**BISHOP STEPHEN FERRANDO: IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HIS MASTER**

**Early Life**

**ROSSIGLIONE – the birth place of Bishop Ferrando**

Rossiglione is located in the hinterland of Liguria, near Genoa, 280 meters above sea level, and is surrounded by mountains some of which exceed 800 meters in altitude.

The climate is harsh in winter, when heavy snow fall may occur, usually rainy in spring and autumn, cool in summer. Therefore, in summer, the region welcomes several guests. Rossiglione is made up of two ancient villages: Lower and upper Rossiglione divided by the river Stura, the most important watercourse in the area, which gives its name to the valley. There are two other centers: Campo Ligure and Masone.

Lower Rossiglione is older, and is located on the left bank of Stura, Upper Rossiglione founded in the sixteenth century, is situated on the right. Until 1805 the two villages formed two separate municipalities, but by a decree of Napoleon in 1805 these were combined and formed one township.

The region experienced two periods of significant economic development. In the sixteenth century it became one of the most important centers for the production and processing of iron in the republic of Genoa. In the twentieth century, particularly during the time between sixties, when it exceeded four thousand inhabitants, one could count on a thousand jobs. The workers also came from the surrounding area. Between the first and the Second World War a boarding school was run by Salesian Sisters for the children of these workers.

Today Rossiglione has about three thousand inhabitants and some small businesses- a diary, machine shops, factories for the production of plastics and furnitures. Bars, restaurants, super markets provide employment to a limited number of people. For this reason daily many go to work elsewhere.

There are three large farms for cattle raising and milk production. The birth rate is an average of fifteen to twenty children per year. They attend kindergarten, elementary and middle school in the locality but for further studies they need to travel to the city of Ovada, Acqui Terme, Genoa and so on. There are many immigrants, especially from Ecuador who are occupied mainly in home care for the numerous elderly people.

**Birth and Family Background**

28 September 1895 was a significant day in the calendar of the Ferrando family.  Stephen, the second child of Augustine Ferrando and Josephine Salvi was born on this day. The parents welcomed the little child with great joy. Stephen had an older sister named Maria and a younger brother John Baptist. They belonged to the parish church of St. Catherine of Rossiglione in the diocese of Acqui, in the Province of Genova.

Augustine and Josephine Salvi were good Catholics, zealous in the practice of religion and were very much interested in the Christian education of their children. Little Stephen was christened on 30 September 1895 in the parish church of St. Catherine, Rossiglione. The Spirit of God took possession of his soul and this Spirit led him throughout his life as he was very docile to the Spirit. Stephen grew up under the vigilant eye of Our Lady of the Angels the beloved Mother of the people of Rossiglione whom they loved deeply and invoked with great faith in moments of need both spiritual and material. Mother Mary granted their petitions and in return they loved her wholeheartedly.

The family of Stephen Ferrando was of humble status, both socially and economically.  To sustain the family Augustine Ferrando worked in a textile firm while the mother of Stephen was a dedicated housewife who took care of the children and saw that they were brought up in sound Christian traditions which enabled them to grow in their faith day by day and live an authentic Christian life.  Though the means for the upbringing of the children and their education were meager, they wanted to give them the best education.  Hard work and a spirit of sacrifice characterized them.

The information the author received from the people of Rossiglione and the priests who knew the family of Stephen Ferrando is that they were well accepted and respected by the people of the place.  The family was devoted and religious minded.  They practiced their faith and brought up the children in the truths of the Catholic Church Love and peace reigned in the family.  The people of Rossiglione, especially the senior people speak with great love, appreciation and admiration about Bishop Ferrando.  This is because Stephen's parents were pious, hardworking, dignified, lovable and God-fearing and instilled the same in their children.  People looked upon them with esteem for their good and exemplary life.  The Ferrando family had but one focus that their children should grow up in the practice of the Christian faith and live the commandments of God which would enable them to love God and His people from him.  From early childhood the Ferrandos introduced their children to Marian piety which became a normal way of life, especially for Stephen.

