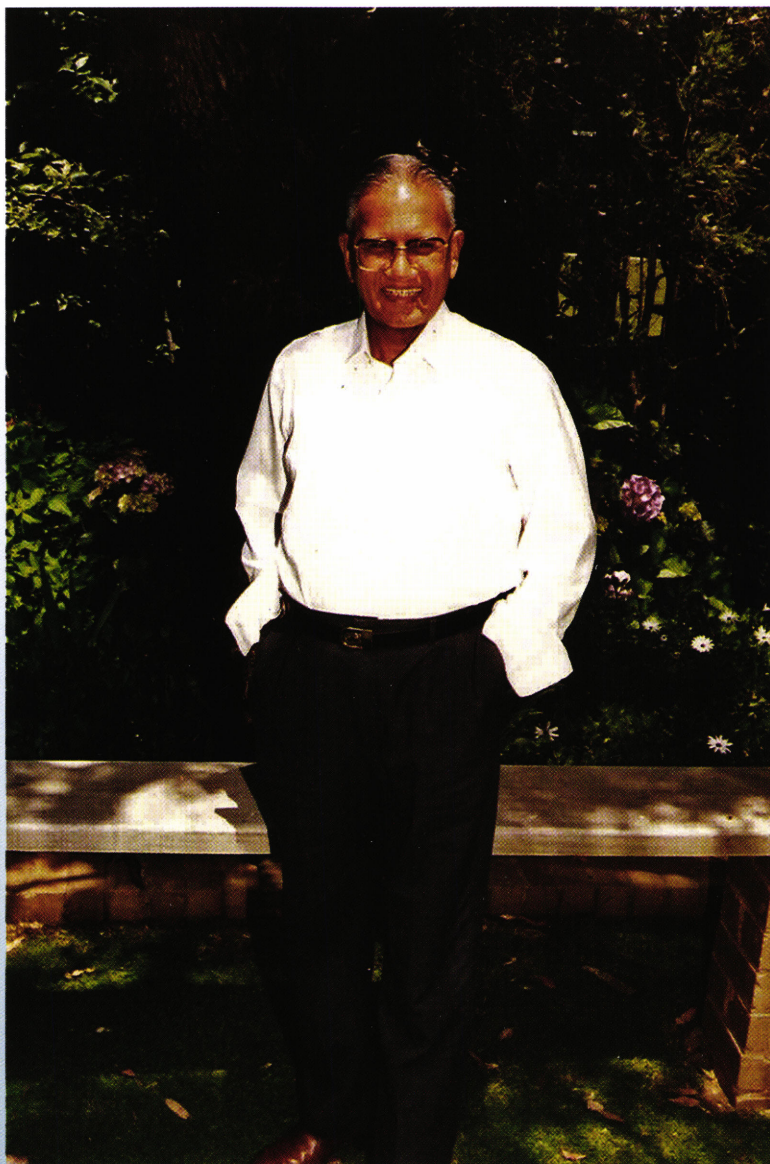


# Father Thomas D'Souza SDB



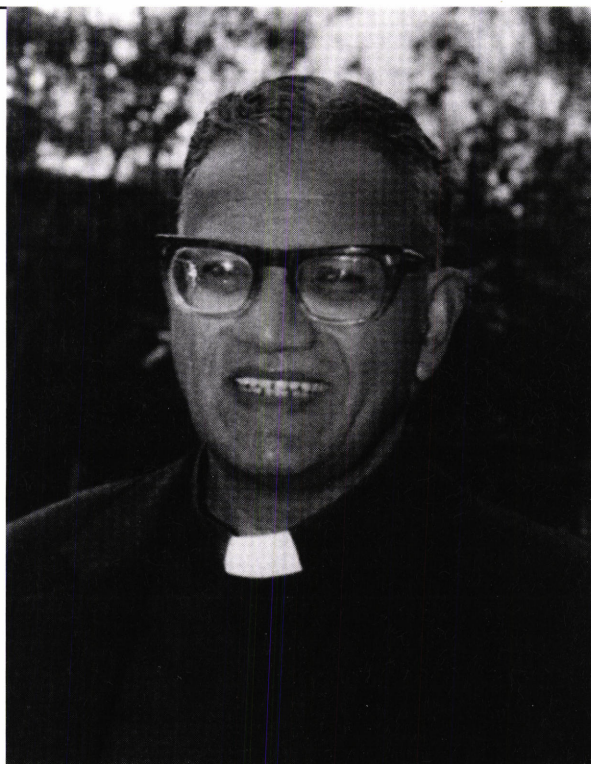
Born: 14 October 1922  
First Profession: 21 December 1945  
Final Profession: 21 May 1951  
Priestly Ordination: 17 December 1955  
Entered Eternal Life: 29 July 2008



