

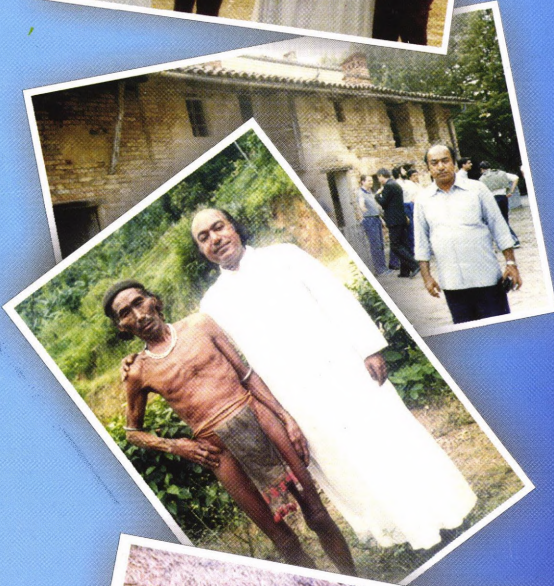
REV. FR. DEVASIA KOLLENKUNNEL SDB

A Man for God's People



Napoleon, as we lovingly called him, was a very powerful person in as much as, he touched the lives of so many of us and printed there the sweet memories of our contact with him. It would be difficult to forget his love, care and generosity. He took pride in being helpful to all who needed him. It was he who took me to Senapati from Mao after my ordination. He stopped the vehicle at the old bridge before we entered the campus. He said a prayer for me as I was going to begin my ministry there, through the intercession of St. Joseph, who was his special friend. He was a very close friend to me and I miss him a lot!

Dear Fr. Devasia, I knew how much you loved your people. May the Good Lord reward you for your generosity! May St. Joseph your special friend and companion lead into the joys of heaven!



Fr. P.A. John SDB



Fr. DEVASIA, FATHER, PASTOR AND FRIEND, LIVES WITH GOD IN OUR HEARTS

Introduction

On 17th September 2004 morning, Fr.Devasia went to preach a two full day retreat to the Western Angami Catholic Association office bearers at Mt.Tabor, Kohima. On 18th evening after finishing the talks and confessions he expressed great happiness over the way people made the retreat. He was to conclude the retreat on the morning of 19th September, Sunday with the morning Mass. However, he was unable to come down to the church due to giddiness and headache. The Sisters then informed us about his health condition. Fr.Alex rushed to the place and brought Dr. Ketheluzo who brought down the blood pressure to normal. Still he was complaining of headache and giddiness. The doctor expressed his happiness over the improvement and wanted to take him himself to Emmaus, Salesian Novitiate at Zubza. But he still wanted to rest there itself. So we obliged. In the afternoon, Fr. Joseph Thottappallil went to bring him but his condition had not improved. Then Fr. Abraham (Rector of Don Bosco, Zubza) and Fr. Alex went to Mt. Tabor. Soon Fr.T.T. Joseph and Fr. A.J. Sebastian (from Don Bosco, Kohima) brought Dr. Loso who checked Fr. Devasia and administered the needed medicines. He assured us that there was nothing to be alarmed at and there was no need to hospitalize him. So after keeping two brothers in the night by the side of Fr.Devasia, we returned to Zubza.

At 3.25 a.m. Bro. Athishu who was staying with Fr.Devasia in the night informed us that he passed away at 3.00 p.m. Fr. Alex and Fr. Abraham rushed to the spot while Fr. A.J. Sebastian and Fr. Christopher brought Dr. Loso

who confirmed his death and later embalmed the body. At 8.25 a.m. the body was taken to Christ King Parish, Kohima accompanied by a large number of people in vehicles. After a fitting and tearful farewell Mass at Christ King Church, the body was brought to Emmaus, his own community where there was a Holy Mass at 2.30 p.m. The members of the catholic communities of Khonoma, Jotsama, Kohima, Sechu-Zubza, Mezoma etc. kept prayerful vigil till 5.00 a.m. on the next day.