**Devotion to our Lady of the Angels - The Protectress of the People**

Rossiglione has a famous and beautiful statue of Our Lady of the Angels (Madonna degli Angeli) to whom the parishioners have great devotion and the Ferrando family nurtured this all through their life. An annual procession is conducted in her honor in the first week of August. The people of Rossiglione honor Mother Mary with great love. Up to this day the devotees of this loving Mother pour in from the neighboring parishes to exhibit their love for her for and seek her intercession for their various needs during the feast. The streets of Rossiglione always wear a festive look while the devotees of this Mother throng the parish church and its compound. The devotees walk devoutly in procession through the streets, dressed in their best praying the rosary and singing intermittently. Some of them wait on both sides of the road to have a glimpse of this heavenly Mother on whom the people depend for favors and graces. The procession is very impressive as the pole bearers in their uniform dance rhythmically to the music of the band while the Madonna appears majestic and smiling.

From his early childhood Stephen participated in this procession and developed a great love for the Mother of God. Later even as Bishop he used to lead the Marian procession in his beloved parish which reminded him of the many processions that he organized and led in the hills and plains of his mission territory in India. As he developed this devotion he adhered to the love and care of the Madonna which gradually became indispensable for his life, in carrying out his mission fruitfully in the distant and difficult land of Northeast India.

**Stephen's Childhood and Early Education**

On 1 May 1903 in the parish church of St. Catherine, Rossiglione, Stephen received his first Holy Communion at the age of 8. This was one of the greatest days of little Stephen, for the Lord found a worthy dwelling place in his heart. On August 8, 1904, he received the sacrament of confirmation from Mons.  Disma Marchese. Jerome Pizzorni was his godfather who took care of his religious upbringing to some extent. On this occasion Stephen offered himself to be a soldier of Christ.

The Ferrandos admitted little Stephen in the elementary school situated in the village at Rossiglione. He was a boy of average intelligence yet he manifested great interest in his studies.  He stood out among his playmates in his childhood, among his schoolmates in school and in the village. Besides his constitutional structure there was something extraordinary in his behavior that everyone loved him, his friends and people in the village. He had a pleasing personality. This perhaps could be the result of the upbringing in the family by his devout parents, and his awareness of the living presence of Jesus in his heart, through whom he performed all his activities, small or big. His friends of him loved him for his jovial nature and made fun of him for his oddities. He took no offense at anyone. Instead

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when his friends made fun of him he laughed with them. The village people loved him for his gentle and good humored nature which they valued even when he was a Bishop and spoke about him with great admiration.

**The Deceased and Surviving Members**

The angel of death visited the Ferrando family. Josephine Salvi, the mother of Bishop Stephen Ferrando went for her eternal reward in 1940 at the age of 73. In 1947 Augustine Ferrando the father followed her to the heavenly abode at the age of 83. In the same year John Baptist who was 49 years old and a bachelor followed his parents to his eternal home.

Maria Ferrando, the sister of Stephen Ferrando was married to Giuseppe Pizzorni in 1924 and they had two sons Gianni and Stefano. In the year 1971 Maria was called to eternity at the age of 78. In 1977, her husband Giuseppe was summoned by his creator at the age of 86. Maria's son Stefano Pizzorni passed away in 1984 at the age of 58 leaving behind his wife Marisa Pizzorni and their two daughters Martha and Tiziana.

During one of the visits of Bishop Stephen Ferrando to Italy the marriage of Gianni Pizzorni and Angela Minetti was blessed on 24 October 1949. Gianni Pizzorni who accompanied the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando to Shillong in December 1987 went to meet his creator in 1991 at the age of 66, leaving behind Angela Minetti and their two sons Enrico and Stefano. Angela Minetti slept in the Lord on 30 January 2011.

The surviving relatives of Bishop Ferrando today are Marisa Pizzorni the wife of late Stephen Pizzorni and their two daughters Martha and Tiziana and their children, and Enrico and Stefano the sons of late Gianni and Angela.

Enrico Pizzorni is a dentist by profession. He lives at Campo de Ligure and practices at Rossiglione. The author visited the family and has met them a few times. While conversing with them one could understand the love and fondness they had for Bishop Ferrando, their dear uncle. Stephen Pizzorni and family of him live at Genova Pegli

**Student at Fossano, Don Bosco**

Young Stephen had a great desire to become a priest and he confided this to his parents. They wanted to give him the best education and help fulfill his desire for him. On completion of his primary education in his native village on 9 October 1904 at the age of nine he was accepted in the Salesian School at Fossano. Coming from a village it was a world of wonder and admiration for Stephen as he feasted his eyes at the magnificent building with a beautiful chapel, spacious study hall and refectory which housed hundreds of boys from different areas and contexts.