Dear Confreres,

After almost six years at Nazareth House, Camberwell, in Melbourne, Fr Thomas died peacefully very early in the morning on 28 July 2008 to return to his heavenly Father. He began his residence at Nazareth House in the hostel section on 10 October 2002 and for the last three years he was in its nursing home section. For many years he regularly concelebrated Mass that was offered in a common room or the Chapel for other residents and patients. Most of his time at Nazareth House he was cheerful and patient – which was good considering his condition.

During the last few months his general health deteriorated and there were periods of time during which he was quite unwell and feeling out of sorts. He was particularly bright when his relatives, Mr and Mrs O'Leary and Louisa D'Souza, came from the United Kingdom and whenever his brother Stanley and or niece Natalie came from Sydney to spend a few days with him. The Sisters of Nazareth were generous in offering them hospitality in Nazareth House during these visits. He was hospitalised for a few days just a couple of months before he died, and he was overjoyed to be able to return to Nazareth House with its loving and caring nursing staff and the familiar surroundings of his room. Registered nurse Rosemary summed up the feelings of all the nurses and



personal carers of Thomas when she said: "Thomas was not usually very talkative but eye-contact and non-verbal communication clearly showed he was appreciative of the care and attention he received from his nurses and personal carers. He regarded Nazareth House as *his* home, and felt at home here."

Fr Thomas responded positively with a sense of deep faith to prayers said with him and to any words drawn from our Christian faith that built up his own faith in the risen life in Christ awaiting him after his eventual death. He certainly looked forward to this new life with Christ in glory. For Thomas it was not simply a matter of eternal rest, but eternal life in Christ with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Mary the mother of Jesus and all the saints.

I am also very proud of being instrumental in bringing souls to follow the Salesian life and who are now fully fledged priests working in the vineyard of the Lord most enthusiastically in Burma.”

## **Apostolate in Australia**

After twenty years of priestly ministry in Burma, on 4 January 1975 he began a new stage of his life when he arrived in Perth, where he was immediately welcomed by the large Burmese population resident there. He felt at home in Australia because Thomas became an Australian citizen on 24 May 1978. As in Burma he was on the look-out for vocations: Thomas’s wish was that “he could be instrumental in leading other young men of Australia to join the Salesian Society.”

For three years Fr Thomas also was confessor and teacher at Brooklyn Park. Brother Michael Lynch who was Headmaster at the time in Brooklyn Park writes: “Newly arrived from Burma, Fr Thomas D’Souza said that he was keen to be involved in the school programme. Tom was a capable musician who played the piano accordion with considerable skill. He was a very welcome presence in the school and related well to both teachers and students. Most lunch times he was on the oval surrounded by and chatting to groups of students. It

was from Tom that I learned much about his native Burma, now Myanmar. Thanks to him I now have an appreciation of the country’s great historical significance, its ethnic diversity and some of the contemporary challenges.

In 1998 when I was transferred to Brunswick Vic, Tom’s health was starting to decline. He now had less energy. However he was still the same friendly, interested and sensitive person I knew in Adelaide in the 1970s. Though his latter years in Nazareth House Camberwell were not easy, I admired him for his patience and gentleness.”

In 1978 Thomas was transferred to Brunswick’s Don Bosco Youth Centre where for over twenty years he worked giving spiritual retreats to many young people and taking care of the young in the Don Bosco Youth Centre. He was assistant, youth worker and Retreat Master at Brunswick 1978-1985, and also Vice-Rector there from 1986 to 1996. From 1996 to 1997 he was assistant parish priest at Brunswick.

