Minutes of the ACSSA South Asia Regional Seminar
27 - 29 June 2025

SALESIAN MISSIONS IN THE WORLD
Evangelisation Endeavours of SDBs and FMAs in South Asia

Day - 1

27 June 2025, Friday

INAUGURATION

The ACSSA (*Associazione Cultori Storia Salesiana* – Association of Promoters Salesian History) Seminar of South Asia Region was set in motion with the inaugural function at 09.00 a.m., which opened with a Prayer Dance by two students of Don Bosco Mithra School INK. It was followed by the lighting of the ceremonial lamp signifying the presence of God, by INK Provincial Rev Fr Jose Koyickal SDB, INK FMA Provincial Sr Lucy Rose Ozhukayil, Fr Thomas Anchukandam SDB - Director ISS, Fr Stanisław Zimniak SDB - ACSSA Secretary, Sr Philomena D'Souza FMA - President ACSSA South Asia and Fr Mathew Kapplikunnel SDB - Member ACSSA Board of Directors. South Asia. This was followed by a series of insightful addresses from prominent Salesian figures. The seminar, aimed at fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Salesian history in the region, commenced in an atmosphere of academic rigor and spiritual reflection.

The inaugural session, held on 27 June 2025, featured a line-up of distinguished speakers who set the tone for the regional gathering.

Welcome Address
Fr. Sebastian Kudackat SDB, Rector of Don Bosco Provincial House Bangalore, delivered the welcome address, warmly greeting all participants and highlighting the significance of the seminar for the South Asian Salesian context. His words underscored the importance of historical inquiry in preserving the rich legacy of Don Bosco and the Salesian congregation.

Presidential Address
Fr. Jose Koyickal SDB Provincial of INK gave the presidential address, sharing his reflections on the seminar's objectives and the role of ACSSA in promoting Salesian studies. His speech emphasized the need for scholarly research to illuminate the Salesian charism's impact throughout history and its relevance in contemporary times.

Inspirational Talk
Sr. Lucy Rose FMA - Provincial of INK**,** delivered an inspirational talk, captivating the audience with her profound insights. Her address provided a spiritual dimension to the historical discussions, reminding attendees of the enduring spirit and mission that underpins Salesian endeavours.

Keynote Address
The keynote address was delivered by **Fr. Thomas Anchukandam SDB** - Director ISS, a renowned scholar of Salesian history. His presentation delved into key aspects of Salesian

historical development, offering a comprehensive overview that laid the groundwork for further discussions during the seminar.

Voice from the Centre

Fr. Stanisław Zimniak SDB - ACSSA Secretary, officially representing the ACSSA Board, voiced the mind of the Central ACSSA, sharing perspectives and updates from the global ACSSA organization. His address reinforced the interconnectedness of regional Salesian history with the broader international narrative and the collective efforts to preserve and promote it.

Messages

Messages were sent by the Rector Major Rev Fr Fabio Attard SDB, Mother General Rev Sr Chiara Cazzuola FMA, Regional councillor of South Asia Rev Fr Biju Pulianmackal and President of Central ACSSA Sr Maria Maul FMA to all participants of the Seminar assuring them of their great interest in promoting Salesian History in the World with a specific emphasis on the Evangelisation Endeavours of SDBs and FMAs in South Asia. Each of them acknowledged and appreciated the commendable work done in this area so far around the Salesian World. As they greeted the participants they extended their best wishes and blessings to them for the resounding success of the Seminar. Their messages were displayed on the screen in videos or plain texts.

Vote of Thanks

The inaugural session concluded with a heartfelt vote of thanks delivered by **Sr. Philomena D'Souza -** President ACSSA South Asia, who expressed gratitude to all speakers, organizers and their collaborators, as well as participants for their contributions to a successful conduct of the seminar.

The inauguration successfully set the stage for the ACSSA South Asia Regional Seminar, promising a productive and enlightening exchange of historical knowledge and perspectives over the coming days.

