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**REV. FR. GEORGE PADINJAREPARAMPIL**  
**SALESIAN OF DON BOSCO**  
**(1937-2012)**



<b>Born</b>	<b>On 31<sup>st</sup> March 1937</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Profession</b>	<b>26<sup>th</sup> April 1960</b>
<b>Ordination</b>	<b>20<sup>th</sup> December 1969</b>
<b>Died</b>	<b>19<sup>th</sup> April 2012</b>



## DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

Down the memory lane I trod once,  
To review the past I never dared since;  
To reminisce and afresh see  
The past and relive it for a while.

It was a bridge that I never crossed,  
In n'r thought that experience be so hard;  
Once set out never going back,  
Attain the goal the guts I shouldn't lack.

Past years flashed across my mind  
As in a movie my life bare laid;  
In a trance I forgot the world around  
Lost, contemplating the life I've lived.

Still a boy from home and hearth  
Was taken to a distant land;  
Foreign people, unheard of tongue,  
Bewildered, confused, utterly disoriented!

Was the choice right! Did by chance I blunder?  
Spent more than a sleepless night  
No turning back, proceed I must,  
To reach the goal, walk the path I should.

I shuddered at the wild sea of life,  
Tossed about like a tiny bark without rudder;  
Dragging me down the darkened chasm  
of allurements of this cunning wild world.

Many a mountain I struggled to mount,  
Many a darkened valley I traversed;  
Winding roads and crooked paths I trod,  
Loathing the path for me he'd trace.

Frightened I prayed for a ray  
Of light to illumine my darkness  
A command from the master,  
As he did for his timid friends.

The command give he did,  
From torpor he raised me up  
A flood of rays lighted my way,  
He took me and by the hand he led.

The dove of peace hovered over me,  
Calm and serenity flood my being;  
By my side the master walked showing  
Me the way full of Roses not without thorns.

I pray that the remaining years,  
I should walk in the shadow of His hands;  
And so the threshold, He would guide,  
Of heaven, His Father's abode.

Fr. P.D. George

**April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2012:**

**A great heart stopped beating!"**, wrote Fr Giovanni Rolandi, the Provincial, announcing the sad demise of Fr George Padinjareparampil; he added,

"With sadness and bowing to the will of God, I announce to you the news of the passing away of Reverend Father **George Padinjareparampil** (1937-2012).

The sad news came in the morning of 19<sup>th</sup> April 2012. He was at the home of his younger brother in Kerala, India (Kanjirapally) and was taking breakfast around 9:00 a.m. (IST) when he collapsed. He was immediately rushed to the nearby hospital and died on the way. The cause of death in all likelihood was a massive heart attack..."

Fr Gianni expressed heartfelt condolences to our confreres, Fr Dominic PD, Fr Johnny PD and Fr Jose PT who are Fr George's brothers and nephew respectively: "May the Lord console them in this time of loss and grieving. May our Mother Mary be very close to them and to the rest of the Padinjareparampil family, as they come to terms with the loss of their dear Fr George."

Kindly let us keep Fr George PD and the members of his family in our prayer, as we ask the Lord for the gift of eternal joy and for the reward of a life lived to the full in the mission to the young. May his soul rest in eternal peace!", wrote Fr Rolandi.

On 23rd April, Monday the family members, relatives, friends, religious and priests kept prayerful night vigil. The following day his brother, Fr. Dominic Padinjareparampil began the emotionally touching celebration of the final rite. The procession from his ancestral home to the parish church was followed by the Eucharistic celebration presided over by his younger brother Fr. Johny Padinjareparampil. Fr. Gianni Rolandi preached after the gospel, and spoke about the legacy left by Fr. George, and challenged everyone to fill the gap left by him. The Bishop of Kanjirapally, Rt. Rev. Mathew Arackal gave his message and presided over the final rites and laid his body to rest in the Cathedral parish in his home town Kanjirapally.



## *Early Life*

George, the third child to Dominic and Elizabeth Padinjareparampil was born on 31 March, 1937, with two elder brothers, four younger brothers and one younger sister. As a child he was adventurous and enterprising. He suffered many privations in his childhood due to economic problems of the family and worked with his brothers to contribute to the family income. Having suffered privations in his life, he could easily identify with the poor and the needy in his later years. However, he didn't believe in doling out charity; rather he worked to empower the poor to stand on their feet to fend for themselves.

He completed elementary and intermediate studies at St. Dominic's Primary and Middle school at Kanjirappally, Kerala State, South India. When he completed class VIII in 1953, he heard about Fr. Peter Bianchi SDB recruiting aspirants for Salesian aspirantate at Bandel, West Bengal. On 14<sup>th</sup> June 1953 he left home with his companions from Kanjirappally (such as Fr. George Kochukarippaparampil, the late Bishop Mathai Kochuparampil and Variyathukalayil Joseph) and reached Bandel. After 3 years in Bandel, he spent another 3 years (1956–59) in Sonada, Darjeeling, West Bengal to complete his Higher Secondary studies. It was in Sonada, under the direction of superiors like Frs. Patrick Sheehy and Nicholas LoGroi, that he continued to aspire to holiness, frequent sacraments, get into the habit of hard work both in studies and manual labour, and develop devotions to the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Help of Christians. Hard work with great determination and persistence helped him to do his studies well – traits that were exhibited all through his life.

