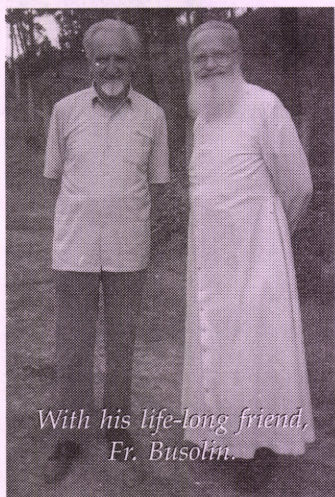


**Rev. Fr.  
HENRY FRASSY S.D.B.  
1920 -1997**

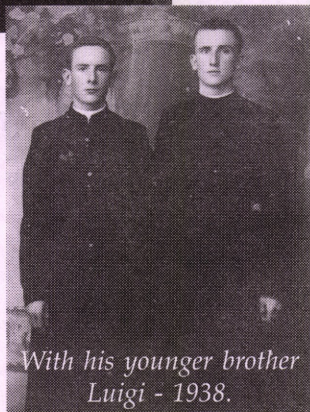




*Fr. Frassy  
with his  
novitiate  
companions  
and his  
novice  
master,  
Bishop  
Marengo  
1939.*



*With his life-long friend,  
Fr. Busolin.*



*With his younger brother  
Luigi - 1938.*

*Bishop  
Marengo  
with the  
parents of  
Fr.  
Frassy  
1933.*





*Dear Confreres,*

The Lord has called to Himself REV. FR. FRASSY, on Wednesday, 22 January at 12.05 pm. The unexpected call came at Boko while he was being taken to Guwahati for treatment. He was 77 years of age, had been a missionary in India for 59 years, working mainly in Assam and Meghalaya, 58 years a Salesian and 48 years a Priest.

### **THE LAST DAYS OF FR. FRASSY**

Fr. Frassy was naturally strong and robust. Except for diabetes from which he had been suffering for the last fifteen years, he enjoyed reasonably good health. During the annual Sobha held in December 1996, while getting into his jeep, Fr. Frassy slipped and sprained his leg. This also developed some pain round the hip. He was prescribed some medicines to relieve him of his pain. However a little later, he began to develop a nausea for food. He would go to the dining hall with the rest of the community but could not bring himself to eat anything. Thinking that this was due to the medicines that he was taking, he stopped taking them. However the situation did not improve. He began to feel weak and tired. But this did not deter him from carrying out his usual work; he even visited some villages around Christmas although it was painful for him to do so.

Many of us in the community requested him to go to the hospital in Tura, or Guwahati or even anticipate his home visit to Italy so that he could get



better treatment. But he preferred to say that the illness was not serious and it would improve with time. It took an hour of persuasion from Fr. Busolin to get him to agree to go to the hospital. I accompanied him to the Holy Cross Hospital, Tura on 14.01.97. The doctor advised that he be admitted so that the necessary tests could be done and he could be put under observation. Fr. Frassy complained of nausea, weakness, and cramps on the leg. All possible tests were conducted there; but as the situation was not improving, it was decided to shift him to Downtown Hospital in Guwahati. Since his haemoglobin count was very low, we were advised to give him blood transfusion before he was taken to Guwahati. After the first bottle of blood was given, his situation improved dramatically and he felt almost all right. However this change did not last more than 24 hours. He was given three more bottles of blood but his condition remained the same. In the evening of 21 January, the day before he was to be taken to Guwahati, his blood sugar count went very high and repeated Insulin injections could not bring it under control. He did not have urine output for 24 hours. The doctors advised us to reach him to Guwahati as soon as possible.

We started off at 4.30 a.m. Sister Julia, the Superior of Holy Cross Hospital and a trained nurse, Fr. Milon Narjary and myself accompanied Fr. Frassy. All along the way, Fr. Frassy was being given drips with insulin to bring his blood sugar under control. During the journey Fr. Frassy was in a sort of coma and was not reacting to jerks of the vehicle resulting from bad road conditions. The end came just after



we had crossed the town of Boko. Sister Julia who was constantly keeping a check on the heart beat of Father Frassy, realised that there was no more pulse. It was 12.05 p.m. Immediately we drove to the civil hospital of Boko where the doctors tried to revive him but to no avail. Fr. Frassy had passed away in silence, his ultimate sacrifice for God and his people.

The body of Fr. Frassy was taken to our house in Boko and to the convent of the FMA where the good sisters got it ready. It was dressed in priestly vestments and laid out in the community hall. The confreres and sisters of Boko as well as the children and some people who were there gathered around the body to pay their respects and pray for the departed soul. At 4.15 p.m. a concelebrated requiem Mass presided over by Fr. Cheeramben Francis, the Vice provincial, and six other priests, was offered for Fr. Frassy.