Presentation of Research Papers:

Following the Inauguration, there was a tea break and the seminar proceeded with paper presentation sessions across multiple tracks in the conference hall. The presentations were broadly categorized into themes reflecting the diverse interests of the participating SDBs and FMAs. Some of the key thematic areas included:

1. *Reservations of the Indian Union Government in the case of Foreign Missionaries in North East India: A Discourse based on their Correspondence"* by Fr Thomas Anchukandam DB – Director ISS.
2. *"A Missionary Appraisal of St Mary's Guwahati, the first FMA house in North India"* presented by Rev Sr Penny Rose Chinir FMA, ING.
3. *"Starting of Salesian Mission among the Nepalis"* by Fr George Thirumalachalil SDB, INC.
4. *"First Salesian Mission in Karnataka: Hospet"* presented by Fr Mahimai Dass SDB, INK.

Every research paper manifested unique features of its own based on the context of the location where it is written. Every speaker did the best and notable work in research work to prepare the paper and its presentation in this significant gathering.

The inaugural day of the ACSSA South Asia Regional Seminar concluded with the solemn celebration of the Holy Eucharist, celebrating the Solemnity of The Sacred Heart of Jesus, presided over by Fr Jose Koyickal SDB, Provincial, and followed by a 'Good Night' talk by Fr Shalbin Kalancherry SDB - Vice-provincial of Bangalore, who highlighted some of the pastoral initiatives of the Bangalore province.

The active participation and engaging discussions underscored the critical need for continued academic exchange and collaborative research in the South Asian context. The seminar served as a vital platform for sharing knowledge, forging new collaborations and collectively addressing the complex challenges and opportunities facing the region. Further proceedings are scheduled for 28 June 2025.

In a first time this seminar was attended also by two sisters from the congregation of the 'Sisters of Maria Ausiliatrice', a branch of the Salesian Family.

To facilitate wider participation, facility was offered to follow the seminar proceedings via Google Meet.

Sr Theresa Phawa FMA, INS
Minutes: Day - 2
28 June 2025, Saturday

The second day of the seminar kicked off with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist cum morning prayer, commemorating the Immaculate Heart of Mary in the conference hall at 7.00 a.m. Fr George Thirumalachalil SDB (INC) presided over the concelebrated Eucharist.

At the outset, Fr George reminded the assembly that historians are called not only to recount events, but also to treasure and ponder them in their hearts - like Mary - recognizing God's presence even in the ordinary and the incomprehensible. He invited everyone to repent for the times they had failed to do so.

In his homily, continuing the Marian theme of the day, he emphasized: *The greatness of Mary lies in the fact that she had a large heart to store things she could not understand. We too must have a large heart and recognize God's hand at work in the daily events of our life.*

Fr George further reflected that Mary offers us the most effective methodology to bring Christ to the world and awaken faith in others. Just as she did in her visitation to Elizabeth, Mary shows us how to bring Christ into every family and allow the Holy Spirit to fill others with divine light. Drawing from stories of the early mission in Sikkim, he emphasized the power of witness through daily life – highlighting the importance of small yet meaningful actions: speaking few but thoughtful words, being friendly and kind, showing genuine care and concern, living simply, and offering a positive greeting. The uplifting and harmonious singing added fervor and grace to the Eucharistic celebration. The Mass concluded with breakfast, marking a peaceful and reflective start to the day.

At 8.45 a.m. the assembly reconvened in the conference hall for the presentation of papers. The atmosphere was prayerfully set by a beautiful rendition of Psalm 78, composed by Ron Haeske: *We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord.* This song aptly captured the spirit and mission of the day.

Fr. Mathew Kapplikunnel SDB, offered a brief welcome to the participants and gently reminded everyone of the importance of adhering to the schedule. Without delay, Sr Eugini F. Lourdusamy FMA, the session moderator, introduced the first speaker Sr. DJ Margaret FMA. Her presentation focused on the topic "*Evangelisation and Empowerment of Women in North Arcot through Auxilium College, Katpadi*."

Utilizing a PowerPoint presentation, Sr. Margaret highlighted key aspects of the College's mission and its transformative impact on women in the region. Although a few questions were posed by the audience, time constraints did not allow for an in-depth discussion. The moderator expressed appreciation and thanked Sr. Margaret for her informative and engaging presentation.

The second speaker of the day was Sr. Lily Perumpettikunnel FMA, who presented the topic, "*The Beginnings of the FMA Mission in Myanmar*". She was introduced by Sr Basanthi Ekka FMA, who also thanked her at the conclusion of the presentation. Sr Lily delivered her talk with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, offering historical insights and reflections on the early days of the FMA mission in Myanmar.