He started his novitiate on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1959 at Sunnyside, Shillong with his novice master, Fr. Joseph Bacchiarello whom he admired for his holiness, Salesian spirit, as well as remembered for the personal care and guidance he received from him. He made his first profession on 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1960 and thus became a Salesian belonging to the Calcutta province. He completed a double BA, in philosophy and in English, with distinction at Salesian College, Sonada, in 1963.



Bro George did the practical training in Bandel, and then at Don Bosco School, Krishnanagar, W Bengal. On 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1965, he made his perpetual profession at Sonada.

He did the first year of his theological studies at Mawlai, Shillong, his second year at Kottagiri and the third and fourth year at Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore, the new theologate and thus belonged to its first batch of theology students<sup>1</sup>. As the new campus was taking shape, he combined theological studies with hard manual work and cultivated an orchard with high quality mango, guava and a variety of fruit trees. They still continue to provide plentiful delicious fruits even to this day. They bear witness to his Salesian qualities of hard work, family spirit, and a sense of belonging as well as his interest and expertise in farming and cultivation – qualities that he manifested all through his pastoral ministry wherever he served.

20<sup>th</sup> December, 1969, was a memorable day for Dn George when Most Rev. Joseph Attippetti ordained him a priest at Vaduthala, Ernakulam together with his companions. On the following day he celebrated his first Mass at his home parish, St. Dominic's Church, Kanjirappally.

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1 *Sino-Indian War 1962: The theologians move from Shilling to Kotagiri and then to Bangalore*  
A region called South Tibet, that makes up most of the land governed by Arunachal Pradesh, is claimed by China. Sino-Indian relations degraded during the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The cause of the escalation into war is still disputed by both Chinese and Indian sources. During the war in 1962, the PRC captured much of the NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency) created by India in 1954. However, China soon declared ceasefire and due to Soviet veto in UN withdrew back to the McMahon Line and returned Indian prisoners of war in 1963.

In 1962 the theologians from Shilling moved to the theologate at Kotagiri, South India. This further led to the building of Kristu Jyoti at Bangalore with a view to accommodate the salesian theology students from all over India and also from elsewhere. This explains Fr George's theological study itinerant.



He chose as his motto: **"At thy word I will let down the net."** (Lk 5:5). This motto proved to be very significant all throughout his life: Peter the fisherman seemed to know better about fishing than Jesus the Carpenter... but Peter ultimately obeyed Jesus and the miracle ensued... Though Fr. George had a lot of differences with those in authority, and would voice his objections strongly, he generally submitted to his superiors at the end as a sign of his spirit of obedience to God's will.

*On the Banks of the Hooghly, the 260 kilometre long distributary of the mighty Ganges*

40 miles from Calcutta, on the banks of the Hooghly river, the new priest became the 'Catechist' (Vice Rector) of Bandel Seminary in 1970. He was seen everywhere – in the church celebrating mass, in the class room teaching, in the dormitory assisting boys, in the infirmary dispensing medicines, on the scooter running errands, in the farm tilling the land and growing vegetables or supervising the poultry and animal farm - everywhere with his characteristic trade mark of tough love. When he found that the aspirants did not have healthy and sufficient food to eat, he started a farm that provided plenty of vegetables, eggs, milk and meat. He showed his love not in mere words but in concrete action - caring for people and catering to their needs – material and spiritual. He was privileged to live in the Marian shrine and under the mantle of Our Lady of Happy Voyage. Here his bond with the mother of Jesus became stronger and become a source of energy and protection as she upheld his life's voyage and preparing him to be an outstanding 'first evangelisation' missionary.

He was transferred to Azimganj in 1973 and after a short stay there he opted to go to Nagaland for frontline mission work, what we now call first evangelization. Thus he moved from Bengal to North East India. God had his plans and continued fashioning him for the tasks to come.



## **Missionary Grounding**

*beneath the 'Roof of the World' (the Himalayan Foothills):*

## **Missionary to North East India**

### *Salesians in the NE India*

From 1918 onwards Rome requested the Salesians to take over the Assam Mission at least five times. In July 1921 the Rector Major, Fr Albera acceded to the renewed and insistent request of the Holy See. Fr Louis Mathias and his ten companions<sup>2</sup> were the chosen pioneers from France, Spain and Italy. In 1922 the Salesians officially took over the Assam Mission from the Jesuit Superior at Calcutta in the presence of Mgr Ferdinand Périer, SJ, the Archbishop of Calcutta. The handwritten notes of the Salvatorian Missionaries record a 10,000 strong faithful group of Catholics in the Seven Sister States. As God continued to shower his blessings on the efforts of self-giving missionaries, the North East has grown into 16 dioceses and 11 Indian Provinces, excluding Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

Dr. F.S. Downs the eminent historian on Christianity in the Northeast India says, "Without question, the most important post-war development had been the rapid expansion of the Roman Catholic Church."<sup>3</sup> Downs rightly points out that the secret of success lay in the availability of personnel and means, and the opening up of the region to the Catholic apostolate.

Today in the Northeast India and in other parts of India where the Salesian work, '*Don Bosco*' is a name love-resonant in the heart evoking joy, and a password.

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2 Frs Mathias, Bars, De Ponti, Bernardi, Gill and Hauber, Bros Cid, Conti, Santana, Calzi, and Aprile

3 F.S. Downs, Christianity in North East India, (Delhi: 1983), p.151 ff.



## Fr George in Nagaland:Kohima and Tseminyu

In 1972 Fr George was assigned to Christ King Church, Kohima the capital of Nagaland, N.E. India. After a short while he moved to Tseminyu<sup>4</sup>, about 61 kms from Kohima. He took up the pioneering challenge to serve and develop the sub centre of the Kohima Parish, inhabited mainly by the Rengmas and by the Semas within the area of the Kohima Mission.