On 21st Sept. at 5.45 a.m. the body was taken to the Village church of Sechu-Zubza where there was a solemn requiem Mass with the people. At 8.45 a.m. Fr.Devasia's body was taken to the Salesian College Chapel at Dimapur where the last rites were held at 2.00 p.m. The funeral Mass was presided over by Rt. Rev. Dr. Dominic Lumon, the coadjutor Arch Bishop of Imphal and concelebrated by Rt.Rev.Dr.John Thomas, the Bishop of Diphu and 120 priests and attended by a large crowd of religious and lay faithful from the various parishes where he worked.

His life sketch

Fr. Devasia Kollenkunnel Devasia was born on 14th December 1937 to Mr. Varkey and Mrs. Theresa Kollenkunnel at Mattakara in the Kottayam District of Kerala. Fr. George Kalikattil baptized him on 22nd December 1937. At the age of three Fr. Devasia lost his mother. Later his father married again and migrated to Malabar and the young Devasia was looked after by his grandfather. Often he used to go to church on weekdays and serve at Mass as an altar boy. He was talented at extracurricular activities and won many prizes at school.

He joined the Aspirantate at Sacred Heart, Tirupatur on 01.06.1952 where he stayed till 1958. He entered the novitiate at Yercaud on 23.05.1958 and made his first profession on 24.05.1959. Fr. Sola was his novice Master.

He completed his philosophical studies at Yercaud in 1962. He did his practical training at Don Bosco, Katpadi from 1962 to 1965. He learnt Tamil during this



Fr. Devassia with his family members

time and was fluent in it. He went to Kotagiri in 1965 to begin his theological studies. After two years of stay he left for Bangalore to continue his theology in the newly established theologate of Kristu Jyoti College. Bishop Anthony Padiyara ordained him a priest on 20th December 1968 at Don Bosco, Pachalam in Ernakulam. He volunteered for the Assam missions and arrived in Dibrugarh in early 1969 to take up his first assignment as the Dean of studies at St. Joseph's Seminary. He was appointed Assistant Parish Priest at Christ King Kohima in 1970. From June 1972 to May 1976 he was Assistant Parish Priest at Wokha. In 1976 he was appointed Parish Priest of St. Paul's Church, Wokha where he served till 1980. Fr. Devassia took charge of Don Bosco Tuli from 1981-1984 and Don Bosco Mon from 1985-1992. At Mon he had a lot of adventures caused by various people. Once he miraculously escaped being shot at by some unknown assailants in the school campus. He made many contacts and worked zealously for the spread of the kingdom of God. From Mon he came to Don Bosco School, Kohima as Administrator in May 1992. He was appointed Warden at Science College Hostel, Kohima in June 1993. From May 1994 he was the Rector and Parish Priest of Don Bosco Punanamai. He was transferred to Christ King Church in Kohima as Parish Priest from January 1999 to February 2004. In 2000 he developed serious cardiac

trouble and underwent bypass heart surgery in Chennai. From then on his activities were considerably reduced. In March 2004 he was appointed to Emmaus, Salesian Novitiate, at Sechu-Zubza as confessor.

As a Person

He was a good pastor. He was sensitive and understanding to people and situations. He was always positive in his attitude and hopeful and optimistic about persons and events. He was a man who loved the people unconditionally and accepted them totally. People who had been abandoned and given up as lost have been rehabilitated by his trust and confidence. He had a special love for the poor and the suffering.

He was a missionary at heart. Though he had mastered the Tamil language in the South, he was attracted by the missions of the Northeast and volunteered for the same after his ordination. He manned some of the most difficult missions like Tuli and Mon in their early days. He was a good preacher. Not only did he have a loud voice but also knew how to speak to the hearts of his listeners. Hence he was always in high demand for retreats for the people. In fact he passed away just as he was completing a retreat. He was a good confessor sought after by people as well as his confreres.