Following her, the third speaker Sr Eugenia Laloo FMA was introduced by Sr. Molly Kaniampady FMA. Sr. Eugenia presented her paper on the topic "*Contribution of the FMA to the Hospital Ministry in Northern India*", creatively utilizing a podcast to enhance the presentation. Her engaging and innovative approach was well received by the audience, and she was warmly thanked by the moderator.

At 11.00 a.m., the assembly dispersed for a short break.

At 11.30 a.m., the fourth speaker Fr Barnes Mawrie SDB was introduced by Sr Theresa Phawa FMA**.** His presentation focused on the topic "*Evangelization of Cultures through the Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Cultures*". Fr Barnes employed both a video presentation and PowerPoint to illustrate the role of the Centre in preserving and promoting indigenous cultures through the lens of evangelization. He was warmly thanked by the moderator for his insightful contribution.

The fifth and final speaker of the session was Fr John Tharakan SDB**,** introduced by Fr Mathew Emprayil SDB**.** His presentation titled "*The Salesian Missionary Thrust in Andhra Pradesh in the Context of the Emerging Social Challenges*", was delivered with the support of on-screen projection and a clear verbal explanation. The presentation explored the evolving educational landscape and the Salesian response to new challenges in the region. He was duly thanked by the moderator for his thoughtful exposition.

At 1.15 p.m., the assembly dispersed for lunch, concluding a rich and engaging morning session.

In the afternoon session Sr Sahaya Sangeetha Rani presented her paper on "*The Beginnings of the FMA mission in Andhra Pradesh*". As she could not be present in person, being in Rome, her presentation was done online through Google Meet. She delineated the struggles and challenges the pioneers had to go through to plant the seeds of the Salesian charism in Andhra Pradesh.

At 4.20 p.m., the seminar participants departed for a visit to **Don Bosco College**, KR Puram, Bengaluru**,** traveling by bus and a support vehicle. Upon arrival, they were warmly welcomed by Fr Wilson Konthempilly SDB**,** Rector of the institution. He offered a brief but informative account of the college's history, noting that it was established in 2022**.**

Following this Fr Dr Geo Kalladanthiyil SDB**,** Principal of the college, addressed the group in the Board Room**,** providing an insightful overview of the institution's mission, academic programs and facilities. After the session, all participants were invited to tour the college campus. Additionally, some members took the opportunity to visit the nearby Kristu Jyoti College.

The group returned to the college at 7.30 p.m.**,** where they were graciously treated to a grand dinner**.** Fr Mathew Kapplikunnel SDB**,** extended heartfelt thanks to the Rector and the college community for their generous hospitality, the fraternal Salesian spirit and the delightful meal shared together.

At 8.10 p.m.**,** the group departed from Don Bosco College and returned to Don Bosco Provincial House by 9.00 p.m. Shortly thereafter, at 9.15 p.m. the night prayers were held in the conference hall. This was followed by the Good Night talk by Sr. DJ Margaret FMA**,** Provincial of Chennai. She spoke on the FMA mission in Sri Lanka**,** which was established in 2008**,** and requested the continued prayers of all present for the mission's growth. She expressed her hope that this new mission would bear abundant fruit and contribute meaningfully to the establishment of God's Kingdom in Sri Lanka.

Day – 3
29 June 2025, Sunday

Evangelizing with Zeal: Echoes of Missionary Fervour

The third and final day of the ACSSA Seminar, *Salesian Mission in the World: Evangelization Endeavours of SDBs and FMAs in South Asia* dawned with spiritual fervour and joyful anticipation, made even more meaningful by the celebration of the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, the fearless pillars of our faith.

The Holy Eucharist, with morning prayers integrated, opened the day. In a brief yet profound introduction, Sr Antony Lourdu Sagayam invited the participants to savour the Word of God and live it with conviction, following the bold witness of Sts. Peter and Paul. Presiding over the Mass, Fr. Maria Arockiam Kanaga offered a stirring homily, reflecting on four missionary passions: faith in Christ, proclamation of His Word, building Christian community and embracing the Cross. Though differing in personality and background, Peter and Paul were united in these core convictions, a timely and powerful inspiration for every missionary today. With hearts stirred and purpose renewed, the day unfolded in the same missionary spirit.
The morning sessions offered a series of impactful and insightful presentations by scholars, each shedding light on the vibrant missionary spirit lived out by members of the Salesian Family in South Asia.