The reasons that led him to choose this school were the educational facilities offered at Don Bosco's Oratory and his desire for him to become a priest. He manifested great diligence in his studies, though not of very outstanding intelligence. He was a person of great discipline. He was much sought after by his companions as they liked his friendliness and cheerfulness. His teachers loved him for his calm and simple nature particularly for his obedience which was very conspicuous even to his fellow students. At times he played tricks on his companions.  Yet they loved him for his simple and humble nature.

Since childhood he showed a great spirit of pity and devotion to Mother Mary, which grew ever stronger as he spent his days and years at Don Bosco's school in Fossano. He developed and fostered this tender love throughout his life and handed down the same devotion to the people in his vast mission of Assam and in a great measure to his spiritual daughters.

**At the Oratory of Turin**

A priest who particularly influenced the life of Ferrando was Don Stefano Rizzo who was the chaplain at the oratory of St. Catherine, Rossiglione. Stephen Ferrando had a close friend in the person of Ravera Giuseppe Ferdinando whose uncle was Don Stefano Rizzo. Thus Stephen Ferrando had a close rapport with Don.  S. Rizzo. Their relationship greatly influenced the life of Stephen Ferrando.  Don Rizzo advised him to join the Salesians of Don Bosco. Thus on 24 October 1907 Stephen was admitted at Valdocco where he completed his studies.

**The Desire to be a Missionary Priest**

The idea of ​​becoming a missionary priest was developed at the oratory. In the Salesian boarding and formation houses it is customary that when missionaries come on holiday, they share their missionary experiences with the boarders and students in the school. This is done particularly in the formation houses with a view to strengthen their vocation to the Salesian way of life and to instil the missionary spirit in them. Missionaries were considered as great heroes in their homeland. Stephen Ferrando must have listened to these missionaries many a time. They would narrate their adventures, experiences, achievements and failures, their heroic activities and challenges and above all their joys and consolation in saving souls and caring for the poor and abandoned. The frequent listening to the life and achievements of the missionaries definitely ignited great enthusiasm and missionary spirit in Stephen Ferrando.

During his school days, he came in close contact with the Salesians and his stay there infused in him the desire to be like one of them. This was furthermore reinforced when he listened to the inspiring and challenging 'Goodnight Talk' of the missionaries who visited the boarding boys during their holidays. He pursued his desire secretly and put his heart and soul into his studies and practiced what he learned from his parents-being disciplined always, courteous in his dealings with everyone and gentle in speech. This endeared him both to his teachers as well as to his fellow students who sought after him for his cheery nature.

Stephen Ferrando's simplicity, goodness, sincerity and fun-loving nature attracted his companions. He had always been docile, submissive, obedient and respectful towards the superiors and teachers.  I have used to recommend these to others.

His superiors wrote: "He distinguished himself among the confreres for maturity in judgment, strong spirit of piety, Balance and equanimity of character, prudence and exactitude in obedience, humble and docile submission and spirit of sacrifice.” Under such circumstances one wonders whether Stephen had any difficulty in following his vocation. The only hindrance he faced was when he had to forgo his seminary studies to defend his country during World War I.

His education with the Salesians gave him a vast knowledge about the life of the Salesians and their missionary spirit in the far flung mission areas which saved countless souls. The holy life of the Salesians under whose guidance he was staying and studying inspired him to follow their way of life as it appealed to him greatly. Thus he was motivated to be a Salesian missionary priest. This desire kept growing in him as he stayed on in the Oratory at Turin.

**INITIATION INTO SALESIAN LIFE**

**Novitiate**

At the completion of his studies Stephen Ferrando entered the Salesian Novitiate on 14 September 1911 at Foglizzo in Turin and received the clerical habit on 19 October 1911. Don Giulio Barberis was his Novice Master known for his dynamism, precision and gentleness. Bishop Fernando often used to speak fondly about him to his novices in Our Lady's House, Shillong. He enjoyed a very good relationship with his Novice Master who was truly a loving person. At the age of 17 on 15 September 1912 Stephen Ferrando made his first religious profession with great love for Jesus and Mary whose company he always cherished and to the great joy of his parents. Fr. Louis Ulla sdb was one of his novitiate companions and a close friend who served as secretary to Bishop Ferrando after his retirement, while he stayed in the Salesian community at Genova Quarto.

