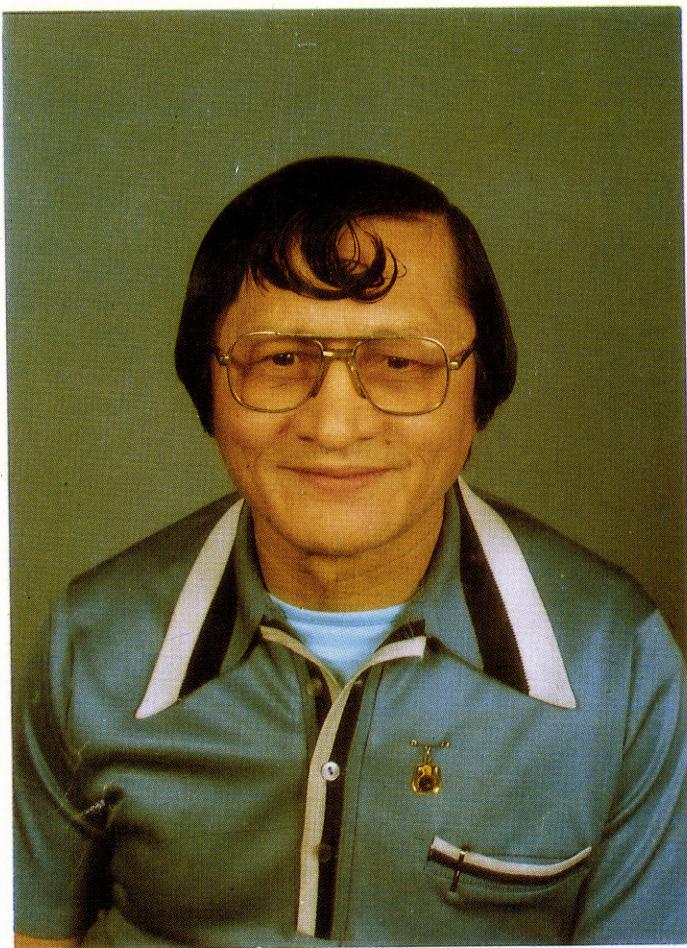
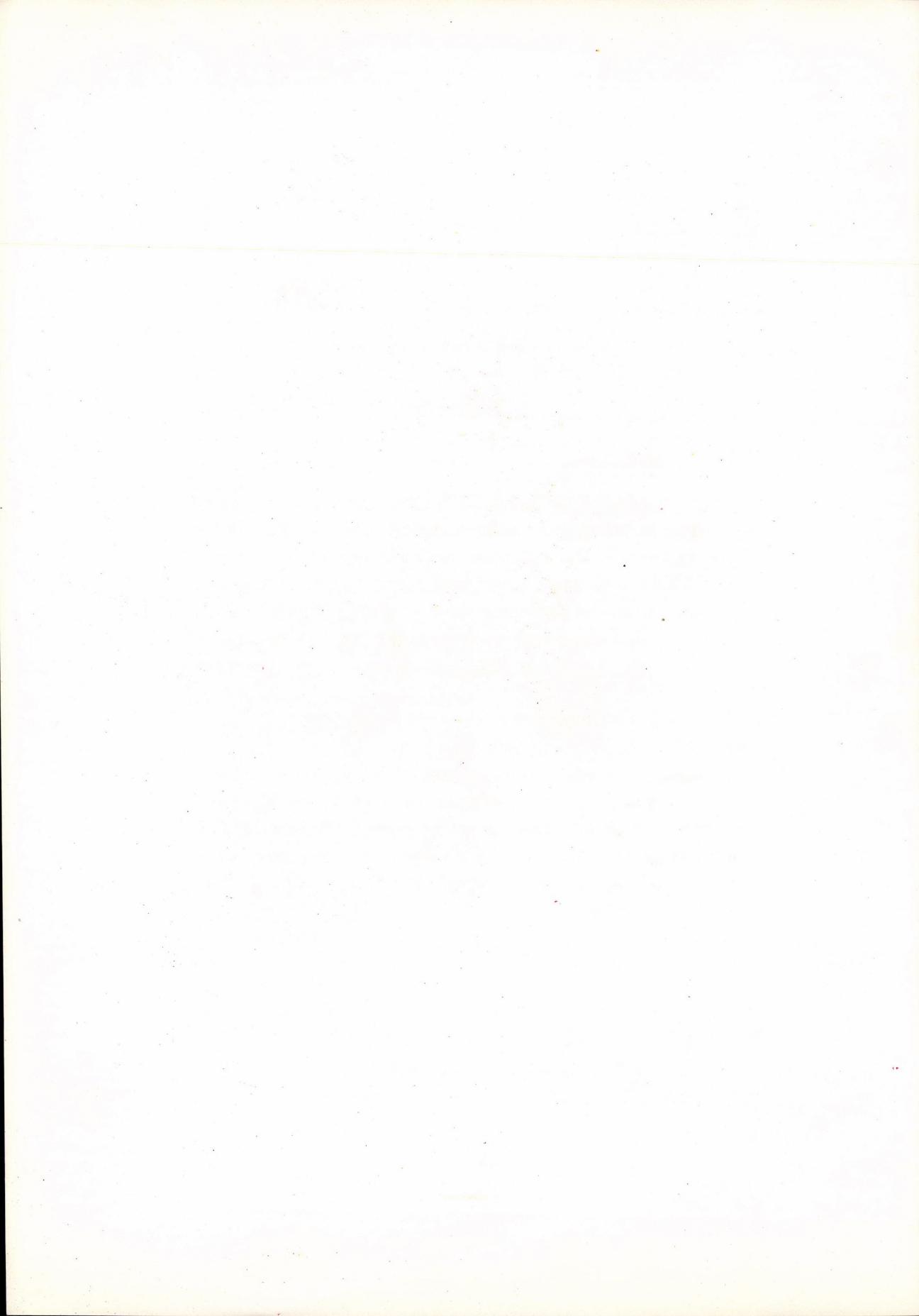