He literally followed the advice in the Book of Proverbs, "My son, do not refuse a kindness to anyone who begs it, if it is in your power to perform it" (Prov.3,27). He would go out of his way to help people in trouble. So many are the instances of people demonstrating their affection and gratitude in public and sometimes to his embarrassment officers in government offices, police men at check gates would embrace him. Once on a hot summer day in Dimapur a young lady came up and wiped his sweating face with her handkerchief. Most of these were in remembrance of the

great kindness they experienced long ago as pupils or parishioners.

Humour, wit and joviality were part and parcel of his life. He was known for his hospitality to people in general and to confreres in particular. He made sure to look after the confreres who were with him. He was truly a loyal son of the Church and the congregation.

Fr.Devasia and Fr. M.M. Michael

Fr. Devasia, Fr. P.K. Mathew and I are the three of 1968 ordination batch working in Dimapur province from the Province of Madras. We used to talk about having a fresh get together of the batch since many may not live up to the golden jubilee year. In fact we had proposed to have it in Kohima, since Fr.Devasia was the parish priest at Kohima and Fr. P.K.Mathew in Wokha. Our 1968 ordination batch consisted of the different novitiate batches of 1957-58 and 58-59 of Yercaud and the others who came down from Guwahati province for theology studies at Kotagiri.

Both Fr. Devasia and Fr. P.K. Mathew went to Chennai for the post bye-pass surgery check-up. Fr.Mathew went through a second operation. Since Fr.Devasia saw that this get-together-plan in Kohima was not going through, he met some of the members of our batch in Chennai and Fr. Joy Panackal, the Rector of St.Joseph's Boys' home Katpadi agreed to host it and took the trouble to contact everybody.

One of the first things that Fr.Devasia did after his return was to send the addresses of all in the north to Fr. Joy so that he could send all the details by post. He told me that as soon as I would get Fr. Joy's letter I should book his ticket also along with mine. But before Fr. Joy's letter reached me, Fr. Devasia got another ticket for his journey to eternity.

Fr. Devasia had sent all the addresses to Fr. Joy except his own. But finally when he got his address Fr. Joy had



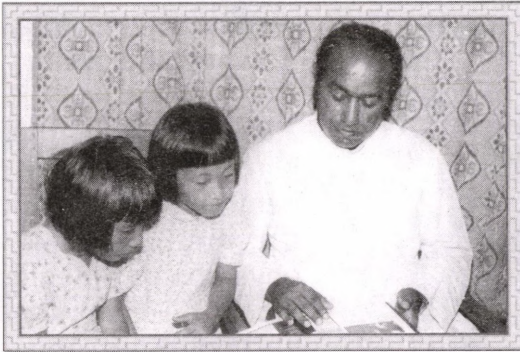
Fr. Devasia with Bl. Mother Teresa

prepared letters to all. However, before they were dispatched, Fr. P.K. Mathew informed him of Fr. Devasia's death. Fr. Joy, picking up Fr. Devasia's envelop commented that he did not send the address as though he had a premonition about his absence. Had Fr. Devasia been there, he would have added much life to our gathering. He is always so jovial and creative in gatherings, making even the so called sleepy ones also active. We

remembered him in all our Holy Masses. He is the third priest of our batch of 21 priests to die. Fr. C.A. George and Fr. Lourdnathan preceded him.

Devasia was known to me from 1954 after I reached the aspirantate at Tirupathur. He was short and so he was in the junior group, but for every feast he would be on the stage, not only because he was a clarinet player in the band but also for acting.

Our association became closer from the annual vacation of 1955, which a few of us spent together at Bears' cave Yercaud, with Rev. Fr. J.Comondou and Bro. John Kespret, during the two years of philosophy. Then the opportunity came to prepare for the TSLC examinations and the knowledge that we both had of Tamil made us often chat in the same language. He was good in all the games



Fr. Devasia with his young friends

we usually played but had a special knack to be a lifter in volleyball.

