that you are young, for me to love you*”!

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