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## **BRO. CHARLES SEIN WIN SDB**

**31 OCTOBER 1924 - 1 APRIL 1993**



"Bro. Charlie was a man of god. He was the friend of youth. An efficient teacher he was completely a different man. He was a good musician and taught music to many youth. He never looked old. Bro. Charlie always shared his happiness with the youth. Now he is no more with us but this remarkable man will always be remembered by us"

These are spontaneous words coming from the heart of a young boy whose life has been touched by the exceptional life of Bro. Charles, affectionately called Charlie by all.

## All too sudden

In the evening of April 1st, 1993 Charlie had given tuition to one and was coming down to the house from the technical school. When he reached the aquarium near the assembly hall of the school, he felt some pain in the back and difficulty in breathing. Some confreres who had come for the meeting of Economers at the Provincial House had gone over there and was standing precisely where Charlie was. He sat down and the confreres nearby helped him. Fr. Pius Eluvathingal who was nearby rushed to get the car out to take him to the doctor. He was helped into the car and Fr. C. L. George cradled his head in the lap and was rushing to Dr. Sinha. Even as they were leaving the house, he had collapsed into the arms of Fr. George and by the time they were negotiating the turn to Park Street, with a gurgling sound he breathed his last. In all it must have taken 5 or 6 minutes!! He was taken to Dr. Sinha's chamber who pronounced him dead. Cause of death: massive cardiac arrest.

## Early Years

Bro. Charles was born on 31st October, 1924 of Marcus Amung Way and Margerita Ma Yi at Shewbo, Burma (Myanmar). In 1943 he went to study at the Lafon Memorial School at Mandalay, which was then run by the Salesians and Fr. Antony Alessi, one time

provincial of Calcutta and Guwahati was there. By 1946 Charles came to India with the intention of becoming a Salesian. He came to Sonada. In 1950 he joined the Novitiate at Kotagiri and had illustrious companions like Bishop KERKETTA and Bishop RESTO. Even though he had finished his novitiate, due to ill health he had to discontinue without making the vows. It was a wrong diagnosis. Charles waited patiently for the day when he would be allowed to join the Novitiate and commit himself to God as a Salesian. During these years of waiting Charles was at Don Bosco School Liluah. In 1956, when the novitiate began in the North at Sunnyside, Upper Shillong, he was one of the 19 novices with Fr. Bacchiarello as the master of novices. Fr. Thomas Polackal who was his companion recalls that even though Charlie was ten years senior to all of us, yet he joined in all the fun and frolic and the pioneering of the good-old-Sunnyside days. He was always ready for some fun and learnt Italian so well that he made his application to the vows in chaste Italian. He Professed on 10th April 1957 along with 18 of his companions. There were two Salesian Brothers in the group and the other was Bro. FRANCIS SURIN.

