

# *A Zealous Pastor*

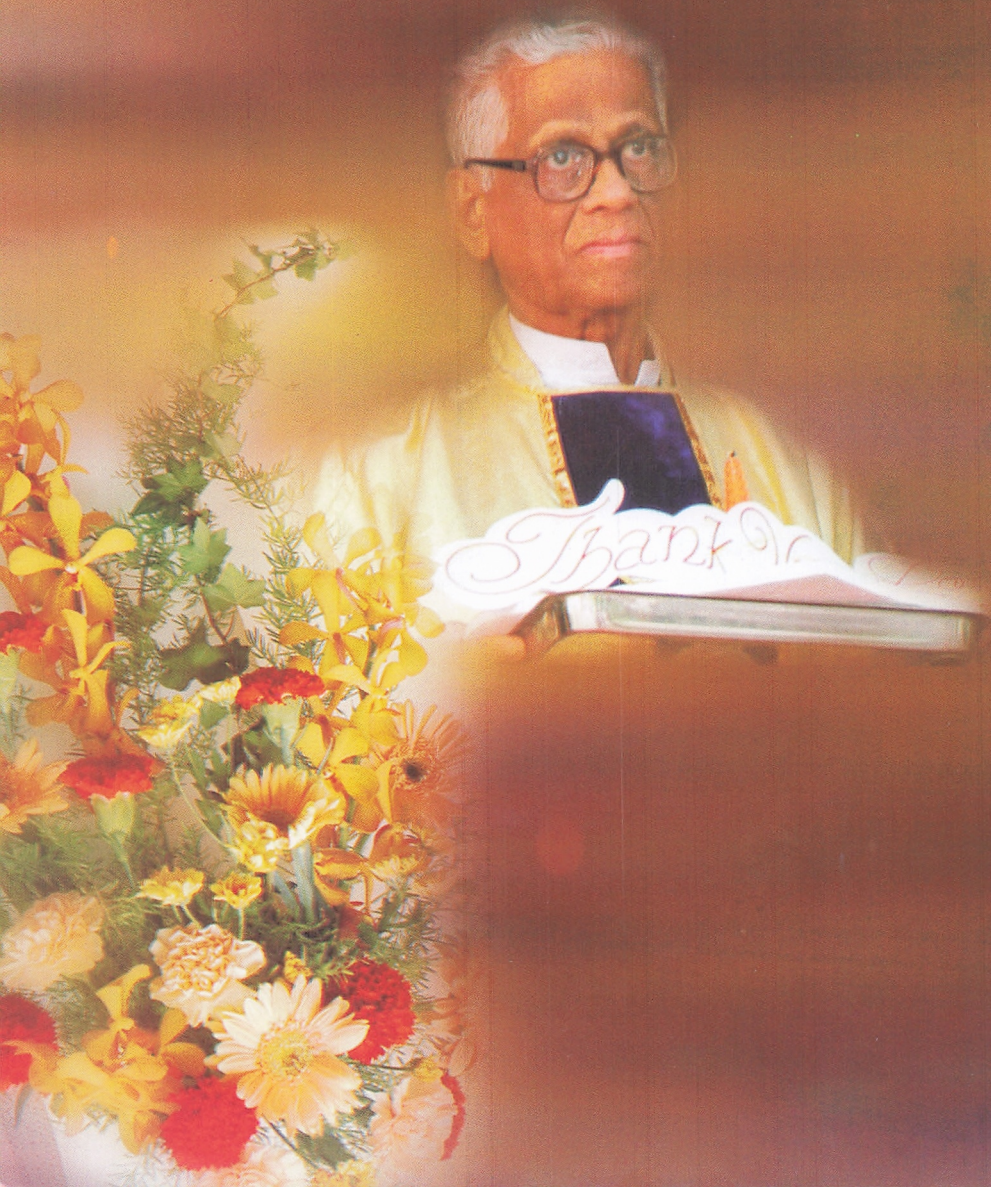


**FR. JOHN NEDUMPURAM SDB  
(1922 - 2007)**

*A Loving Tribute from the  
Salesians of Tiruchy Province*



*An Evangelizer at All Times*





## **Fr. JOHN NEDUMPURAM, S.D.B.**

**1922 – 2007**

### **His early life in the family**

John was born on 7 December 1922 in Nedumpuram family at Kothamangalam, in the Archdiocese of Ernakulam, Kerala. His parents were Ittiyavira and Theresa Koikara. The baby was baptized on 17<sup>th</sup> December in St. George's Church, Kothamangalam. During his early years he was a well-built and strong boy, sufficiently intelligent, but playful and carefree. One day his aunt-nun and his own sister-nun advised him: "Forget about the past and now onwards study hard and have an ambition in life. Continue your schooling and get through your SSLC. Don't be lazy!" This advice of his elders could not have come at a more opportune time! Fortunately, Pappachan took to heart this advice and from that day he started studying. He studied as hard as he could and passed his SSLC in the government examination of 1943.