A few hours later a requiem Mass was offered by the community of Bosco Mount in Rongkhon, and the confreres, priests and sisters of nearby institutions and people of the parish who had come there on hearing the news of the passing away of Fr. Frassy. The body of Fr. Frassy reached Bosco Mount early in the morning of January 23 and was kept in the chapel. The community, the confreres of the house around and some parishioners joined in the requiem Mass which was offered at 7.00 a.m. for the repose of his soul. All through the morning hundreds of people came from the villages of the parish, from Rongkhon and from Tura and from other parishes to pay their respects to the departed soul. Many of them were not able to hold back their tears when they saw the lifeless body of their father and friend.



At 12.15 p.m. the body of Fr. Frassy was taken to the parish Church of Rongkhon. The funeral Mass began at 1.30 p.m. Besides Bishop George Mamalassery who presided over the Mass, Bishop Marengo, Bishop Joseph Aind of Dibrugarh, Fr. Provincial and 80 other priests concelebrated. Although some parishioners from the interior villages had to go back before Mass or immediately after Mass due to the three or four hours journey they had to make on foot to reach their homes, the church was full to capacity and many people had to be accommodated in front of the church. Speaking at the funeral Mass, Bishop George Mamalassery of Tura, highlighted the priestly and missionary qualities of Fr. Frassy *"Fr. Frassy worked without rest, braving all difficulties, traversing the hills and valleys. He was a righteous, hard-working and zealous priest who toiled in the vineyard of the Lord till the Lord called him. In the name of the Church and in the name of the Christians I thank him for all he has done"*.

The mortal remains of Fr. Frassy were carried in procession to the Regional Salesian Cemetery in Bosco Mount, Rongkhon. Bishop Joseph Aind of Dibrugarh conducted the funeral rites. Several touching farewell messages on behalf of the aspirants of Bosco Mount, the Parish community of Rongkhon, the civil authorities, religious congregations and the faithful were spoken at the grave side. In his talk, Fr. Dominic Jala, the Provincial gave a brief resumé of Fr. Frassy's life and works and highlighted some of his outstanding qualities. He said that in the departure of Fr. Frassy, God had taken away from the midst of his confreres, friends and parishioners a missionary



who had his goals clear and oriented everything he thought, said and did in that light. 'Those who worked with him will testify to the energy and enthusiasm with which he plunged into the demanding missionary work as long as physical strength permitted him. Seeing the work he continued to put in during the last year of his life, one could not imagine that he was a man who was completing 77 years of life', he said. He thanked God for the precious gift of Fr. Frassy to the Province and to the Church in North East India.

### LIFE — SKETCH OF FR. FRASSY

Fr. Henry Frassy was born on 1 March 1920 at St. Christopher, Val d'Aosta, in North Italy. His parents, Luigi Frassy, a farmer and crane operator and his mother Prosperina Chenoz, a housewife, had six children of whom Frassy was the fourth. They were very devout Catholics who instilled in their children the love of God and concern for their neighbour. Young Henry had his early education in his native village. The deeply religious atmosphere prevailing in his family enkindled in Henry and his younger brother, Luigi, the desire to become priests. Although his good parents were not against this, their father wanted one of them to help him with the work in his farm. When the children began to be more serious and determined in their decision, their father had recourse to a trick to dissuade one of them. He asked both Henry and Luigi to kneel down in the room. *'The one who will get up first will stay here with me, the*



*other one can go to become a priest'*, said their father. No sooner were the words uttered than both were down on their knees. There they stayed on their knees the whole day. When it began to grow dark and there was no sign of anyone of them getting up, their mother got worried and pleaded with her husband to do something because the children had not eaten anything and were evidently in pain. With tears in his eyes he lifted up both of them embraced them and said, *'Both of you have won. You may both go to become priests.'* They were overjoyed and heaved a sigh of relief. Henry entered the missionary aspirantate of Ivrea and began his studies there on 14 September 1936. His younger brother went to the diocesan seminary some time later.

Young Frassy was a serious student and distinguished himself for his piety and application to study. He was admitted to the novitiate on July 12 1938 and came to India to do his novitiate under Bishop Marengo as master of novices. He made his first profession in the presence of Fr. Vincent Scuderi at Sonada on 22 December 1939.

The Second World War had just begun and Bro. Henry Frassy was sent to the concentration camp together with other Italian nationals. He made his perpetual profession in the camp at Dhera Dun on September 19, 1945 and was ordained a priest on September 11, 1949 at Don Bosco, Liluah, Calcutta. Since he had missed his practical training due to the war and the concentration camp, he completed his theology while doing his practical training in Liluah.