He decided to reside close to the people of the Tseminyu village. Perched on the brow of the hill, the village gradually spread itself down the ridge and overlooked the town below. From the Kohima-Wokha highway, a three kilometre broad muddy footpath snaked up the ridge to the village centre. About a kilometre before reaching the village, there was an abandoned house on the left. From the main road, it had a creaky ghastly view of an 'anytime-fall' eagle's nest pivoted on the edge of a cliff. Fr George dared to lodge in there. "Father in the ghost-house, ooo...eh uh... gm...", the news rumbled through the village. The Villagers admired the courage of new missionary who lived in the ghost-house in ruins, the home of cockroaches, termites and huge rats who loved to have a nibble at his ears in the night. He would taunt the villagers, 'No ghost can stay here when I am in'. However, he was glad when his confreres visited him – a rare treat! He would put his narrow bed over the broken commode what was once a narrow toilet room, and leave the only living room to the guest confreres.

He chose a rough and tough life for himself. Denying himself even the bare necessities, he started to evangelize, build village churches, and the convent for the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC) with school for the children. His hard work and sacrifices were blessed with many who accepted the Good News. Tseminyu grew into a Parish of its own right. He built other churches in the substations. The subdivision of the Parish was even being thought of. The Master of the harvest blessed his seven years of selfless sacrifice and hard labour preparing him for his next field of work: *Africa*. Here he was to spend the remaining thirty two years of his life, *until 'God touched him and took his breath back to Himself'*.

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<sup>4</sup> Under Tseminyu sub-division, there are 32 villages, out of which 27 villages are recognized by the Government. It also has one town, one compound and the Tseminyu administrative headquarter. This sub-division is mainly inhabited by the Rengma Nagas.





## **IN AFRICA**

### **Kenya and Tanzania**

The General Chapter of the Salesians of Don Bosco in 1978 re-launched Project Africa. Don E. Viganó set his heart on 'Project Africa' in a big way, inviting all the Salesian provinces to make a concerted effort to materialise 'Project Africa', bringing to fruition Don Bosco's vision and prophecy of Africa. In 1980 the Superior Council in Rome requested the Salesian Provinces of India to send missionaries to Eastern Africa – Kenya, Tanzania and the Sudan.

27<sup>th</sup> August 1980 marked the departure of 15 gallant and resolute missionaries from Mumbai to Africa via Rome where missionaries from the different Indian Provinces were to attend the orientation course from 1<sup>st</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 1980. Receiving the Missionary cross from Don E. Viganó on 28<sup>th</sup> Sept, the 15 intrepid missionaries branched out into Kenya, Tanzania and the Sudan.

Three were assigned to Kenya: Frs. Mathew Vadacherry (in-charge), George Padinjareparambil and Thomas Punchekunnel. In April 1981 they took up residence at the Catholic Mission, Korr, situated in the heart of the Kaisut desert and thus becoming pioneering Salesian missionaries in Kenya.

In May 1981, Korr quasi-parish had 500 parishioners in all, scattered through the vast arid land, wandering in search of food for survival and for their cattle living in their '*manyattas*' (by and large mobile settlements of igloo-shaped huts made from light, transportable materials, like sticks, twigs, papers and cloth); even as, as if in tandem, the enthusiastic pioneers too took up their residence in a barrack.

In November the Servant of God, His Eminence Maurice Cardinal Otunga of Nairobi warmly welcomed them in his office, commissioning them: "*Invade Africa with the Kingdom of God.*"<sup>5</sup> The words bore deeper and deeper into the heart of Fr George as the years rolled on, energizing his missionary life bearing much fruit.

The official opening of the community took place on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1981. The quasi-parish was officially handed to the salesians on 15<sup>th</sup> July by Bishop Charles Cavallera with the request to include Illaut and Kargi. Years later, a son of the soil would pen these lines, remembering where it all began...

*"From the hearts of your children,...  
the Rendille, the Samburu...  
Lead them Lord,..  
from darkness to light...  
In Life and in Death  
Lord, bide with me."*<sup>6</sup>

On 14<sup>th</sup> November 1982 very early in the morning, Fr George was at the wheel of the land rover setting off from Nairobi together with Bro Cherian Palathinkal and Fr Mathias D'Counha. They were accompanied by Fr Tony D'Souza, the delegate and Mr Masawe, a lay helper. It was a historical 550 kilometre missionary journey to take over the *Technical School in Marsabit*. Fr George took charge of the new mission with great generous availability and missionary zeal.

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5 Maurice Cardinal Otunga made this spontaneous welcoming prophetic advice when he met Frs. Tony D'Souza, Thomas Punchekunel and George Padinjareparambil on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1980 at Archbishop's House, Nairobi

6 Abel Thathi Njeru, sdb



24<sup>th</sup> November was a red letter day: "... placing of the **Blessed Eucharist in the Tabernacle, till then empty, giving meaning to our work and community in CHRIST.**" They knew where to draw their energy and strength from. All through his life one would not find Fr George in long hours of prayer, however, he would be astutely punctual and regular for his meditation and spiritual reading before the Blessed Sacrament, *drawing energy and endurance in his work for the young and the people* (cf. C.89).