### **N.I. John's initial Salesian formation**

That year God intervened in John Nedumpuram's life in a special way and brought him in contact with Fr. Jose' Carreno, SDB who was then the acting provincial of the Madras Province. As per his invitation N.I. John came to Tirupattur at the beginning of June 1943. After three years in the aspirantate, he entered the novitiate at Kotagiri in May 1946 under the





direction of Fr. Orpheus Mantovani, the Novice Master. He got a thorough training in Salesian Spirit and professed a year later, on 24 May 1947.

## Philosophy and Theology

John made his first triennial profession in 1947 after which he started his philosophical studies in the same place (Kotagiri). But when he completed the first year, the Provincial of Madras did not have sufficient number of young confreres to assist the boys in the boarding schools. Hence he asked those who were completing the first year of philosophy at Kotagiri to go immediately for their Practical Training. Thus young Brother John was sent to 'The Refuge' Chennai at the end of May 1948, to assist the boys and also take a few classes in the elementary school. At the end of the school year the group was sent back to Kotagiri to continue their philosophical studies. To continue his practical training he was sent to Don Bosco, Matunga, Bombay (Mumbai) for two more years. By February 1952 he was ready for theological studies and was sent to Mawlai. N.I. John made his Final Profession only at the end of the first year of Theology on 07-12-1952. He continued his theological course and received the Minor Order of *Lector* on 25 July 1953 and *Acolyte* on 7 December 1953. By April 1955 he received the Order of Diaconate. He was ordained a priest by Rt. Rev. Stephen Ferrando, SDB, Bishop of Shillong on 8 December 1955, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.







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## Priestly Ministry

Fr. John did his first year of priestly ministry at St. Bede's Anglo Indian School, Chennai (1956-57), doing at the same time his TTC (Diploma in Teachers' Training). In the following year he was at 'The Refuge' also in the same city and continued his TTC and successfully completed the Diploma course by the end of the year.

Most of the following years starting from 1958 John worked as Parish priest in various places: For five years he was at **Chingleput starting from 1958**. That parish was at that time under the care of the Salesians of Don Bosco. From Chingleput Fr. John used to go to a village not too far, Oragadam, the people were still amenable to evangelization work. In fact he had taken up that work seriously. It was by no means easy or comfortable without the minimum of convenience *in loco* - no presbytery, no church and at the beginning very few Christians! Fr. N.I. John did pioneering work at Oragadam not caring for his health or conveniences of life. He taught catechism to that villagers living in nearby places. Thus he was able to baptize a number of people. Today Oragadam has become a flourishing mission station with a noticeable growth in neighbouring villages.

Fr. John was the **Parish Priest of St. Francis Xavier's church, Chennai (1963-65)**. He continued with as much zeal the devotion to Mary Help of Christians and the celebrations in her honour on the 24<sup>th</sup> of every month. Most of these Marian practices were started by Fr. Orpheus Mantovani, John's novice







Master and also his immediate predecessor. Another apostolate which was perhaps more congenial to Fr. John's mentality was his apostolate among the very poor living in crowded shackles in the Port area of the city. Some of the young women were almost forced by poverty to enter into the flesh trade. Fr. John helped them to the best of his ability to change their ways and to rehabilitate them in faith and economic self-sufficiency.

Fr. John's next appointment was to be the **Rector of St. Joseph's Technical Institute, Katpadi (1965-68)**. All the usual activities: the carpentry, the small mechanical shop, the band under the direction of Mr. Sagayam, a renowned musician and all the other activities of St. Joseph's Industrial School of Katpadi continued to flourish under the direction of Fr. John.

After completing his term as Rector, Fr. John was quite happy to go to **Sagayathottam as Rector (1968-71)** to look after the poor boys. He continued the efficient work started by Fr. Emilio Dabove who was earlier the Economer of the Province. With the help of Fr. K.C.George (administrator and farm incharge), he managed to clear the debt the house had incurred earlier.

Fr. John was in **Oragadam as the Parish Priest from 1971 to 1975**. By now Oragadam, started by him, was already erected as a parish. Going there and working among the Catholics whom he had baptized was a great joy for him since he could continue their Christian formation. He had lived there without any convenience whatever, but now there was a little presbytery with ordinary conveniences.







Around the year 1975 Fr. Provincial was on the lookout for one who could work for the Tamil speaking Catholics of Bangalore. He picked up Fr. John and sent him to **Holy Family Church as its Parish Priest (1975-78)**. He worked there with great zeal trying to set right several marriages, helped those working in quarries or in the telephone Factory (ITI).