During his novitiate Stephen Ferrando cultivated union with God and a spirit of prayer. As a result he was able to take an active part in the life of the community to which he belonged and he was able to mingle well with everyone. He was very fervent in his religious duties like prayer life, friendly talk with the superior, weekly confession, relationship with his Superiors and companions that helped him to attain spiritual maturity. Stephen was esteemed by his novice master and companion for his tranquility, serenity, cordiality, piety and exemplary obedience.

Testifies Fr Louis Ulla, his novitiate companion. The conduct of Stephen Ferrando in the novitiate was very exemplary. His attitude towards spiritual life and formation were of serious nature. He distinguished himself for his piety, which was the predominant virtue that drew the attention of those who lived with him. On piety he based his life and activities. His colleagues on him had great love and esteem for him.

**Student of Philosophy**

Stephen Ferrando had his Philosophical studies at the Salesian Stadentate of Turin-Valsalice. He took his studies seriously while he cultivated the spirit of piety in a deeper manner. In his studies he always manifested great diligence. The thought of perseverance in his vocation was uppermost in his mind at all times that he put his whole heart and mind in his studies and he prayed for this earnestly.

Stephen Ferrando responded well to the formative stimuli of this period.  In the course of his studies he always manifested clear and strong intelligence, sharp memory, and perseverance, great capacity in grasping things and diligence in studies. He cultivated from his childhood union with God and the spirit of prayer which he least from his loving mother Josephine Salvi.  As he grew in physical stature, the spirit of prayer and union with God grew in him steadily and these deeply rooted in him.

**SOLDIER IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

**An Unexpected Summon**

On completion of the higher studies in the seminary, Stephen Ferrando and his companions were earnestly preparing themselves to follow their call in the Salesian congregation. These youngsters were eager to collaborate with Don Bosco in his mission of taking care of the young, who wandered about aimlessly through the streets of Turin, being a menace to everyone. Meanwhile World War I broke out in Europe on 28 June 1914. All young men were compelled to join the army to fight for their country irrespective of who they were: father, son, brother, priest, cleric, or seminarian. Stephen too was enrolled in the army along with his companions. To state in his own words: "The second unexpected letter came a year later when Italy joined World War 1. The summons to take up arms in the battlefield in defense of my country came like a shock for me and my companions." Stephen Ferrando, the young cleric approached the frontiers of War with an attitude of pride loyalty towards his motherland – Italy.

Although he felt that his dream of becoming a priest as early as possible was shattered, Stephen Ferrando accepted with resignation the changes caused by the war and was determined to pursue his plans later. He fought the war valiantly, placing his friends and himself under the protection of Mother Mary. He saw the will of God in his call to be a soldier to defend his country. He entrusted his plans for his future life in the hands of God realizing that he was led by God in all circumstances and in all places. He considered saving his motherland from the hands of enemies as something sacred, urgent and important.  Thus the hands that joined daily several times in prayer had now to be trained to take up arms to wage war in defense of his country.

In the midst of fierce fighting, the desire to complete his studies for the priesthood kept growing day in and day out. He kept this flame alive and longed for the end of the war to fulfill the long cherished dream of his heart-the priesthood. He prayed fervently everyday and looked forward eagerly to the conclusion of the war. He witnessed human carnage, and the untold misery of the people greatly troubled him. The end of the war would enable him to get back to his studies to continue his quest and prepare himself to be Christ’s soldier to alleviate the sufferings of all, the sick, the poor, the illiterate and carry Christ love’s to them.

He trusted in a God who was his rock and safety.  He was a man who placed himself and his future projects in the hands of God with great hope and trust, in the unperturbed he went ahead. He had great faith and immense trust in God and Mother Mary that he believed his long cherished dream of becoming a priest would be fulfilled one day.

With these dreams in mind Stephen set out with his companions and fought against their enemies in the Southeast of Trento, North of Verona and Pakova, Monte Carlo, Monte Grappa, river Piave and the Alps. It is obvious that he was very courageous in facing the situations of the battlefield. He himself narrates certain incidents. He received a number of medals, honors and certificates for his valor in the battlefield.