As God would have it, his pioneering days at Marsabit was cut short.

In 1983 Fr Mathew Vadacherry returned to India. Due to lack of personnel, the Provincial delegate was at a loss and approached Fr George. True to his ordination motto: *"At thy word I will let down the net*, he was back in Korr putting his heart and soul to move the Mission forward with its many challenges: first-evangelization, catechizing the faithful, training of catechists, medical care, education, water etc. Schools, Churches, the Salesian residence etc had to be built, besides the inherited problems related to catechists and the staff. Korr was 500 kms from Nairobi with very poor roads and communication. Means of transport was essential to the mission and its development, nay for very survival (even today).

### *Nature-enculturation*

A few days after his arrival from Marsabit, Fr George thought of exploring the mission campus and its vicinity. The four newly arrived Nirmala Dasi Sisters (SNDs)<sup>7</sup> joined him. Newness and freshness of nature kindled further the spirit of quest. Coolness of the dusk was inviting. Exploration excitement was heightened by a riverbed in an arid land, that too, a few meters away from the unfenced mission boundary. As they strolled leisurely, a group of native Rendiles passed them by, silently and with fast pace. The new missionaries mused, "Why so silent and hurried?" Before they could think of an answer they saw lions emerging from the riverbed. The king of beasts was leading his pride. Fr George was quick to grasp the danger. He whispered to the sisters, "Don't run, don't panic! Walk backwards... slowly, slowly... back... back!" Fr George held his ground looking the leader in the eye, while

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7 Srs Leela, Lucy, Annie and Theresa

the sisters backed slowly with their heart in their mouth. The leader and his pride paused. Precious seconds gained by their indecision put to best use, Fr George too backed slowly and steadily, his eyes still fixed on the lead lion. The lion and his pride didn't hunker down or crouch for a kill, instead they moved off with a sour listless whimpering whinge, as if saying: *'Ok for now, lead us not into temptation again!'*



Brave indeed! ... 'Lion of Korr' confronting a pride of lions; however it was a firsthand lesson well learned in nature-enculturation never to be forgotten. In the years to come, many a time, he would have to rush to the rescue of a fellow missionary, caged in a Landrover marooned in the 'laga' or a river bed; this time however, he would be accompanied by experienced well armed young 'morans', hastening to reach the spot before sundown when the King of the forest would be hunting, asserting his supremacy, sparing none.

In 1985 Fr Egidio Viganó, the then Rector Major of the salesians, visited Korr and was enchanted by its unique beauty as well as the progress of the salesian mission. Fr Viganó was unaware of the above incidents. At one moment, he turned to Fr George and exclaimed, as if gauging his visit with a spontaneous salute and fitting tribute to the courage and tenacity of selfless pioneering missionary: *'il Leone del Korr'* (Lion of Korr).

God watched over kindly and blessed eleven years of enthusiastic dedication, toil and sweat, in the face of want, tensions and depravations. The mission flourished: people began to settle down around the mission, the mission was built with the residences for the priests,



sisters, dispensary and the parish church besides the developments and activities in the substations. In his foresight, Fr George gave great importance to education and took special care of the girls knowing well that a girl educated is a family well informed and educated.

In 1991 he was asked to take a short Salesiana course at Don Bosco Hall, Berkley, California to revamp his energies of both body and spirit. His absence brought into limelight his qualities of hard work, great perseverance and dynamism of special genre as attested from Fr Stephen Chemmalakuzhy, himself a pioneering companion in Tanzania and later Superior of Province of Eastern Africa: *'Fr George is one of the founder members of Korr Mission who loves to work in the difficult environs of Korr. In our present circumstance, he is the only person available ...'*

In the meanwhile the new international Salesian Philosophate cum Novitate was opened at Moshi, Tanzania. He was requested to be the pioneering administrator of this new foundation in Tanzania. With his characteristic dynamism, he was seen planting trees, fruit-trees and vegetable gardens. The neighbourhood village was not spared, even as he kept organizing Holy Mass under the trees. The fruit-tress and vegetable garden still continue to nourish the young salesians, while they study and play beneath the shade of the trees that keep watch from below the snowy peak of Kilimanjaro. The enthusiasm and experience he had built up at the foot hills of the "Roof of the World", he sprightly lay at the pedestal of the "Roof of Africa".

### *Pioneer of Don Bosco Didia*

A secondary school was to be opened to cater to the unprivileged youth in a very poor area in Tanzania. The scouting party decided on Didia, 50 kms from the nearest town Shinyanga, about 120 kms drive from Lake Mwanza. In 1993 Fr George was there again at the request of the superiors, to spend his energies to begin the new foundation. He was once again alone living in a shed. In a short time the structures were mushrooming, however his body was weakening due to the strain and he had an attack of cerebral malaria. He nearly succumbed to the deadly attack making fast incursion through his weak body. Fr Jose, his nephew came to his rescue just in time. God's protection, added to his inherent strong will and tenacity, won the day.

The mission grew gradually. It now accommodates over 700 students with an A Level (Form VI) facilities. During a memorial Mass, the present Rector, Fr. Babu paid tribute "to his spirit of hard work, dedication, readiness to accept challenges, dedication to the education of the young, especially of girls, love for prayer and sacraments. Fr. George was also a gifted cook and story teller. He reminded everyone that it was because of the obedience and sacrifice of Fr. George that we have a community at Didia."