In 1978 he was back at **Sagayathottam as Rector (1978-83)**. He was very familiar both with the environment and the work in 300 acres of agricultural land and large Cattle Farm. By now the Agricultural School was raised to the status of a College with the facility to confer degrees in agriculture. In the house he took care of the religious life of his confreres. He also continued his work for the poor people around.

After many years of hard work in various capacities, now that he was 65 years old, Fr. Provincial gave him a relatively easy obedience, to be the confessor of the students of philosophy at Yercaud besides Fr. Sola who was by then 81 years old. Whether in the confessional or outside Fr. John inculcated love of purity among the young Salesians of Yercaud. Fr. John's every homily or good night talk ended with a thought on holy Purity.

After just a year he was transferred to Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur as its Rector and Correspondent of the College. He who was a missionary parish priest all his life felt very small in the midst of the most qualified personnel of the province. He accepted Fr. Provincial's orders only because of his spirit of obedience.







At the end of the year a veteran foreign missionary, Fr. Egidio Sola passed away on 9 February 1989. In that situation, the Provincial was on the lookout for a willing confrere who could be both a confessor and the director of the 'propaganda' work at Yercaud. For this work a working knowledge of Italian was almost essential, but Fr. John did not know much of Italian. He was fully aware of the enormous burden he was taking upon himself with the new obedience and he was 76 years old at that time. He did not mind it for the sake of the Lord! He was in Yercaud from 1989 to 1999.

Fr. John was asked to go to the **Pre-novitiate at Vellakinar, Coimbatore in 1999** as a confessor. He was there till his death in 2007.

### **Fr. John towards the end of his life**

Fr. Peter Gnanasekar, the Rector of Vellakinar House wrote regarding the *Sunset of Fr. John's life*: "Last year (2006), in the early days of September Fr. John fell ill seriously and was in the hospital for ten days. He recovered to some extent and joined the community on September 12<sup>th</sup>. The doctor who treated him told me: 'Fr. John has a number of complications besides having a very low blood count. I do not think he will live long'. This detail however was not in the official medical report. With this in mind, one fine evening I approached Fr. John and asked him whether he had any unfulfilled desires in life. Without waiting for a second, he said that he wanted to visit the parishes







of Chingleput and especially Oragadam where he began his priestly ministry. Fr. John was given a hearty welcome in the two parishes and the people even arranged for a Congratulatory Function for the Golden Jubilee of his priesthood. He celebrated Holy Mass in the parishes of Oragadam, Chingleput as well as in some convents and parishes in Chennai. Amazingly the long and tiresome tour instead of adding to his health problems, enabled him to be refreshed, fully satisfied and happy.

The Golden Jubilee of his ordination was celebrated by the community on August 5, 2005. His priest brothers Antony and Stanley Nedumpuram and their close relatives participated in the celebration. However, not long after that the health of Fr. John began to deteriorate fast. His blood sugar shot up and he also had occasional chest pain. He was admitted in Vimal Jyothi Hospital run by the CMC Sisters, who nursed the bedridden elderly priest for the next 45 days. He was undergoing very severe sufferings from his fracture and other ailments and was writhing in pain. On 4 July (2007) his sickness took a turn for the worse and his brother, Fr. Stanley was informed. That very evening he managed to reach the place with his sister and other relatives. They remained in the hospital close to their dying brother. In the morning of 7<sup>th</sup> July information reached from the hospital that good Fr. John was sinking. Fr. Amalraj Susai, the Provincial of Tiruchy and some confreres rushed to the hospital. All stood around the bed of Fr. John praying for him. One of the priests gave the dying priest an absolution yet another







time. Then those around continued praying and singing. At the words, “*O Lord, abide with me*” Fr. John breathed his last. His body was laid in state in the house and after mass in the morning, it was taken to the new Salesian cemetery at Tiruchy and there laid to rest, to wait for the day of the resurrection.

## Fr. John's Characteristics

**1) His zeal for souls:** The motto of the congregation found on the Coat of Arms of the congregation: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle* (give me souls, take away the rest) is truly applicable to this great Salesian. Whether in his early years of priesthood at St. Bede's, Chennai or at Oragadam or Vellakinar, his one preoccupation was salvation of souls. “Wherever Fr. John was sent”, said Fr. Amalraj Susai, the Provincial of Tiruchy, “he projected himself as a pastor. He paid attention to various needs of people entrusted to his care. But in a particular way, he paid attention to the spiritual growth of the people. He showed a lot of interest in the work of evangelization in the parishes of Chingleput and Oragadam. Even after many years, the parishioners of the area where he was a parish priest still remember him fondly for his generous and dedicated work”.

**2) His Oratorian heart:** Very recently Fr. Arnold Mahesh told me here at Yercaud: “What I appreciate most in Fr. N.I. John is the fact that every evening he would be standing close to the playground where the brothers played to cheer and encourage them”. Fr. John was a good footballer and also took





interest in the games of the brothers. So also he took keen interest in the Oratories to which the clerics were going on Sundays.