He was also Chaplain to Mater Christi College in Belgrave. He helped with parish and home masses around Melbourne, offered pastoral care to the sick in three local hospitals and ever so much more. He also worked for the Filipino community in Melbourne encouraging them to keep alive their



reminds us that “he always kept busy and cheerful in his early days as a good Salesian of Don Bosco.” He did his theological studies from 1951 to 1955 at Shillong.

Only on the day of his priestly ordination did he learn of his father’s secret prayer for some of his sons to become Salesian priests. Thomas was ordained by Archbishop U Win at St Joseph’s Church in Mandalay on 17 December 1955. Incidentally, Bishop U Win was also the first Burmese bishop. On this day Thomas’s father’s prayer in the Vatican on Easter Sunday, 1934, was answered. Thomas was the first Burmese Salesian priest. Eventually three of Lawrence’s sons became priests and a daughter became a religious sister.

## **Apostolate in Burma**

Fr William Matthews has the following to say about Fr Thomas’s apostolate in Burma: “He was responsible for many Salesian vocations in Burma. He invited and challenged many young men to become sons of Don Bosco. A number of Salesians presently working in Burma are the fruits of his work. He was renowned for being a good confessor, ever since his days in the Anisakan Minor Seminary. He was a great story teller too. He could keep minor seminarians interested and listening enthusiastically to his stories. The

boys would gather around him each evening after dinner, before saying the rosary in a group, to hear his fascinating stories, recounted as serials. The boys would not like to miss out from hearing his evening fascinating stories. Tom was loved by many seminarians so much so that he became the envy for other Salesians in the community. He was a very zealous and passionate parish priest at St. Joseph’s Parish in Thingangyun, a suburb outside Rangoon. Many people in Salesian circles in Burma still fondly remember him for his affection and enthusiasm in parish ministry and in the formation time he spent at Nazareth seminary in Anisakan, Burma.” His brother Stanley summed up lasting memory of Thomas, particularly in Burma, as “One who was very generous in helping others, especially the young in Burma. All his life he always inspired me by his words and actions.”

He was Catechist at Mandalay 1955-56, and Anikisan 1956-63, parish priest in Rangoon 1963 to 1968, and Vice Rector from 1968-74 at Anikisan.

Thomas wrote “I fully enjoyed my fifty years of Salesian life and the best part of my 40 years of priesthood was blest with individual contacts with souls in the confessional, leading all to a closer intimate relationship with the Lord.



Before his admission to Nazareth House he had been ill for some time in the Salesian community of Don Bosco Youth Centre and Hostel, Brunswick, where he was cared for by the community especially its Rector Fr Brendan Murphy. He spent a brief time in Vacluse Hospital, Brunswick, but not needing acute hospital care, he returned to live in the Salesian Community until he was admitted to Nazareth House.

## EARLY LIFE AND FAMILY

Thomas Xavier D'Souza was born on 14 October 1922 in Rangoon, Burma, now named Myanmar. His parents were Lawrence D'Souza and his mother Dorothy (née Lazarus). His father was a very

religious man and a well known music teacher and his mother was a fervent Salesian Co-operator. They had seven boys and four girls, a total of eleven children: Thomas was the third child. He attended St Paul's De la Salle High School for his primary and secondary education. He was awarded a Gold Medal in a Singing Competition in 1937. As Fr William Matthews notes: "Tom came from a very musical family. He could play and master a number of different musical instruments. His talent in music brought joy to many whom he came across in his life and ministry."

At this school he had the opportunity to attend a retreat given by Fr Wollaston, a Salesian and during this retreat he was deeply moved, and on reflection, discovered that he was called to follow in the footsteps of Don Bosco.

When Thomas' father was in Rome on a pilgrimage he was present at a canonisation ceremony in the Vatican on Easter Sunday 1934. He soon found out the newly proclaimed saint was Don Bosco after he contacted a group of priests surrounding his body – they turned out to be Salesians. Many people were giving them articles and handkerchiefs to touch his





body and they were returned to them as relics. On that day his father prayed privately that some of his sons would likewise become priests of Don Bosco. In the unfolding years of his early life, Fr Thomas grasped the essence of the Gospel call.