- *Echoes of a Brave Heart: Mother Helen Fernandes FMA:*
  Sr. Philomena D'Souza brought alive the inspiring story of Mother Helen Fernandes, one of the first Indian FMAs to shape the mission in the Madras (now Chennai) Province. With a heart rooted in deep faith and simplicity, Mother Helen lived the Salesian spirit with quiet strength and joyful conviction. She didn't just follow the motto "Evangelise by educating and educate by evangelising", she embodied it. Her writings, filled with wisdom and passion, continue to echo her call to "have a broad mind and a large heart". A woman of courage and vision, her legacy still lights the path for missionaries today.
- *Fr Mathew Kapplikunnel SDB* delivered the presentation titled, *"A Missionary with Fire: The Zeal of Fr Abraham Panampara SDB."*

With passionate conviction, Fr Mathew brought to life the extraordinary journey of Fr Abraham Panampara, who was a man ablaze with missionary zeal, bold, compassionate and firm in his pursuit of souls for Christ. Leaving behind academic prestige, he stepped into the humble villages of Andhra Pradesh, adopting a simple lifestyle among the poor, and speaking their language of faith and love. He preached the Gospel with clarity and power, trained over 900 catechists and built vibrant Christian communities modelled on the early Church. Unafraid to challenge injustice, he encouraged converts to keep their names to protect their dignity and rights, insisting that faith, not labels, defines a Christian. His prayer-filled life, dynamic preaching and unwavering trust in the Spirit turned fields into churches and strangers into disciples. Fr Panampara was not just a missionary he was a flame that ignited many hearts, a living echo of Don Bosco's dream, and a witness to the saving love of Christ. The foundation of his missionary enterprise was the command of Jesus, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news … one who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk16,15-16).

- *Sr Sheela Jacob FMA* presented the highlights of her reflection titled, *"Missionary Impulse of Auxilium Kottiyam: A Story of Zeal and Growth".*
  Sr Sheela traced the inspiring journey of Auxilium Kottiyam, the first Salesian foundation in Kerala, established in 1977 – a bold missionary initiative in a land already steeped in Christian heritage. Through the pioneering efforts of Sr Anna Thekkekandathil and Sr Josephine Pereira, the mission began humbly in a rented cottage, launching youth oratories, family outreach, and skill training for girls, even amidst cultural tensions. Sr Sheela emphasized how the sisters' pastoral closeness and incarnational approach transformed Kottiyam into a cradle of vocations and a dynamic centre of Salesian evangelisation. She affirmed that Kottiyam truly embodies the spirit of Mission *Ad Gentes*, a mission that forms hearts, builds communities and continues to bear fruit for the Salesian charism in South India.

After a short refreshment break, the gathering reconvened with eager anticipation to be enriched by the next speaker, whose insights promised to enlighten minds and stir hearts.

- It was interesting to listen to the narration of Fr. Thomas Anchukandam on the "*Contribution of Pioneer missionary Don Luigi Cerato (1925-1976)*". Fr Luigi Cerato, one of the first Salesian missionaries in Assam, whose quiet dedication helped shape the early mission in Northeast India. Entering the seminary with deep faith, Fr. Cerato embraced the call to mission with humility and zeal. Learning the local language became a key step in his inculturated approach, allowing him to connect deeply with the people. His mission was marked by simple presence, pastoral closeness and solid service, planting the first seeds of Salesian life in the region.
- Fr. Mathew Kapplikunnel SDB presented the paper of Fr. Stanisław Zimniak SDB, ACSSA Secretary from Rome, titled *Filippo Rinaldi: the origin of the vocation and the "missionary passion" of the Salesian Congregation, the drafting of the first Missionary Regulations, and the establishment of the General Mission Procure by the 13th General Chapter of 1929*.
  The presentation offered a valuable historical insight into how the missionary spirit was shaped, sustained, and promoted within the Salesian Congregation under the leadership of Fr Rinaldi, highlighting his dynamic vision and enduring influence on Salesian evangelizing efforts across the world.