**3) His obsession: the virtue of purity:** Fr. John was very patient and understanding with his penitents. Knowing that an important problem faced by the young religious is the preserving of the virtue of purity, he used to speak about it. "To preserve it the necessary means have to be observed: among these, in the first place the spiritual means like the frequent use of the sacrament of penance and possibly daily Holy Communion received fervently and prayerfully and finally devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the second place, the necessary natural means have to be observed: the custody of the senses, particularly the eyes and the sense of touch". He would advise his young penitents again and again not to be worried over the problem, but to take great care to pray well and to make use of all the supernatural and natural means to preserve the virtue of Purity.

**4) Observance of the Vow of Poverty:** Fr. John would have found Article 79 of the Constitutions according to his own heart and way congenial. He was trying to practise it all his life: "The spirit of poverty leads us to be one with the poor and to love them in Christ... 'Remember well, he tells us, "What we have is not ours, it belongs to the poor: woe to us if we do not use it well'. "







**5) Ever available for the sacrament of confession:** Fr. John was noted for his availability in the sacrament of reconciliation. He would be ready to take time and trouble to hear the long queue of penitents on the eve of important solemnities like Easter, patronal feast of the parish where he worked, Christmas, etc. He considered this sacrament as an important means of helping the individual Christian to grow in spiritual life.

**6) Preferential love for the poor:** When he was at Yercaud this love was very visible in his work for the poor of the sub-station of Nagalur (Yercaud parish). He helped the poorer among the people to build houses. Besides Sunday Mass, he used to celebrate mass for them every Thursday evening. Wherever possible, he helped the poor families to send their children to St. Joseph's Katpadi, Dominic Savio, Tirupattur or Sagayathottam Agricultural School for their education.

**7) His readiness to be a 'spare wheel':** Whenever Fr. Provincial needed someone to do a little difficult work and was looking for one, he knew that he could rely on Fr. John. But Fr. N.I. would obey willingly and accomplish the work to the best of his abilities. Like Don Bosco, he too would *dare and hope!*

### **What others have said about Fr. John Nedumpuram**

**1. Fr. Anthony Mampra, SDB:** "Fr. John was very sincere and straight forward in his dealings, but was very exemplary in his religious life, the practice of the vows, his prayer life and





lived his commitment without compromise or compensations. He was a veritable source of inspiration to me all along. Recently someone sent me a list of names of Salesians whom he admired and whose number is dwindling. Fr. John is one among the dwindling species!”

**2. Fr. Camillus, former Provincial of INM:** Wrote to Fr. John on 27-10-1989: “Thanks a lot for your love and concern, help and cooperation. Your unassuming attitude and dedicated service at the confessional and in the ‘Propaganda Office’ impress all of us. Personally I am much touched by your religious life and dedication. Thanks a lot for your timely guidance in the confessional”.

**3. Fr. Vincent Durairaj, former Provincial of INM:** Writing to Fr. John on 28-11-1991 he said: “Personally and in the name of the Province I thank you sincerely for the wonderful and unique service that you are doing in your community as confessor. It is a silent service but the most needed one as we all know. God bless you abundantly for your work and your cooperation with me.”

**4. Fr. John Madasseril (M.U.), SDB:** “Fr. John as I knew him, was a deeply convinced religious, very much attached to his Salesian Vocation. He lived a very simple life; practised poverty even putting himself to inconveniences. He used to travel to Angamaly Eye Hospital in Kerala, a journey of 7 to 8 hours by bus with his small bag and a water bottle and a sandwich.







When I suggested to him that it was better to buy something warm on the way, he said ‘we can save that money and use it for poor boys’. He was happy and contented with what he had and never accepted anything more, not even a new razor more convenient for shaving.”

**5. Fr. Peter Gnanasekar, SDB:** “Fr. John has been a witness to the love of God and has touched us with his simplicity, dedication and the love for the poor.”

**6. Cl. John Joseph:** “Fr. John was my confessor when I was in the pre-novitiate at Vellakinar in the year 2005-2006. My companions too appreciated his silent service in the confessional. Another point I admired in him was his daily presence in the playground when we were playing in the evening; so also the little corrections he used to give us in various little ways”.

Compiled by

**Fr. Joseph Puthenkalam, SDB**



“I can do all things in  
Him who strengthens me”





*"The LORD is my shepherd, I  
shall not want.*

*He makes me lie down in  
green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul.*

*He leads me in right paths  
for his name's sake.*

*Surely goodness and mercy  
shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of  
the LORD  
my whole life long".*

*– Ps 23: 1-3,6*

**Necrology :**

**Born :** 07 December 1922, Kothamangalm (Kerala)

**First Profession :** 24 May 1948, Kotagiri

**Ordination :** 12 December 1956

**Death :** 07 July 2007, Coimbatore