## Salesian Life

From his first profession till 1960 he was at Don Bosco Shillong. Then he went down to Guwahati to do his mechanical engineering. In 1966 he was sent to Don Bosco Krishna-nagar. Six years later he was sent to Istituto Angelli, Turin, to do Electronics, T.V. and Radio engineering. On his return from Turin he set up the Electronics department in Don Bosco Liluah until it was shifted to Don Bosco Park



Circus in 1980. When computers became the new thing in the schools, Charlie went to Bombay to qualify himself so that he could teach this subject to the students. He was on the lookout for updating programmes and courses for his personal growth and greater efficiency.

Fr. Thomas Polackal the Provincial writing to the confreres of the province at the time of Charlie's death, mentioned a number of sterling qualities that characterized the life of Charlie. He says, "even though he was advanced in years he had only one or two grey hairs!! His face was that of a young man. Charlie was really young at heart and that was written all over him and in his whole carriage and activities. He loved to be with the young. He got himself trained to animate youth groups especially the YCS and the youth who came into contact with him can testify to the fact that he was a very energetic man. Just a few days before his death he walked all the way from Don Bosco Park Circus to the city zoo with a group of boys. That must be roughly 4 Kms. For a young man that must be cake-walk but not for one who was 69!! But Charlie did it and that too with his boys.



## **Apostolate through Music and Singing**

He learnt the guitar and every Sunday infallibly he was at Dhapa, the backyard of Calcutta in a make-shift chapel singing and playing the guitar to accompany the eucharist. Very soon he had trained a few boys to do the same. He loved to wear the latest

jersey just like the young men whom he taught and animated”.

I personally had the privilege of attending a charismatic retreat at Patna together with Charlie in the year 1984. Since I was familiar with the hymns I was requested to lead the singing. Charlie was so impressed with the retreat that in one of his spontaneous prayers he said, “Lord help me to sing and play the guitar like Fr. Pulickal”. As soon as he returned to Calcutta he started to practise and learn a few chords and within a short time he was accompanying the church singing with his guitar and his sonorous voice. I was amazed to see a man of 60 starting to learn the guitar. What an example for youngsters.

## **Optimism and Enthusiasm**

There is another trait of his character that never escaped anyone’s attention: ENTHUSIASM and INFECTIOUS OPTIMISM!. Charlie could never be put down by any difficulty. These last few years he had quite a few scooter accidents. That did not deter him and he never gave up. No, not Charlie. Not always he was successful in all he undertook. But that did not matter at all to Charlie. No matter what he did, it had to be done with all his heart. When he sang it was fortissimo. When he talked it was audible all over the place. When he taught in class, he was totally involved and made the students feel that way. Even at this stage, his mind was clear and his explanations lucid. There were both boys and girls who came to him for tuition in maths or any of the branches of his expertise.

## **Love for Youth**

Don Bosco told his youngsters: *It is enough for me to know that you are young for me to love you.*

This was literally true of Charlie. For the young he was ready for anything. For them he had time, talent, health and world of good-will to boot. Quite often he used to go to Ashalayam to be

with those boys picked up from the railway stations or the streets of Calcutta or Howrah. He was there because he loved to be with them. He made himself all things to all so that he could gain at least some of them. We can put the same in another way : Charlie made himself young with the young so that he could save at least some of them. In making his application for his first vows, he expressed himself like this : My special aim is to save my soul and to become a saint through hard and sanctified work in the education of the young.

## Attachment to his Vocation

Fr. Provincial goes on to share another characteristic of Charlie: his deep attachment to his vocation and to the Salesian society. He loved to be a Salesian brother. When we used to have aspirants for the Brotherhood at DB Park Circus he was always available for those boys for classes, goodnight talks etc. even when others were not around. When preparing for the Third National Conference of Salesian Brothers, he was asked to prepare a paper on the Brother and their future. He said something both here at Calcutta and at St.Bede's Madras where the National Conference was held that is difficult to forget. He shared that one day would come in India when there would be as many Brothers as there would be priests: 50:50.