Our make shift theological college of Kotagiri from 1965 to 67 had its thrills and adventures since

normal activities were not all available. Nearly one third of the community was accommodated in two nearby houses which were of few minutes walk from the main buildings. It happened that both of us were accommodated in one room with a cloth partition. And so we could share a lot of mission experience together and it happened that we opted to work in the North East.

His first appointment in St. Joseph's Seminary lasted only one year, since we had all hoped to work in the Mission area as we used to share our experience. He too wanted to be in direct mission fields. So he was given the obedience to be in Christ King parish with Fr. Ittyachen. But his enthusiastic work was so to say affected due to some false accusations brought by misunderstandings with a section of youth, and so he used to come to Wokha, where I was working with Fr. P.K. Anthony as the parish priest. We gave him a warm welcome and he too did not remain as a guest but shared the work in the mission. So much so he was appointed to share our mission work.

He enjoyed the touring of the villages of Wokha parish which comprised of the whole Wokha district. We had a very supportive community and Fr. Devasia enjoyed the village visits, which sometimes lasted almost a month. He had a special knack in entertaining the old people, and the children with his mono-acting stories and anecdotes.

When we started the Akuluto school, Fr. Devasia spent more than a month at a stretch and he invited all the students to come to the school on Sunday also, which they did and parents at that time did not object.

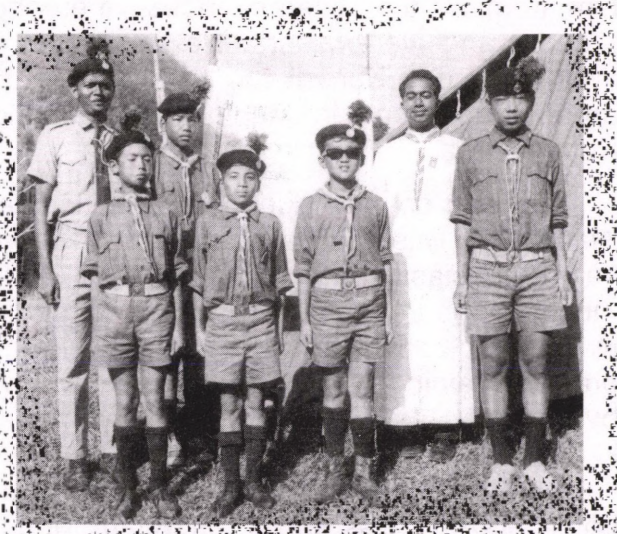
He was a good singer and during his theologate days, he was sent for karnatic music training at Coimbatore.

In January 1975 Fr. Devasia was appointed parish priest at Wokha when I was transferred to Christ King, Kohima.

Fr. Devasia has worked with Angamis, Lothas, Aos, Konyaks, Semas and Maos. Wherever he went he worked with genuine love for the people, especially the poor and the old. He was all action and enthusiasm until he was subject to the bye pass surgery. In spite of that he continued with his responsibility in Christ King as Parish Priest.

When he was in Mon, he had visited many villages and his life was attempted and when he visited Mon with Fr. Bianchi,

he showed me the dent, which the bullet had made on the cement plaster. God saved his life. During his stay in Mon, he bought up much land, so that



Fr. Devasia as a Scout Master

when the institutions develop, it would not be handicapped

as in Wokha, with houses all around. He got the place leveled where the present High School is built.

He had great faith in Homeo and Unani Medicines and he treated many with much success.