Fr Babu Augustine was twice his Rector in his post-surgery years. He knew Fr George for 30 years. He witnesses certain aspects of Fr. George that touched him:

- 1) "Fr George had a great determination and willpower. It is his will power that made him live in spite of his illness. The fact that he was our pioneer at Korr and Didia speaks for itself.
- 2) He assisted several students with school fees through his sponsorships. Very many students, especially from Korr, were able to go to the university or secondary schools because of Fr. George.
- 3) Though he could be angry quite fast he was able to forgive also fast. I know of several occasions when he would be upset with students whom he was sponsoring. But when they apologized, he would forgive them immediately and continue assisting them.
- 4) He used his time well.

He was a great company during picnics: Fr Babu had gone for picnics with him several times. He was their chief chef during those picnics. He also had lots of jokes and interesting stories to keep all happy.

All at Don Bosco Didia are also grateful to him for being our founder. In those days when transport and communication were much difficult he lived here alone in a container and had serious attacks of malaria several times! THANK YOU FR. GEORGE FOR THOSE SACRIFICES YOU MADE."



Bro. Kenneth knew him as a prenovice. He shared his experience: "Fr George never tolerated mediocrity - he expected the best from everyone and was so good in narrating stories."

In his foresight, Fr George initiated the process for the collaboration the Notre Dame Sisters who also acknowledged Fr George as a guardian angel who cared and guided the Sisters when they were new in Africa.

### *1994-1997*

In the earlier years of his missionary life in Eastern Africa Fr George was robust, enjoyed good health, and was known for endurance. However, his many years of selfless pioneering work began to take its toll on his health. On June 25, 1994 he was operated for abdominal aorta in Madras. He had to remain with this condition until his death. He did not become jittery about his health, rather, continued rendering services to different communities in various capacity in Tanzania: procurator and administrator in Upanga, Dar Es Salaam, and Administrator of DB Mafinga Seminary; he then moved to Kenya, Don Bosco Upper Hill, as Rector of the Provincial House community. However, his heart was still in Korr.

### *Brief Recess in Korr: Relapse and Inconceivable Recovery*

In 1998 he was back in Korr as Rector and Parish Priest with great enthusiasm. However, soon his body was too weak to respond to his formidable mental strength and will. In 2000 he was found with high blood pressure. Medical examination revealed problems related to heart and kidneys. This made the superiors to invite him to come out of Korr and work close to medical facilities in Boys Town, Karen, Nairobi. In spite of medical care his renal system was collapsing. Both kidneys were not responding as the disease was progressing to a fatal termination. After much persuasion, Fr George left for Bangalore for further medical care. His critical unusual condition required a 'three-in- one' major surgery to be done in the same year 2001. This extraordinary 'three-in-one' made headlines in the daily News Network, THE TIMES OF INDIA, Monday, September 17, 2001. The article is reproduced below:

## ***'Brotherly love, faith help priest to pull through'***

by Sriranjana Chaudhuri

Bangalore: *Three-in-one needn't always be good, especially when you have a combination of advanced kidney, heart and abdominal disease. But it needn't always be that bad, especially when you are three brothers all willing to help out in times of trouble.*

*Fr George (65) ...showed up in Bangalore's Manipal Institute of Nephrology and Urology (MINU) in February (2001) with symptoms of kidney failure.*

*"By the time he got here we knew that both his kidneys had failed. But even before we could suggest some kind of corrective treatment, initial tests showed up some startling results" says MINU director Dr H Sudarshan Ballal.*

*In addition to his two failed kidneys the priest also had coronary artery disease and abdominal aortic aneurysm which meant that his heart and abdomen stood in the way of a kidney transplant [his aneurysm had deteriorated to fusiform increasing the danger of rupture].*

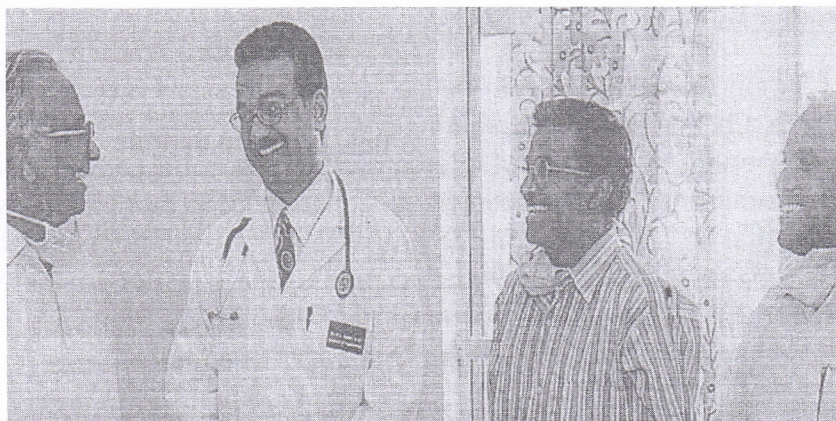
*Explains Dr Ballal: "It is extremely rare to see all three diseases being present at the same time and have them dealt with in stage..."*

*This was hazardous all the way through since given his age and the nature of the disease, he could have died of any at any given time. And yet we had to take the risks to give him a fair chance."*

*... Fr George underwent coronary bypass surgery (total arterial revascularization) on June 12. That passed off without any incident. Next, on July 14, he was again operated by Dr Srivayas and his team to repair the abdominal aortic aneurysm. That turned out to be a tricky one. [...] Finally, in the last week of August Fr George was all ready for a kidney transplant. His brothers, Fr Johnny and Fr Dominic ... competed with each other to be the donor. Fr Jonny (45) was the closest match.*