Douglas, Fr. Thomas' brother, writes: "One evening in October 1941 I remember seeing my brother Tommy holding the life of Don Bosco in his hands. He had gone through several chapters of the book already and was now holding it reflectively, and quietly sobbing. I asked him: 'Tommy, why are you crying?' 'I don't know what to do', he answered, 'because I want to be a priest like Don Bosco'." Before Christmas he met Fr A. Alessi SDB who told him that the nearest Salesian Seminary was in the Himalayas at Salesian College, Sonada, near Darjeeling. Douglas continues: "After experiencing three months of Japanese air-raids and bombings, Tom providentially found himself and his family crossing the mine-infested waters of the Bay of Bengal, on a 5-day voyage that brought him to Madras where he was able to get more information about Salesian College up in the Himalayas and how to get there. In the middle of April 1942 ... Tom, to our utter and tearful amazement suddenly, started wishing us all 'good-bye' at Hubli Railway Junction, to catch a train that would take him on a 2,000 mile, 5-day

journey across the Deccan Plateau, via Calcutta, to the beginning of Salesian goal - Sonada. He certainly must have felt that it was worth all the time and trouble to have finally found himself where God wanted him to begin his real Salesian Journey to the holy Priesthood."

## **Salesian formation years**

As we have seen, in 1942 Thomas began his studies for the priesthood in an aspirantate at Sonada. During his novitiate in India, Thomas met Major McAteer, the American Chaplain to thousands of American soldiers living on the Indian border preparing to free Burma from occupation by the Japanese military. Major McAteer suggested to the G.I. troops to sponsor Thomas for his ten years of studies to become a Salesian priest. Three collections were taken up for this purpose at three Masses said by the Chaplain on one Sunday in December 1945, and naturally with Thomas as his altar server. All the money collected was handed over to the Salesian Provincial, Fr Mariano Uguet.

After his Novitiate he made his first profession in 1945. He pursued his studies in philosophy at Sonada from 1946 to 1948 and in 1949 Thomas obtained his B.A. at Calcutta University. He also did his practical training from 1948 to 1951 at Sonada and at Don Bosco Liluah looking after aspirants. Fr Matthews



strong faith and culture. Fr Brendan Murphy, Thomas' Rector at Brunswick from 2000 to 2002 said: "I thought highly of Father Tom, and regarded him as a good friend and a gentleman, as I think did all his fellow Salesians. I found him shrewd, perceptive, patient, grateful and charitable. He obviously suffered much in his last years, but retained his priestly spirit." Fr Anthony Quang who was with Fr. Thomas at Brunswick added the following comments: "Fr Thomas was a quiet Salesian who did not say much, always had a smile and greeted all his confreres. He was faithful in participating in community prayer life, being punctual and often was in the chapel before the prayer time. He loved slides. He collected a series of slides and used them for retreats and recollection days for students. When he was sick, he spent most his time in bed reflecting and praying. He did not want to become a heavy burden to anybody."

In 1998 he became unwell and retired from active work at Brunswick. In January 2007 he was transferred to the Chadstone community since it was closer to Nazareth House. This made it easier for confreres from Chadstone to visit Fr Thomas.

Fr Thomas was a Salesian priest for over 52 years. When one met Fr Tom, he always had a warm smile.



He reached out to everybody to take their hand: they knew they were in the company of a warm and caring person. One sensed an especially calm, firm-footed presence in Fr Thomas. He put people at ease whether they were business people, children that came to Don Bosco Youth Centre or young people making the retreats he provided at Brunswick over many years. He was gifted with a deep sense of the presence of God, without attachment to the material things. He cared deeply for young people and reached out to all without hesitation. Fr Thomas will live on in the memory of the many people he touched in his own wonderful way.

On behalf of the Chadstone  
Community  
Norman Ford SDB  
Rector  
16 October 2008





Stanley, Terry, Noel, Marie, Duggie, Jock, Norman  
Catherine, Sarah, Tom