**Recognition of a Valiant Soldier**

The number of honors that Bishop Ferrando received from various dignitaries for the great service rendered in defense of his homeland are the following:

1. On 28 March 1917 he received a Medal of Honor from the Lt.  General of the King of Italy.
2. In 1919 he was decorated with a Silver Medal for valor.
3. On 4 February 1935 his Majesty Victor Emmanuel III, King of Italy conferred on Ferrando the title " Commandatore "
4. On 3 March 1971 he was made a Cavalier and was given the title of " Grande Ufficiale Republica Italiana "
5. On 13 October 1974 the same honor was conferred on him by the Prefect of Genova.
6. On 4 November 1974 the President of the Archaeological Academy of Italy bestowed upon Bishop Ferrando the Diploma Academico Onorari " by which he became a member ( honoris causa ) of this Archaeological Academy.

These records show how the Italian government recognized the selfless and heroic service of Ferrando and the valor he exhibited while saving his country from the hands of enemies.

These honours indicate the dedication and the sacrificing spirit with which Stephen Ferrando heroically fought for his country. Although he received the above honors and his superiors in the army and companions held him in high esteem his attitude towards all this was that of St. Paul who considered everything as loss for the sake of Christ. "More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him… With his high ranking performance in the army he could have risen high and held an honorable position in the world, but he renounced all this to be a soldier of Christ and establish God's kingdom in the land of his dreams.

The author considers it a matter of pride and privilege to have seen these framed certificates and medals decorating the parlor of the house of Gianni Pizzorni and Angela Minetti who entrusted their son Enrico to pass on these to the congregation after their passage of eternity. The congregation received this precious heritage from the Pizzorni family at the demise of Angela Minetti on 30 January 2011. The same was brought to India to the MSMHC Generalate at Hatigaon, Guwahati, by Sr Elizabeth Jacob, the Economer General o n 24 May 2011 on a day very dear to Bishop Stephen Ferrando and to the congregation, the feast of Mary Help of Christians. The congregation is proud to have these treasures.

**Stephen Ferrando's Heroic Deeds**

Two episodes which took place during the War which Bishop Ferrando often narrated with great satisfaction are given below.  His novices too used to speak about them.  On one occasion he was manning a strategic place. He was pacing up and down, left and right. Suddenly he noticed a movement at the entrance of a tunnel in the mountain. He suspected that someone was hiding in it. He immediately shouted out, “Hands up and come out.”  "Out came three German soldiers, strong and sturdy one after another. Fear enveloped him when he saw the three mighty fellows crawling out of the tunnel one after the other. Unflinchingly he stood his ground and fought hard to put up a brave front although he was in a tight corner. Stephen was all alone, the three hefty men against one, surrendered themselves. He said that he had never prayed as fervently as he did on that occasion. Behold God spared his life to accomplished his plan for which he destined him.

There is another incident that depicts his undaunted courage, heroic acts and love and compassion for a friend.

When I was in charge of the Sanitary Department I had to risk my life to rescue one of our soldiers. We were stationed rather close to the enemy camp. Though we were alert, we were taken aback when we saw bullets flying in our direction. In our frantic attempt to escape the bullets and to save ourselves, one of our companions was shot in both his legs. Being a bit slow by nature I was the last in the line; behold my wounded friend lying bathed in blood and pain. There was no time to spared. I lifted him up, and placed him on my shoulders and began to march, entrusting both of us to the protection of the Madonna. I could have been easily caught us as I moved slowly with my dying friend. God saved me. I managed to carry him for miles on my back. In the camp the nurse came and God saved his life. It was sheer providence of God. Later on I was awarded for this act of bravery, “but only God knows how terribly afraid I was”.

Stephen Ferrando was willing to lay down his life for his friends. It is to be remembered that he was the last in line and all his friends in the army passed by the wounded soldier lying in a pool of blood. But Stephen's heroism coupled with love rose above every danger and he carried his dying friend to the camp on his back. Thus even at a young age and in the midst of great dangers he gave himself to save his friends, actualizing the words of Jesus that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for his friends(cf.Jn 15: 13). Thus he walked in the foot steps of His Master even to the extent of giving his life for those at the point of death.

In the midst of fierce fighting Stephen often remembered his superiors, parents and friends and he maintained contacts with them whenever he got an opportunity. The post cards and letter send by him to the superiors are in the archives of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Pisana, Rome. Copies of these are preserved in the archives of the MSMHC Generalate, Guwahati, Assam.

The author has read a letter of Bishop Ferrando written to one of his friends in Rossiglione in which he described the horror of war and which contained much advice for living a pious life. He preserved this letter with great love and reverence for his friend.