His death and funeral was an enviable one. He was working till the last moment. There were four Masses with his body one in Christ King, one at Emmaus, another at St. Maria Goretti Church and the last at Salesian College. He gave no trouble to anybody. He did not suffer being bed ridden. He was loved by all. *Fr. M.M. Michael, sdb*

Fr. Devasia and Fr. P.K. Mathew

“Do not be mastered by evil but master evil with good” (Rom 12,21). This saying in the Bible is literally fulfilled in the life of our dear Fr. Devasia. With the demise of Fr. Devasia the people who knew him are finding it difficult to come to terms, each of us cherishing the memory of the man, his magnetic personality. There have been tributes to him from all the different tribes where he worked, his friends, and well-wishers. He worked in Lotha area in Wokha, among Konyaks in Mon, among the Aos in Tuli, among the Maos in Manipur and among Angamis in Kohima area.

His friends and superiors affectionately called him 'Napoleon'. This appellation started at Tirupattur as he was very enthusiastic and outspoken. He liked this name very much and he treasured it till the end of his life. Later on he was recognized by his friends only by this name. During his practical training at Katpadi he was known by another name by the boys as 'brother Devasagayam' as he was very loving and helpful to his friends. In Angami area he was known as 'Fr. Kevi', which means very good in Angami. In Lotha area he was known as 'Ellam Mhona Fr. Devasia', which means 'very good' Fr. Devasia. All this only shows the great generosity and goodness of Fr. Devasia. He was a

very generous person and he was eager to share whatever he had with others. The Bible saying, "give and there will be gifts for you, a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and overflowing will be poured into your lap, because the standard you use for others will be the standard used for you". Lk 6,38 was applicable to Fr.Devasia. He shared generously and also others were very generous towards him.

He had a very special devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to Our Lady and to St.Joseph. He used to keep the picture of St. Joseph always on his table and St. Joseph helped him in all his necessities.

He was an angel of mercy to the poor and needy. When he was the warden at Science College, Kohima orphanage was nearby and the inmates of this orphanage experienced his goodness and generosity. Whenever they had no food or faced any other problems they ran to Fr.Devasia who always went to their help.

When he was at Mon once on a visit to the civil hospital he met a boy who lost one of his legs and was abandoned by his relatives and friends. He took him to the boarding and took care of him, made him study in the school and gave him an artificial limb and today he is a respectable person and he is able to stand on his own legs.

His love and compassion extended to all types of people, to the rich and the poor alike. With his knowledge of Unani and Homeo medicines he was able to reach out to many people even to some of the medical doctors.

He was known for his contacts and connectivity. He could establish friendship to all sorts of people, politicians, leaders, officers and important people of the area and all felt comfortable and happy in his company. He was very enthusiastic and outgoing. He affirmed people and make them feel great.

He was a fearless preacher of the word of God in spite of much opposition. One day while showing a film on the life of Christ at Humtso village in Wokha district, he was stoned by some people. He had to stop the show and come away soon. At another time in Wokha one of the leading Rev.Pastors gave a warning letter asking him to stop preaching the Catholic faith. Fr.Devasia was not perturbed by the threats but on the other hand he wrote to him a very polite letter, quoting from the Bible and Indian Constitution saying that he had to obey the command of God and he would not stop the work of God at any cost. He also said the constitution allowed preaching of religion and nobody could prevent him from what he was doing. He even invited him to come and preach in the Don Bosco Campus. The letter was received in good spirit and he became one of the greatest supporters of Fr.Devasia later on.

He was friendly with all his companions and he enjoyed the company of others. His friends eagerly sought his presence. He is no more with us physically but he lives on with this optimistic enthusiasm. May he rest in peace. *Fr. P. K. Mathew Ponnattil, sdb*

How they remember Him

"We remember him as a dedicated father and a true Christian leader"

-*Zhakuo Abel and K.Agatha*, President & secretary of the Octave choir, Kohima.

"Fr.Devasia is a yeoman who has dedicated his life for the service of mankind. He is a cheerful and loving father to young and old whomever he meets. His death has brought a cold wave to our society because nothing can replace his selfless love and concern for the people"

-*Vilasielie Michael*, President, Elders Association, Christ King, Kohima.