## FR. FRASSY, THE MISSIONARY

Fr. Henry Frassy was every bit a missionary and his life-long dream was to go to the missions. He spent the first three years of his priestly life at Sonada as teacher. On 29 December 1951, he wrote out a humble petition to Rev. Fr. I. Riccaldone, his superior, expressing his longing to go to the missions. He had heard that new missions were to be opened in Assam and so he hoped to be sent there. His superior granted his request and in 1952 he was sent to Golaghat where he worked for twelve years. Of his stay in Golaghat he writes, *"The name "Golaghat" fills me with emotion. It brings to my mind many happy memories because it was in this mission that I spent the first and the best years of my missionary life. Those were years of poverty in the missions. But the greater the privations and lack of comforts, the happier we felt because we had been taught and were convinced that such was missionary life. When I joined the Golaghat community in 1952, "mission" area extended from Sonari to Diphu. Fr. Guidotto and myself made it a point to visit all the villages once a month both in the dry and the rainy seasons. I reached all the villages either on foot or on bicycle. It was such a tremendous joy to give the sacraments to the people. The faith of the people was amazing and I could only thank God for such great faith"*. In 1964 he was transferred to Naharkatia in Upper Assam where he worked for five years.

1969 was a sad year in the history of the missions of North East India. The Indian government asked all the foreign missionaries working in the Assam Valley to leave the area. With a heavy heart Fr. Frassy left Assam to work in the newly opened missionary



aspirantate of Borivli. In 1973, after returning from a home visit, he wrote to his provincial from Borivli, *"I came back to India with the only hope that one day I would still be able to go back to the missions. I feel homesick for my mission field.... I am trying to enjoy myself but the joy is not full..... My mind and heart still often go to Naharkatia and I cannot realize in full as yet that I'll not be able to go back to Assam. It all seems a dream."*

The Lord heard his prayer and in 1973 he was able to come to Meghalaya and he worked in Garo Hills till his death. It was a great change for him. The people, their language and customs and their mentality were totally different from those with whom he had worked so far. But through tenacious effort he mastered the language and the knowledge of the people. At first he worked in Rongjeng with Fr. Busolin and later in 1977 he was sent to start the parish of Williamnagar. He built up the mission centre and developed it. In 1986 he was asked to start another mission centre, that of Rongkhon. As in Williamnagar, also in Rongkhon he had to start from scratch and build up everything.

He was very methodical in his catechesis and wanted the people to learn their faith well. He was insistent that they know how to approach the sacrament of confession. Sitting in the confessional and listening to the confessions which were sometimes not well made, he was wont to look up to the crucifix above the altar in frustration and gesticulate as if to say, 'Lord, look here, what have I not done to teach them how to make confessions well, and see what is going on here.' He was meticulous about the quality of Christian life he tried to instill in his parishioners.



He worked hard to build up mature and convinced communities who were also self-supporting and not the ones that had to depend upon him always.

He made sure that the communities in the villages were visited regularly either by himself or by his assistant. He was very methodical on his missionary tours starting with the preparation of the things to be taken for the tours. He would leave nothing to chance and would see that everything that is required is taken. Every time he visited a village he inquired about the sick and the old and visited them; he was very particular to see that the children went to school. He helped the poorer ones by bringing them to the parish boarding. He even kept an attendance register of his Christians to see if they came to the Church and received the sacraments. The Christian life of his people was very important to him. Fr. Joseph Madathikandom, an MCBS priest who worked in Garo Hills for some years, says this of him, *"I knew him personally for a long time and the impression that I have of him is that he was a dedicated missionary. During my visit there in April 1996, I had a long chat with him about the thriving missionary work in Garo Hills. His heart was filled with missionary zeal"*. He loved his Christians and cared for them; but he was not an indulgent father but one who took pains to see that they grew up in the right way.

His catechists speak about his care to provide chapels in all the villages. He made sure that every village, even those with few catholic families, had a 'pucca' chapel. Rikseng Marak, one of his catechists, has this to say about Fr. Frassy's missionary zeal, *"Father Frassy encouraged us always to go and contact*



*new families and new villages and on his visit he made it a point also to visit the non-christian families of the village."*

### **FR. FRASSY, THE MAN AND THE PRIEST**

One of the striking characteristics of Fr. Frassy was his honesty and uprightness in dealing with people. 'He was a perfect gentleman.' says Bishop George Mamalassery of Tura. 'After the constructions in Williamnagar mission were over, he returned all the extra building materials even to the last nail'. He was prompt in paying back his debts and never made anyone wait to get what he had to pay them.

