

Provincial House,
210-212 Krungthep Kritha Road,
Hua Mark, Bangkok 10240, THAILAND



Fr. Albino Ponchione, SDB

Dear Confreres,

On December 17, 1997 at 22.10 hours our dear confrere,

Fr. Albino Ponchione, SDB

peacefully passed away at the age of 93 years, 67 years as Salesian and 57 years as Priest of the Lord. On his deathbed were present Rev. Fr. Joseph Prathan Sridarunsil, Provincial, and some members of the Salesian Provincial House community.

In his autobiographical record, we find the following information:



Years of Discernment: His Childhood and Adolescence Years

Born on February 25, 1904 at Agliano D'Asti, Asti, Italy in a family of four children, two male and two female, his parents were Joseph and Ellese Louise Ponchione. Barely a year old, he miraculously escaped death when their home was burned. This event forced his family to transfer to Turin where he began his kindergarten schooling. In Turin, the family lived at Moncalieri Street and Albino pursued his elementary schooling at "La Grand Madre di Dio" School. Here he received the sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation and could frequent the Salesian Oratory at Versalice.

After his elementary education, the young Albino already began to work just when the first World War broke out. One night, he was hit accidentally by the army truck and had to be hospitalized. On his recovery, he worked on one store. However, on one occasion as he was working one priest gave him a severe look that scared him so much that he got sick for about a month. As the family migrates from one town to another, the young Albino also changes jobs and occupations from one to another.

On April 1, 1924, Albino was called in for military service. Barely two months at the military camp, he wrote home complaining about the hardships and difficulties encountered in the camp. However, he forgot to write the name and address of his parents in the envelope. The postman, therefore, returned the letter to the camp's authority. The letter was read in front of all the military personnel and called on the owner of this letter. Young Albino almost collapsed and died as he was so ashamed of what he did.

After two months, Albino was transferred to work at the hospital. There he met Sister Luisa de Thomatis whom he considered as his "guardian angel".

Upon completion of his military service, he applied to work in many places. One of his co-workers invited him to read the "Salesian Bulletin" but he refused. Finally, he just decided to look at the pictures. One picture, however, attracted his attention. It was about Bishop Comin, riding on the horse with a missionary cross. Going home, he told his parents and family that he too wanted to become a missionary. Of course, everybody in the family was surprised and they counseled that going to Sunday Mass was already more than enough.

Since then, his life had no goals and meaning. He was longing that he could meet someone to give him advice. Finally, he met one Salesian priest, Guido Favini who gained his trust and confidence. On July 17, 1926, Albino informed Sister Luisa de Thomatis of his decision to enter a Salesian seminary for late vocations, as son of “Mary” at Versallice, Turin.

During his seminary days, he had the opportunity to meet Bishop Guerra and Fr. Rinaldi during the annual retreat of the Provincials of Europe. He was asked by the Bishop Guerra what was he doing there. Albino simply answered that he wanted to become a lay brother because he felt so old enough at twenty three years to study for the priesthood and that he had only finished his elementary education. The bishop, however, encouraged him saying that with courage he could succeed as a priest too.

While waiting to be sent to begin his high school studies, he was sent at Villa Moglia. One of his house chores was to take care of the piggery. He, however, disliked the work and began to complain about it to his companion. When the Rector knew about it he was called up and politely invited to leave the seminary if he was not satisfied about the house chore assigned. Reflecting on this mistake, he asked for forgiveness.

Salesian : A Religious and Missionary

With patience and determination, Albino pursued his studies aiming at being a missionary. On September 19, 1929, he had his investiture from Rev. Fr. Philip Rinaldi. On December 14, 1929, he and the other thirteen missionaries sailed for Thailand and arrived at Bang Nok Khuek on January 14, 1930. On January 18, they started their novitiate year under the guidance of Fr. Almazan, Novice Master. Cleric Albino made the first profession on January 19, 1931 and pursued his philosophical studies for three years. He made his practical training for two years at Don Krabuang. On January 19, 1934, he made his perpetual vows, then, made another three years of practical training at Bangtan, Banpong. He pursued his teacher's certificate for two years and then his theology. Finally, on

September 28, 1940 he was ordained a priest by Bishop Perros at Bang Nok Khuek, Ratchaburi Province.

As a Salesian missionary priest, Fr. Albino Ponchione worked zealously to serve God and men in the different roles and duties where Religious Obedience assigned him. From being assistant pastor to being pastor, confessor, provincial secretary, novice-master or rector, he did all his duties in a spirit of dedication, hard work and good example. (cf. Fr. Ponchione's autobiographical record)

Fatherliness of a Rector: loving and lovable

Among the many offices of animation and government that religious obedience has appointed Fr. Albino Ponchione, rectorship to houses of formation and provincial secretary were the longest.