"Fr. Devasia was a dedicated and loving priest, and his passing away from this world is a great loss for the Catholic community as a whole and to each of us in particular".

- *Catholic women Association, Kohima.*

"Our hearts are filled with grief in loosing a person who had loved and stood for his people and his society".

- *Mr. Kevin Sekhose, Kohima.*

"Fr. Devasia was my novitiate companion. He was a good religious observant, pious, having great concern for others and very obliging. He was very cheerful and outgoing and thus won the hearts of all those whom he came in contact with. I taught him Tamil and other subjects to appear privately for teacher's diploma. He learnt Tamil well and could speak both colloquial and literary Tamil".

- *Bro. Joseph Das, sdb, Chennai.*

"Fr. Devasia's association with the Kohima Jesuits is long and of genuine affection. I was told by Late Fr. Stany Coelho, it was the young Fr. Devasia who took the pioneer Jesuits in and around Kohima when they reached Nagaland in 1970. He remained a friend and a counselor through out his life to us Jesuits. I have fond memories of Fr. Devasia specially when he was at Kohima and Mao. He was a friend to all and he had a large heart to embrace everything under the sun. He was a man of God and man for the people. His enthusiasm and his love for the Church were contagious as his laughter and mirth. He made life beautiful to all those whom he served. May the Lord give us many more Devasias to the Church through his intercession"

• - *Fr. Hector D'Souza, S.J., Provincial of South Asia.*

"When I joined the aspirantate at Tirupattur in June 1957, Devasia was one of the senior aspirants. He used to

be very jovial and friendly and was a real treat to watch on the stage. I met him twice while he was at Mao. What I appreciated in him always was his optimism, friendliness and hard work as a missionary”

-Fr. V.V. Abraham, sdb, New Delhi.

“Fr. Devasia was a pleasant person to deal with. Always humorous and witty, he liked to get the attention of those around him, whether Salesians or boys and often succeeded too. There was a lot of optimism about him. I had never seen him discouraged about things or complaining. As far as I knew him, he was one who could control his temper. I had never seen him angry or showing annoyance. All of us his companions really missed him during the batch meeting. This was expressed by several of those who came for the meeting. He had a good memory of events and things that took place during the aspirantate and later on, especially the humorous ones. During the entertainments and get-togethers, he would be the live wire”

-Fr. Joy Panackal, Chennai.

“Fr. Devasia had always been a loving father to me. His words have inspired and motivated me, but his edifying deeds have proved more. From the time I met and contacted him, as a young boy, I felt loved and I too loved him. His simple but thought-provoking advice will continue to carry me along the journey of my life:” “whatever path of life you choose, do not worry. Trust in God, and you will do well”

-Bro. Athishu N., sdb, Emmaus.

“In him I saw a father, pastor and friend. He was a man always ready to extend a helping hand to anyone, at anytime and anywhere in need. For the first time in my life, I heard a complaint from the Parishners of their Parish Priest for being over generous and approachable. In fact, during one of my holidays I told him about this complaint. He told

me that he had heard the same complaint from the Previous Parish as well. He further told me that he will continue to have the same weakness because of stretchable heart. Yes indeed Fr. Devassia was a generous person. When he gave, he did not count the cost or the amount but saw the needy and the need!"

-Sr. Margaret Sekhose.

"Rev.Fr.Devasia was a very loving person. He was very frank and sincere in his commitment. He loved the downtrodden people and extended his arm of help to the needy. He lived an exemplary life of a priest".

-Dr. Adaso Simon, Senapati, Manipur.

"I admire Fr.Devasia's love for the poor and the needy. His words had the capacity to change a person's life. He was impartial to people in all his dealings. Being a simple man he never craved for name or fame"

-Mr.Manikho, Pudanamai Village.