*On August 31, the two brothers were wheeled in for the transplant.*





QUICK RECOVERY: **Fr George** (extreme left) with Dr H. S. Ballal and brothers Fr Johny (kidney donor) and Fr Dominic (extreme left)

*The man of God with his implicit faith in the Almighty and his doctors walked out of the hospital in a week's time, almost as if nothing had happened.*

God gave him another span of 11 years. Though he was under heavy medication hereafter, he showed burst of energy: never resting, always doing something, teaching, starting or reviving farms, building poultries, green houses to contribute to the communities in their effort to be self-sufficient. He was helping in Tanzanian communities of post novitiate at Moshi and novitiate in Morogoro.

He had for sure, a feeling that when the younger confreres see him working they would value work themselves! Thus, his remaining energies were spent in the Kenyan communities of Boys Town Karen and Bosco Boys Kuwinda as Prenovice Director and later as confessor. With such a medical condition, his *resilient dynamism* reflected his love for God, love for Don Bosco and love for the less-privileged, especially the young people.

## REMINISCENCES/TESTIMONIALS

Fr Simon Asira, the Vice Provincial has this to say: "The life of Fr George is a beautiful mosaic creating a wonderful blending of gifts of both nature and grace. A man of solid convictions, he would go wholesale towards achieving what he believed (in conscience) to be right, yet so humble, that he always sought the permission of his superiors before undertaking any project. When the opinion of the superior conflicted with his own, he would always make his mind known, but then he would add "but I will do what you tell me out of obedience."

In my interactions with Fr George I was enabled to witness how loving and compassionate he was towards the poor youth. He would literary do everything within his possibilities to make sure they had a decent education, clothing and food! His presence in Korr has truly earned him the title of '*the desert father*' not because of the traditional ascetic religious practices but rather because of the way he involved himself in the life of the people of the desert to the point that a great majority of them see in him 'a father.'

He was a man of God and of great determination. What he did and stood for will live on for a very, very long time. The young people, whose lives he touched, will remember him for transforming their life in a Salesian way by providing an education that will ultimately help them to fend for themselves living an honest life that prepares them for eternity in the Triune God. May Lord reward him for the life he lived as a Salesian and that we Salesians of the present generation may learn from him that single mindedness of life."

"My close association with Fr. George was when I was sent to Korr in 1991 as a new priest", recalls Fr Luke Mulayinkal (Sajan). "Fr.George was getting ready to go to the States for studies at Berkley. Of the many things he said and did, two things impressed me very much which I value and appreciate and try to follow:

1. 'Take care of the young and to invest in them as they are the future of the church and the Society'.



2. Fr. George had seen that teachers, people in the medical profession and others from down country found it difficult to serve the people of arid and semi-arid areas. Hence he started educating the young people of the place by sending them, to secondary schools, Seminaries, Teachers Training Colleges, Nursing Schools, Technical Schools etc. all over Kenya and abroad. *The Africa Oggi* made sacrifices looking for means for this noble endeavour. Today we reap the fruits of his vision and effort: those educated by him are now teachers, head-teachers, nurses, priests and professionals in various fields."

Fr George pioneered a paradigm shift initiating a new era in the nomadic life of the Rendilles and Samburus through education. Among countless educated by Fr. George, many Rendille and Samburu girls have successfully gone through university education. Each of these is a guarantee and hope for an educated family. Many of them have found a place in society, able to earn a good living, and even have their voice heard before their marriage – something that was rarely heard of before. In the room of Fr George there were countless cards and greetings from these young people for whom, he was their mentor, friend and 'dad one in a million'. On his birthday some of these, now happy mothers and well-placed in society, penned a long poem for the occasion, highlighting their sentiments expressing how much Fr George had done, transforming them and their society. Some verses selected at random from the moving lyrical citation, *Happy Birthday Loving Dad*:

"Today is yet another moment  
We commemorate your arrival in the earth  
That had an impact to many helpless people  
Happy birthday dad, your one in a million.

You crossed the beautiful Indian Ocean  
You passed heart breaking Kenyan city  
You decided to settle in harsh desert for us  
Happy birthday dad, your one in a million

Frustrating roads never discouraged you  
Insecurities on the road was never a stumbling block to you  
You brought life to segregated Rendilee girl child  
Happy birthday dad, your one in a million

Spiritually you're our hero and mentor  
You taught us to love and serve God  
You brought us up in a Christian way of life  
Happy birthday dad, your one in a million

May be I would have been a frustrated mother  
Treated like a slave by an old uneducated husband  
But today dad am proud of you I know my right  
Happy birthday dad, your one in a million. [...]

May God bless your clean heart  
May he fill you with his spirit  
May he restore the joys of salvation in you  
Happy birthday dad, your one in a million."

Fr George listened attentively as a seasoned patriarch with a triumphant grinning smile following the thoughts, emotions, and the very lyric, in itself being a tribute to the success of the education level reached by a Rendile girl – something once unthinkable.