Everyone knew that Fr. Frassy was meticulous, orderly. He was a perfectionist. He built up two mission centres at Williamnagar and Rongkhon, complete with parish church, school, presbytery, convent and boarding. One can notice the precision, the finish and the aesthetic sense of Fr. Frassy. He wanted to do everything well, be it building the mission or building the Christian community.

Speaking about the way he treated others, his catechists testify that he treated everyone equally regardless of whether they were rich or poor. If he had any preference, it was only for those who were in greater need. He had a compassionate heart that felt the sufferings of his people. The many people who received his help testify to his pastoral charity.

Fr. Frassy enjoyed the company of his confreres and fellow-priests. He enjoyed spending some time, when he could, in-discussing and sharing with them



on a wide range of topics, from spirituality and the latest trends in theology to football, the French Open Tennis tournament or cricket.

As a religious and priest, Fr. Frassy was a man of prayer; he was exact in the fulfillment of his practices of piety. The last words he uttered on this earth were, 'Did you put my breviary in the bag?' He asked this while his bag was being taken down to the car before he left on his last journey to Guwahati. Even during his sickness in the hospital he used to pray the breviary regularly. When he was physically unable to do so, he asked someone else to pray it and he would pray together in silence. Alipson B. Marak who was his Head-Catechist for nine years says, *"During the tour of villages, Fr. Frassy would get up at 5.00 every morning. He would pray his breviary first and then spend 30 minutes in Bible reading and meditation."* It was the same when he was in Rongkhon.

The Eucharist and Word of God were for him the power behind a good Christian life. He made every effort to go to the villages often and offer Mass for the people. He tended to be a little long in his sermons. But he was wont to say, *"It is not everyday that the people have a chance to be instructed. I must use the occasion to teach them something even though it may take long"*.

Together with the Eucharist, devotion to Our Blessed Mother was very important to him. He wanted that the Rosary, the celebration of the month of May and the month of the Rosary and the feasts of our Blessed Mother play an important role in the Christian life of his people.



His personal poverty found its fruitfulness in his love for and solidarity with the poor. In the beginning of his missionary life, privations were due to lack of resources. But even when Providence blessed his work by sending him enough money, his life-style remained austere and poor. Obedience was not always easy for him particularly when he had to change the field of his apostolate. Regarding a difficult obedience when he was asked to begin the mission of Williamnagar he wrote to Fr. Busolin, 'I cannot believe that God is changing His will every three months'. But he always remained respectful and obedient to his superior though sometimes it cost him pain and suffering.

## CONCLUSION

Though Fr. Frassy is no more, he will continue to live on in the hearts of the innumerable people he has touched through the witness of his integrity, his exemplary priestly and religious life, his missionary zeal and his pastoral charity. His confreres, friends and his Christians will continue to recall with joy the many occasions during which they experienced God's love through him. Let us thank God for the gift of Fr. Frassy to our province and to the Church in North East India. He was a missionary who worked, suffered and died serving God's people; a true pastor after the heart of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

The exemplary lives of our valiant predecessors must beckon us to greater fidelity and generosity in God's service. They were driven solely by the desire to make known the immeasurable love of Christ for



all peoples, 'the love of Christ is a compelling force'. And neither privation, nor sacrifice nor suffering deterred them from this one aim of their lives. This is the heritage they have left to us. May the Lord enable us to carry forward with love and enthusiasm their unfinished mission. Let us also pray that God may send us many generous young men to continue the work for which they lived and died..... TO PROCLAIM THE SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST TO OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN NORTHEAST INDIA.

**Fr. C.L. Thomas, sdb**

November 1997

*For the Necrology*

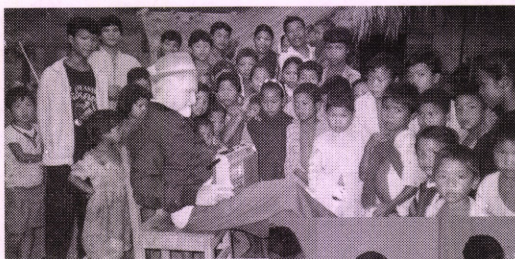
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***Fr. Henry Frassy, sdb***

<i>Born</i>	:	01.03.1920
<i>Professed</i>	:	22.12.1939
<i>Ordained</i>	:	11.09.1949
<i>Died</i>	:	22.01.1997

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*Fr. Frassy in a village.*

*Around the mortal remains of Fr. Frassy in Boko.*



*A parting kiss by his novice master, Bishop and friend.*

*Fr. Provincial blessing the mortal remains of Fr. Frassy after the Funeral Mass.*



*The catechists of Rongkhon parish around the grave of Fr. Frassy.*