## In the eyes of his confreres

Fr. Tony Kariyattil who worked closely with Charlie for a number of years recalls some of the slogans that Charlie had. "All for my sweet Jesus", "I am a Don Bosco Boy", "I love the poor" etc. He speaks about the



commitment that Charlie had. He used to say "I will teach the boys till the end of my days". "I will animate the youth, especially the YCS movement till I die". "I will support all the youth groups in the archdiocese of Calcutta and lead them to Jesus". This deep commitment to the apostolate of the young affected the later part of Charlie's life and made him single-minded in his purpose of reaching out to youth. Charlie liked what the youth liked : music, good food, entertainment, games, jokes, singing and especially the way they prayed. One of the yearly activities organized by him was Christmas Carol singing. He used to gather a large number of boys and girls and practise with them for days. For five days before Christmas he and the youngsters criss-crossed the city and sang the message of Christmas visiting homes and praying with the people. It is heartening to note that the youth have continued this practice even after Charlie's death.

Fr. Tony continues and says that Charlie had the rare gift of making himself one with the young without losing his identity. Further he recalls that Charlie had great love for the poor. To experience the sufferings of the poor he decided to lie on the floor at sleeping time. With this intent he used to go to Don Bosco Ashalayam once a week and teach the street boys singing and many a time he used to spent the night with them. He used to show great sympathy to the workers in the technical section and had the desire to help needy persons who came to him.

Bro. T. V. Johny considers as special privilege from God to have spent a few years with this "Holy and innocent man - a marvelous creation of God". He says "Charlie never bothered about anything-criticism, time, money, energy, age, power - nothing could prevent him when it came to be a helping hand to others like going to Ashalayam, YCS meetings, camps, families, old people's homes etc. He was very frank and open to me. He used to share his plans, hopes and expectations with me. He was to me as my own brother. He was so concerned about me, gave me genuine corrections, congratulated and appreciated whenever a good thing was done. He never criticized others. In his personal

sharing, he used to tell me about his worries and anxieties too. He was indeed a very optimistic person. He wanted to die without giving any trouble to anybody and God did grant his desire. From the human point of view it was a bit early. Charlie wanted to be young forever”.

Bro. Theophilus has similar things to say about Charlie. “Bro. Charlie as a good Salesian loved the youth of his time. He loved the youth not only in words but by his active involvement with the activities of the youth i.e. YCS, music, games picnic etc. He was a man who would go to the youth and not wait for the youth to come to him. He loved the youth so much that distances, weather, inconveniences, and time were no obstructions to him at all. The manifestations of his love for the youth could be seen by the same and in return the youth loved him. All that Bro. Charlie did was to bring young people to God by following the methods of Don Bosco.

One of the staff members of the technical department who was very close to Bro. Charlie says, “There was no one like Bro. Charlie. I will never forget him. He gave me strength to carry on when all my hopes were shattered and gone. He was straightforward and never let anybody down. He protested for the demands of the youth and would never fail... Though sudden came his end, no pupils will forget this loving friend”.

### **In the memory of his beloved young people**

Isaac John says that Charlie was profoundly human open to the signs of the time. He was a man, yes he was a man of god. He wasn't only a Salesian Brother but a friend, a person very close to us and our families. As a teacher he gave us the best, never getting disappointed with any student but always trying to help in his extra free hours by taking the weaker students for tuition. I still remember him saying, “Study time study well”. In a word HE WAS A GEM OF A PERSON.” Vijay Kumar, another student says, “Bro. Charlie was unlike other brothers. He had very special

qualities in him. He was a very hard worker. You could see him working at any time of the day even late at night. He was so sympathetic. His way of dealing with us was totally different. He even called his office a sharing room. He was so much interested in youth that he would himself become like a youth in order to help out the youth in their problems, which was a difficult task due to his age. Bro. Charlie was a gift so profound. We miss him....” Yet another student says “Bro. Charlie was completely special. No more brother like this in the Salesian community.”

Joseph Deepak Saha narrates one of his experiences with Charlie. “A month before he expired, I had the chance to go with him for the funeral of a young girl from the YCS. He took me all the way to the cemetery on his scooter and brought me back. He was a very understanding, generous, gentle, kind and loving person. I will always remember him in my prayers and he will always bless me from his heavenly home”. Youngsters can be emotional but think of what Stephen Baptist says “I feel there will never be a Salesian brother like Bro Charlie. He was the best, he is the best and he will always be the best”. Avijit Sadhu, like so many boys of the school had heard so much about Don Bosco but it was the life and example of Charlie which made him say “To me I feel that Bro. Charlie was another Don Bosco. He really had some dedication for the youth”. Pankaj Pramanick could rightly say “He was a holy person in whom I could feel the presence of God”.