However, they never thought that it would their last birthday with Fr George, and the lyrical tribute would soon have an elegiac overtone when it would once again be affectionately eulogized at the memorial Mass offered for a Legend, 'dad, your one in a million!'.<sup>8</sup>

Fr George was proverbial as a good, demanding and dedicated teacher in his early days as well his waning years. Fr. Waldemar Jonatowski testifies to his eagerness and dedication even during his last years of life: "I've experienced his total dedication, even in poor health, towards the youth and his professionalism in teaching in Boys Town..." The excerpt from the secretarial students on his golden jubilee depicts a brief summary of his life:

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8 Lucia Lekana



Fame and wealth we didn't ask for,  
We know that you wouldn't care.  
Lasting kindness is the treasure  
From God we sought for you in prayer. [...]

We wanna wish you enough  
Happiness to make you sweet,  
Enough trials to keep you strong,  
Enough sorrow to keep you human,  
Enough hope to keep you going”.

There many other lyrics written by those who appreciated and thanked his helpful fatherly presence knowing that he appreciated poetry with deftness and adroitness. In his final years he penned short and long poems, *the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: they take their origin in emotions recollected in tranquillity*<sup>9</sup>. However he never wanted to make headlines, nor be seen in the limelight nor sought the glare of the cameras. Behind his tough nature, Fr George could well be embodied in the Lyrical Ballad of Wordsworth:

*‘The best portion of a goodman’s life:  
his little, nameless  
unremembered act  
of kindness and love!’*

Fondly remembered by ‘Africa Oggi’:

Ciao a tutti,  
ho saputo della morte di Padre George  
e ne sono rimasta molto colpita  
e addolorata.  
Grazie a lui ho conosciuto il mondo della  
solidarietà e dell’aiuto.

E’ stato un grande uomo  
e noi lo ricorderemo per sempre.  
Le sue azioni hanno fatto del bene  
a tante persone.  
Grazie Padre George

Roberta  
Africa Oggi

---

9 William Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads

Fr G. Chalissery SDB, at one time Provincial of East Africa reminiscences: "True, he appeared at times a little tough. But he had an affectionate heart and any little kindness done for him was always appreciated. You could talk to him and he was always ready to obey. I am sure he is with Jesus and from heaven he will be able to help us all to imitate his spirit of hard-work and enthusiasm in our missionary endeavour."

When I lived with Fr P.D. George in Tanzania (Moshi), I found him to be a caring person", recalls Bishop Mulenga, the first Bishop of Kabwe, Zambia, "Despite his poor health, he was a very resilient person. I personally found him a very friendly person. He had also a big concern for the poor youth especially those who had problems looking for money to pay school fees. May his soul rest in eternal peace!"

He was a man deeply in *love with his vocation and love for the congregation* in which he lived and worked out his salvation. In many of his conversations we could see his zeal to defend and strengthen the congregation and always felt a great sense of belonging to it. Sometimes one could misunderstand his 'hard-line' stand on certain issues, but analyzing the issue makes one understand that his position is purely from a very personal and deep sense of belonging to the congregation. Any decision or any person who does not contribute to the 'good' of the congregation would make him restless even lose his temper. And this, we know, sometimes evoked strong reactions from him especially during the period he was on heavy medication.

Fr Johny, his kidney donor, younger brother and Salesian priest testifies, "Fr. George was a beacon of light in our family. He gave us all a sense of direction. He inspired me to join the Salesians and continued to accompany me in my life's journey. What I admire most in him are his simplicity of life, passionate love, selfless caring, indefatigable energy, steely determination, and undefeatable perseverance as he sincerely tried to live out his priestly and Salesian values according to his convictions."

Fr George made an honest struggle and was very faithful to Christian and religious commitments, and his missionary vocation. He worked hard. He lived poor. He exhibited great integrity. He hands the gauntlet to us, present-day religious, as counter-values filter in and pressurize us.



Fr Tony Fernandes, his Salesian pioneer missionary counterpart in Tanzania and who later moved to Kenya, has succinctly condensed in depth the enigma of Fr George: **“TIRELESS, TOUGH, TENDER HEARTED - that’s what P.D. George was to me. God-given, God-taken!**

Before Fr George left for India in 2001 for the ‘three-in-one’ surgery, he handed over a small envelope to the Provincial Secretary with a low anxious whisper: “Put it in my file in the archives... this is for ‘When I am gone’ ...; in case the operation...”

The envelope was his LAST WILL and TESTAMENT:

[ ..] *“If it should happen that God wants to cut short my life and call me to Himself I willingly submit to His divine Will.*

*My only request to my superiors is that if it is possible my mortal remains should be interned in Korr. ...*

*I would like to be remembered as one who lived to die for his people and died to live among them forever.”*

### **‘Died to live among his people forever’**

*A great heart stopped beating!*, wrote Fr Giovanni Rolandi, the provincial, announcing the sad demise of Fr George Padinjareparampil on 19th April 2012. Fr. Joseph Puthenpurakal SDB<sup>10</sup> responded with an empathetic note in reply:

“I am so sorry to hear of his passing away. We came together from Kerala to Bandel in 1953.

As you have written *A great heart stopped beating!*

I would like to add also that **it continues to beat for us**, now that he is with the Lord.

*Hard working, loving and a loyal Salesian*, Fr. P.D. George has been a great missionary”.

**May his soul rest in eternal Peace! ”**

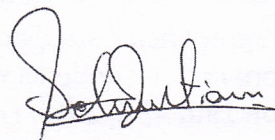
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10 Fr. Joseph Puthenpurakal SDB, PhD, is currently a professor and the director of the Missiological Centre in Shillong, India. He was the Vicar General of the Diocese of Dimapur, NE India, when Fr George was the Parish Priest in Tseminyu. Fr J Puthenpurakal was his classmate and began the Salesian formation (aspirantate) together.