Re-energized after lunch, the participants reconvened for a captivating session featuring the presentation of the recently released volume *"Reasoned Paths of Historiography for Salesian History (1971–2022)",* edited by Cinzia Angelucci and Stanisław Zimniak SDB. The volume

was introduced by Fr. Mathew Kapplikunnel SDB, who described it as a monumental work comprising 5,282 scientifically curated entries. These entries encompass philosophical, theological, educational and devotional dimensions of a scientific nature, offering an in-depth view of the Salesian tradition.

Fr Kapplikunnel emphasized the book's unique worth that the impressive volume brings together a wide array of articles and books, offering a classified bibliographical approach to Salesian history and spirituality – a must for anyone who intends to do research on any Salesian topic, in order to know the state of research on that theme. It is creatively framed as a symbolic journey through a grand "pavilion" of seven rooms, each representing a key chapter in Salesian history. Over 5,000 "paintings" – metaphors for the scholarly entries – richly portray the global mission of the Salesian Family, from the foundational legacy of Don Bosco to the missionary dynamism of his spiritual heirs and the Marian inspiration of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

- Participants were also familiarized with and guided on how to make the most of the treasure trove of the official **website www.is-acssa.org**, the digital hub of the Institute of Salesian History ISS) and Association of the Promoters of Salesian History (ACSSA) combined.

Evaluation of the Seminar

The Participants were divided into six groups and the focus of the discussions centred around two essential themes:

1. Organizing Paper Presentations
2. Maintaining the Scientific Character of the Seminar

The open forum that followed these group discussions was a vibrant exchange of experiences, insights and forward-thinking ideas. Below is a synthesis of the most impactful suggestions:

Paper Presentations

- Quality over Quantity: Limit the number of presentations to 5 per day to ensure deeper engagement and meaningful dialogue.
- Time Management: Allocate 45 minutes per presentation, followed by dedicated time for feedback and Q&A.
- Time for peer learning, panel discussions, debates and workshop-style presentations to diversify the learning experience.

Upholding the Scientific Character:

- Follow the Norms for writing a scientific paper provided by ACSSA and followed by ISS.
- Course through Online to be offered.

Recommendations for Follow up

Constitution of ACSSA Committee for selection of papers to the global Seminar in 2027: Fr. KJ Louis's suggestion to form a 5-member committee to select the papers, was unanimously agreed upon and executed on the spot.

The following members were chosen: Sr Philomena D'Souza, Sr Devadoss Margaret, Fr Barnes Mawrie, Fr Valerian Pereira, Fr Dominic Selvaraj Hendry.

In his ***Concluding Message***, Fr Stanisław Zimniak SDB offered heartfelt thanks to the ACSSA team, acknowledging the three years of dedicated preparation behind the seminar. He reminded the assembly that this moment marks not a conclusion, but a launchpad especially significant

as the Salesian Family prepares to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition to South America.

The seminar drew to a meaningful close with heartfelt words of gratitude from Sr Philomena D'Souza FMA, President of ACSSA, who acknowledged the dedication, intellectual richness and fraternal spirit that marked each session. A special note of appreciation was extended to Fr. Jose Koyickal SDB, Provincial of INK, for graciously allowing to host the seminar in the Provincial House and for the warm hospitality that made this gathering both fruitful and memorable.

As the participants parted ways, they carried with them not only new knowledge and inspiration but also a renewed sense of mission to deepen the roots of Salesian history, to tell its story with fidelity and passion, and to contribute to its unfolding narrative with scholarly integrity and missionary zeal.

Administrative Matters

Once the non-ACSSA members who participated in the seminar left, the ACSSA members stayed back for a special session to discuss purely ACSSA matters. The discussions centred around recruiting new members, the theme for the next seminar and election of new office bearers.

Fr Kapplikunnel had already during the seminar invited the participants to enrol themselves in ACSSA and forwarded to them the application form and the form for the permission of the respective provincial.

As per earlier decision ACSSA seminar is to be held every two years. However, in view of the global seminar in 2027, it was agreed that the next appointment would be in 2028. The theme proposed was the same as this time – the Missions – as much more remained to be studied under this theme.

As the current office bearers Sr Pilomena D'Souza and Fr Mathew Kapplikunnel, president and secretary respectively expressed their wish for a change, Fr Valerian Pereira and Sr Molly Kaniampady were elected in their place as president and secretary respectively, in keeping with the decision to alternate the posts between SDBs and FMAs.

Compiled by: Sr Theresa Phawa – Sr Lydia Komuhra – Sr Jothy Antony Rayappan.