## **Life of Prayer**

It would seem that Charlie’s life was activity all the way. From all that we have seen, it was certain that he was more active than anybody else. But his life was not mere activity alone. All that he did was motivated by a sense of apostolate. He was deeply spiritual and exemplary in his prayer life. At times he was not able to be present with the community for all the practices of piety but he more than made up for it. He attended a number of charismatic

retreats and enjoyed various prayer experiences. Prayer supported his entire life and when he prayed his involvement was total. His zeal reached out in such a way to the life of others that he took great pains to be with youngsters when they prayed, he taught them to pray, made prayer and liturgical functions attractive for them. He took active part in the community celebrations of prayer and spontaneously poured out his heart to God in prayer. Everyday after the morning eucharist one could see him staying on in the chapel for long time. Charlie, so to say, cushioned his intense active life with his simple deep and profound prayer life.

## **His devotion to Mary**

In the true Salesian tradition, Charlie had a childlike devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was evident in his words and he took every opportunity to tell others about Our Lady. Earlier I had quoted the words of Fr. Provincial about his deep attachment and devotion to his salesian vocation. This devotion to the Blessed Virgin was very much a part of his salesian life, and holiness.

## **He lived his life to the full**

People who came into contact with Charlie could notice that he really enjoyed life to the full. He loved picnics and outings. I remember the time we as a community went to DIGHA. It was a short trip. Charlie liked the place so much that many times he expressed the desire to go there again. Quite often he used to visit his friends in the city to chat with them, sing with them and enjoy a hearty meal. He did have many friends!! One could never find him sad or morose. He had too little time for all that stuff. He just could not sit idle or be doing too much of sedentary work. Due to this, at times he was misunderstood by his confreres and even criticized; but Charlie did not care very much. He certainly lived his life to the full.

Charlie could be called the apostle of the Chinese community.

He was very much involved in this apostolate as can be seen from the sentiments expressed by some of the people. Josephine Chen writes "Brother Charlie as we all knew was fun loving, jovial, understanding etc.etc. Even if all the adjectives were used to describe Brother, it will not be enough. Brother started teaching me from the year 1991. He not only



taught me guitar but even Physics and Maths. Every Saturday afternoon Brother used to come to our house and we used to have a gala time together and sometimes Brother even joined us for dinner. Whatever was cooked he ate happily, as if he was a member of our family. I remember the prawn pickle Brother made and gave us. It was really yummy. The first song he taught me was showers of blessing - one of Brother's favourite songs. Whenever I had any problem I used to trust only one person, i.e. Bro. Charlie. Though I came to know Brother from the year 1991, it seems I have known him for ages.

I remember the time I used to tease him by calling "Hi! Father Charlie". He then replied saying, "I am not a Father, I am a Brother, a brother to all". I then asked him, "why don't you want to become a father?". He thought for a moment and answered, "I want to remain a brother because all the youngsters are more fond and free with a brother than with a Father.....From 2nd April 1993 till now my guitar is rusting. Without Bro. Charlie learning guitar seems to be so dry. Bro. Charlie has left this world and at present he might be singing with his charming voice for the Blessed Trinity. He might be looking down from Heaven smiling and watching each act of ours. "Brother Charlie, you have left an empty space in the heart of all of us which no one can occupy".

“One filled with joy, preaches without preaching”

-Mother Teresa.

I wonder if Mother said these words keeping in mind Bro. Charlie. But if I were to describe the man in a single sentence, I would not be able to find a better one.” This is how yet another youngster recalls his experience of Bro. Charlie. Let me continue in his words. “Yes, a man who was filled with joy and a man who preached without preaching. I must have been twelve or thirteen when I saw this man. He was wearing a white Don Bosco T-Shirt and riding his battered blue scooter through the waterlogged bylanes of Tengra (Chinatown). There was nothing extraordinary about this man at the first glance, but on closer scrutiny I found something inescapable about his face - a sort of quiet determination that one comes across on the face of a Tour-de-France cyclist on the last leg of his journey.

A small building tucked away behind the Chinatown market serves as the chapel for the Chinese community. In the many years that I have been going there for mass, there have been very few occasions when Bro. Charlie came in late for mass. The priest might be late, the parishners might be late, but this man would always be there, eveready with his one-man orchestra which would invariably consist of a novice who has just brought his guitar or learnt to play the basics the Sunday before.