*"When it happens that a Salesian yields up his life  
while working for souls,  
You can say that our congregation has registered a great triumph  
And that on it will descend in abundance the blessings of heaven."*  
(concluding paragraph of the 'Spiritual Testament of Don Bosco')

*Fr George Padinjareparambil,  
deeply human, religious, a son of Don Bosco,  
a priest of God, and a frontline missionary,  
is indeed,*

***An inspiring story of the joys and struggles,  
A life lived that is best lived in profound faith!***



Rev Fr Sebastian Chirayath  
Rector  
Bosco Boys, Kuwinda, Nairobi  
1<sup>st</sup> July 2013



## THE WAY TO LIVE

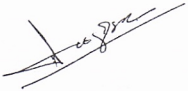
Wherever you go  
Wherever you stay  
Let God be in your side.

Whatever you do  
Whatever you say  
Let God be in your heart.

Whichever be your thoughts  
Whichever be your plans  
Let God be in your mind.

When God is in your being  
You can't but be like God.

And so,  
Live like the evergreen  
"with a heart within  
And God over head".

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "George PD", written over a horizontal line.

George PD

## JESUS BE MY SHIELD

When howling storms blow at will,  
Driving monstrous waves with their wide open jaws,  
Everything on their way ready to swallow,  
Merciful Jesus, be my shield.


When unimpeded sweeps the whistling wind,  
Widely sways the majestic palms  
Unsure what their fate shall be,  
Merciful Jesus, be my shield.

When lightning flashes in the darkened sky,  
And shoots its flaming arrows across the vault,  
Turning thousand lights but a dull dying star,  
Merciful Jesus, be my shield.

When our mother earth groans and shivers,  
And the tall towers that pierce the blue  
Come tumbling down in a cloud of dust,  
Merciful Jesus, be my shield.

I'm a mutely speck in a tiny little bark,  
Rocked by the roaring, rolling, frothing billows,  
Driven hither and thither by the whimsy wind,  
Merciful Jesus, be my shield.

I shake like a reed in the swift running stream,  
My weak knees knock o'ewhelm by some crippling fear  
Lest I should lose all my hope in thee,  
Merciful Jesus, my shield thou be.



George PD



## THE NEW BEGINNING

Nothing exist without a new beginning,  
Like a chapter in your favourite book;  
Without expectation you reach out,  
Turn a page and take a look.

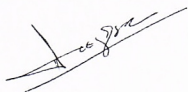
Each one of us is so different  
Yet, in the Lord's eyes we are all one;  
In dark moments as in sunny days  
There's God's love ever unchanging.

Heroes we are in our own way,  
When we pick up the past and find a ray  
Of light to lead us all the way  
To a life built in joy and gay.

In light moments, we sing and rejoice,  
Search for a place to rest and unwind,  
Ne'er forgetting the morrow that's coming  
We'll be challenged to some unplanned race.

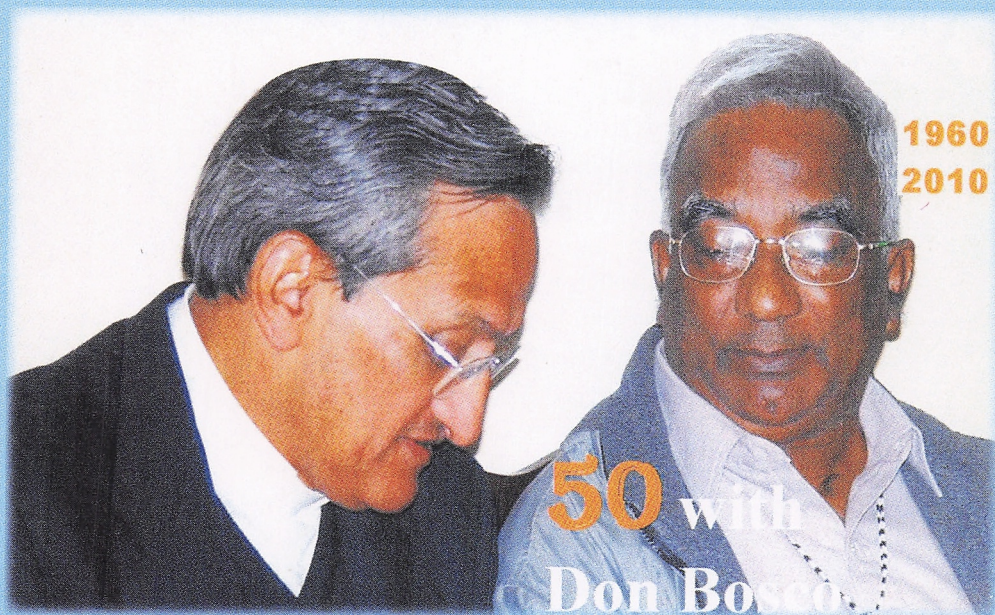
What's the future, we are uncertain,  
The next stop, we are not sure;  
There's a God who knows it all  
He planned it long before.

So launch out with a resolute heart  
Obstacles there may be, but God's by your side  
Our youthful lives may fumble in darkness  
But there's light at the end of the tunnel.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Fr. P.D. George', written over a horizontal line.

Fr. P.D. George  
20th Nov. '04





*“I would like to be remembered  
as one who lived to die for his people  
and died to live among them forever.”*