From year 1950 to 1963, he was Rector of Huahin (1950-1961) and of Ratchaburi (1962-1963). The Community of Huahin had several departments such as school, aspirantate, boarding school, novitiate and philosophate. Fr. Albino managed to coordinate all sectors with tact and care that everybody felt his fatherliness to all. While he gave importance to the development of human resources, other facilities were attended too: the buildings, educational equipment's, sports, liturgical furnishings and musical instruments. Benefactors from abroad were willing to support whatever improvement was requested. In fact, Huahin then was considered a model community with all the modern facilities of the time.

One famous activity of Huahin Vitthayalai was the brass band which was frequently sought for musical shows and celebration. In fact, Huahin Vitthayalai's Brass Band had the privilege and honor to welcome and entertain the royal family during their yearly summer stay at the Klai Kangwon Palace, Huahin.

In 1962 Fr. Albino was transferred and appointed Rector of both the Daruna School and Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception Seminary of Ratchaburi.

His appointment as Rector of aspirantate and seminary testifies his love and dedication to promote vocations to the local church. He followed up the personal formation and growth of the seminarians individually. He instilled in them the spirit of orderliness, self-control and perseverance in order to live a life of service for others.

Complimenting the Salesian spirit and charisma in his ministry with the seminarians, Fr. Albino still encouraged the spirituality of the focolare movement. Rightly so, he is considered as one of the founding promoters of the focolare movement in Thailand.

No matter where Fr. Albino was assigned, there were always people remembering him as loving and lovable. Confreres, teachers, students or seminarians were always glad to go and visit him.

Witness of Precision and orderliness as Provincial Secretary

With his experiences as a Rector in many communities, Fr. Albino was finally assigned to be the provincial secretary and archivist since 1971. He did his work not only with great love and care but with the greatest precision and orderliness. All provincial minutes were neatly written by hand and recorded precisely. Most of his time was spent at the secretarial office. However, he had always time for other activities.

As the provincial secretariat was attached to St. Dominic School, Fr. Albino was always seen among the young during their recesses. Many times, the boys went to see him in his office and he always welcomed and entertained them.

Stamp collecting and reading were his pastime hobbies that became part and partial of his life. Even when his eyesight was already deteriorating, he was always following all the magazine and reading materials with great interest.

He faithfully did his role as provincial secretary till 1993. However, he did his job as an archivist until the last month of his demise.

Availability and kindness in Spiritual Direction

The ministry of Reconciliation is one ministry that Fr. Albino loved and never refused to offer service. He was always available: confreres, young people and all. His advises were always full of kindness, understanding and encouragement. He was an ordinary confessor in Sampran even when he was stationed at the Provincial House. In addition, he taught Salesian history at Sampran. It was his joy to see the brothers and the novices there.

The last days: joyful in prayer

In 1997 the provincial house was transferred to its new site at Krungthep Kritha Road, Hua Mark, Bangkok and Fr. Albino was assigned there. He continued to help in whatever he could- the ministry of Reconciliation, reading, praying, being with the community at meal time.

During the recovery period and his last hospitalization due to a lost of balance's incident in his room, Fr. Albino spent most of his time in prayers especially with the rosary beads in hand. He openly confessed that this was his joyous prayer.

Fr. Albino never tired of repeating that he was always prepared for the Will of God all the time, no matter when it comes.

All his health operations were offered for the salvation of all.

“Always onward! Never backward! ” was his favorite saying. This showed his practice to always trust the past on the Mercy of God and the future on His Goodness. In a way this was his inner motivation to face always the goal and purpose of life.

When someone asked Fr. Albino his secret for a happy life, his simple response and prayer was: “ Lord, let me live life one day at a time at its best, Amen. ”

Thus, on December 17, 1997 after having prayed and lived “life one day at a time at its best”, the Lord answered his prayer. Fr. Albino has lived 93 years, 9 months and 22 days.

Fr. Albino’s long life has left different imprints and memories to many lives that have encountered him. For most of them, he was simply “Khun Pho Pong”, a fountain of dedication and love for each of them. Such was his life because of the motivating power and resolutions. Some of them were as follows:

“Listening is better than speaking”

“Always look at the ultimate goal of what you are doing”

“ Let not your left hand knows what your right hand is doing”

“Even the most durable thing is emptiness”

“Give me souls, take away the rest”

“Only the Lord is my highest good”

“ I long to die in order to be with the Lord forever”

Dear confreres, this is a genuine Salesian who has sown the Love of St. John Bosco to the Thai young people and continued to support the charisma of the founder among the confreres through his life, works and examples.

While I recommend to you the soul of Fr. Albino Ponchione in your prayers, let us together thank the Lord for the grace of this beautiful and exemplary Salesian life that He has bestowed to our province.

Fr. Joseph Banchong Santisukniran
Rector, Provincial House
Bangkok, Thailand

For the necrology

Fr. Albino Ponchione, born at Agliano D’Asti, Asti, Italy, on February 25, 1904, died in Bangkok, Thailand on December 17, 1997 at the age of 93, 67 years of profession and 57 of priesthood.