For youngsters like me who have been part of the carol singing group, there are quite a number of anecdotes that we can recall which reflect his tremendous sense of humour or the way in which he dealt with young people. Now the only mode of transport in Calcutta which is as old as the trams is the Don Bosco Training Institute van. I have never seen it move faster than the trams for that matter, but nonetheless it wasn't uncomfortable. I remember an incident in which Brother was more than apprehensive about what the boys and girls were doing at the back of the van. The next day he had a bulb fitted to the back of the van just to make sure that he could “see each one of us”. the boys not to be



outwitted had the bulb removed in no time. But it was Bro. Charlie who had the last laugh when he got another bulb fitted the next day, this time with a thick wire mesh around it!!

In dealing with young people he was never impatient, angry or unapproachable. He was always there when you needed him. If you ever needed a shoulder to cry on or someone to share your joy and happiness, his office in the Technical block would always be open no matter what the time was. Perhaps that's why young people loved him - He was always available. There must be generations of youngsters who have gone to the movies with him or shared "puchkas" with him in the maidan. Such was the man, the legend that Bro. Charlie was".

Miss Daisy Mary Kuo, a leading member of the Chinese Prayer Team can sum up the experiences of many in her community. She says, "Be it the Saturday coaching classes or the after-mass breakfast Br. Charlie was there....He used to comb his hair as he called it "the Don Bosco Way". You could hardly associate Bro. Charlie with the man seen riding a scooter wearing thick black goggles and a white overcoat, yet that was him.

"The day, 1st April 1993, a shock awaited us as we were told the news of the sudden demise of Bro. Charlie. We didn't want to believe our ears because it was April Fool's day. In the end however the truth was inevitable. It had been hardly two weeks since he had announced in our chapel regarding new hymns for Easter. That Easter the grief in our voices could be felt as we sang the

new hymns. While singing those beautiful hymns we could feel as if Bro.Charlie was there singing with us and tapping his foot and raising up the dust from the ground and urging us on. Till today, I feel Bro.Charlie is still with us during our Sunday mass in Dhapa, watching over us and guiding us”.

Mrs.Victoria D’Souza who knew Bro. Charlie well and considered him to be a family member summarises some of the special qualities of Bro.charlie. “He never grumbled...I have learnt this from him. He never got angry in a hurry. I have not seen him losing his temper with boys and girls. I don’t know how but he had a charm and a way of attracting young people. If a student or someone else hurt him Charlie would not show it at all. When boys and girls came together they would not think of any mischief because they would not think of hurting him. Besides he had confidence in them. Another great quality that he had was his ability to love equally. He had no special attachment to anyone. Bro.Charlie could enjoy a good meal but he had no special attraction for food,drink,clothes etc”.

### **Adieu --**

For forty-seven years Charlie lived and worked in India and never had the chance of visiting his relatives and dear ones in his native country of MYANMAR. I am certain that he longed to meet his people, but this was not to be. It must have been a great sacrifice that he offered up for the youth for whom he dedicated his life. On the evening of April 1st 1993, the news of his sudden death shocked everyone. Within an hour confreres from the nearby communities gathered together to offer a mass for the departed soul. The next day there was an unprecedented crowd especially young people who came to attend the funeral mass which was held in the school with all solemnity and devotion. After this his body was taken to Bandel where the final rites were conducted. Fr. Provincial presided over the eucharist and it certainly was a very moving experience for all. Five large buses had taken people

from Calcutta to Bandel to enable them to take part in the service. Boys and girls wept bitterly because their sorrow at the loss of a special and dear friend was unbearable. Every Salesian present, must have felt proud of this member of the society, a faithful and worthy son of Don Bosco.

## **With Love from his Community**

The last thirteen years of his life were spent in Don Bosco Park Circus and it was during this time that some of the outstanding qualities of our dear Bro. Charlie were manifested. Whatever service he offered to numerous youngsters was in the name of the salesian community and each and every member of this community is grateful to him for whatever he has done. More than his achievements, we are grateful for the person that he was, for his holy life and example which certainly influenced the lives of many salesians and others. Charlie, you will always remain as an active member of this community from heaven. Watch over the young people who are here and guide the activities of the Salesians and help them to carry on the mission of Don Bosco in all its purity and authenticity.

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*We love you  
Charlie*



*We always did*