"Fr.Devasia had a very enlivening spirit and would pass on to others the same. He had no partiality between the rich and the poor. Youthful spirit was very noticeable in him. He had a very special love for youth and would encourage them in every church activity. He gave hope to many people in despair"

-Mr.T.Kapani, Catechist, Punanamei.

"Fr.Devasia was a friend to all. He strengthened my faith and also of others. His words still strike me: "Do not worry even if you are poor. God will help and provide for you"

-Mr.Kholi Peter, Catechist, Pudunamei.

"I can call Fr.Devasia my own father. He was a real father to me. He helped me to find my way outside. He is genuine in doing his priestly ministry. He was never worried about his own interest, but was fully involved in other's

welfare. He loved children very much. His keen interest for Sunday School children was admirable”

-Mrs. Adaphro Rose, Pudunamei.

CONCLUSION

I had the privilege of living with Fr. Devasia during the last 8 months of his earthly sojourn. He was affectionate, tender hearted, compassionate and friendly. He had his human temperamental imperfections which perhaps made him a deeply understanding person. People in difficulties could turn to him for guidance and support. Many entrusted their troubled consciences and the recess of their weighing hearts to his priestly, fatherly care. He helped out a number of poverty-stricken families and educated their children wherever he was sent. He valued friendship and enjoyed the company of his friends. He could share lighter moments with his fun and jokes and at the same time listen to the people's serious problems. He had a heart large enough to welcome any group of people without prejudice. His loss is irreplaceable. We lost a father, brother, friend and pastor; the poor a compassionate benefactor; Dimapur Province a valiant Salesian and the diocese a zealous missionary. But Fr. Devasia lives because Christ lives. God is love. Those who love, share the nature of God. Love never comes to an end (I Cor.13, 8). Fr. Devasia lives with God in our hearts, never to die.

Fr. Alex Pulimoottil, sdb

Rector, Emmaus, Salesian Novitiate, Sechu-Zubza

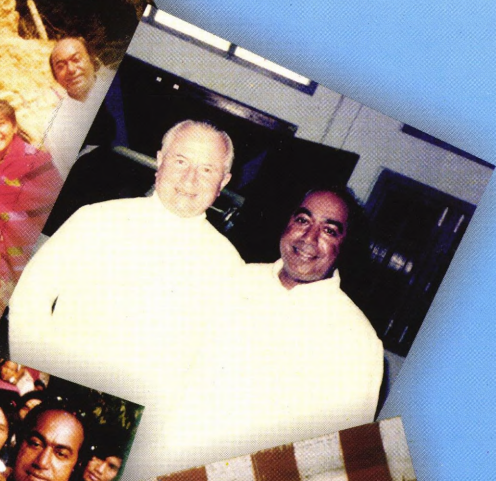
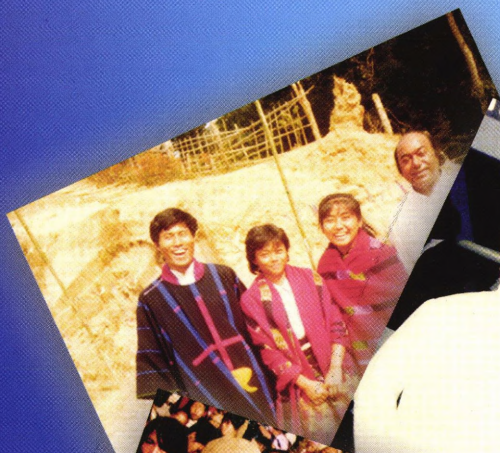
NECROLOGY

Birth: 14.12.1937

First Profession: 24.05.1959

Ordination: 20.12.1968

Death: 20.09.2004



THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

*The Lord is my shepherd
I have everything I need.
He lets me rest in fields of green grass
And lead me to quiet pools of fresh water.
He gives me new strength.
He guides me in the right paths,
As he promised.
Even if I go through the deepest darkness,
I will not be afraid, Lord
For you are with me.
Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me.*

(Psalms 23 : 1-4)