**Letters from the Battle Field**

Stephen had great love and respect for his superiors that even from the battlefield be kept writing to them regularly informing them of the situation in the field, his longing to attend religious functions, the movement of the contingent, his yearning to see the end of the war, desire to get back to the seminary to pursue his dream of becoming a priest, his achievements in the battle field and above all seeking their prayers for the well being of all, for himself and his companions.

The following extracts are taken from the letters written by Stephen Ferrando in Italian to his superiors in Turin.  There are 27 letters in all: Five written to Don Vincenzo Cimati, thirteen to Don Manazzero Emmanuele, seven to Don Alessandro Lucells, one to Celso Zoreta and one to Luigi Pasella

Letter dated 15 August 1915 addressed to Don Vincenzo Cimatti expresses nostalgic feelings and asks for prayer for courage and strength to fulfill his duties.

"As I write these lines fresh memories come to my mind of the solemn feast (15 August). I will welcome the dawn of the great day in this new and strange land accompanied by

the sound of the gunfire, but always thinking of the celebration there; the Mass and all the rest. Often I find myself in Turin: In Valalice… Dear Father and teacher remember me at the tomb of our Saints so that I may have the strength to fulfill my duties cheerfully and readily. Thank God everything goes on well,I remember Jesus every day.”

The letter of 21 November 1915 expresses his pain at not being able to come back and complete his studies and at the same time takes refuge in Jesus who knows what is best.

"The scholastic year has commenced, however the Lord has not permitted me to complete my studies with you all my beloved superiors and companions. All the same I am with you in my thoughts of the class room of Valsalice. The distance arouses in me the memory of many hours spent in that room… while the sound of the cannons resound in the air, I try to recite the Dante's poems. I do not know when and how we will be able to give the exam… we lack nothing because Jesus is always with us… pray for us.

The letter of 21 December 1915 shows how Mary Help of Christians saved him and the group from bombardment. Even in the battlefield his inner yearnings found rest only in Jesus.

“Here in Adriac we were welcomed by a Monsignor of the place, to whom we presented ourselves as Salesians. And he put everything in his palace at our disposal. He treated us with such courtesy as his own children.  Today we will leave for the frontiers.  We are not at the firing front but near Aqualia. We really merited a day of rest after the famous day of 27 October on which our session of battalions was bombarded with so many grenades. Mary Help of Christians saved us even from that danger and we were not hurt. For Christmas we will be away from our dear ones. But we shall be united with you in spirit with all the brothers there in prayer and jubilant songs.  It shall be a day of thanksgiving for us… We are made little bit like Baby Jesus who suffered much for us in the humble manger of Bethlehem. Dear Father, during the Christmas night when you offer the divine sacrifice please put both of us in the chalice that Jesus may make us His own, purify and transform us to make us worthy sons of Don Bosco. We pray much for you.”

Letter of 21 February 1916 demonstrates his confidence of him that God will fulfill his dream of being a missionary and how he and his companion make effort to keep up the spiritual fervour.

“..The trust in God gives sufficient strength and courage to the soul. Everything here below will pass away. If the Lord permits, the day will come when I will be able to dedicate myself with great ardour to the mission which will be entrusted to me.  I am still with Bacchiarello and here we try to form a Salesian community. The Church is nearby and we try to fulfill our practices of piety.

His tender love and devotion to Mary Help of Christians and his trust that she will protect and deliver him from the evil of the war is seen in the letter of 19 May 1916

"Today returning from the most dangerous frontier it was a great consolation to receive your post card. Oh! What a comfort even in this moment of anxiety and fear to think of the feast of Mary Help of Christians”; a few days ago i happened to meet a confrere who runs a school here nearby. Even in the midst of cannon and surrounded by all kinds of dangers, on entering the place it was a great surprise to see Don Bosco’s Madonna there. I felt very secure and tranquil. This is the most crucial part of the ten months of war ... yet I am confident that our good Mother will help us and since we are far away we have more right to be protected by her. Please remember us when you visit her in the Shrine at Turin and ask her to protect us.

The letter of 7 August 1916 recounts the misery of the war as well as his goal in life which keeps him well motivated to face the ordeal by fixing his gaze on Jesus.

“Since long I have not been able to communicate. During the vigilance of these days it seemed like an infernal concert with the incessant sound of the cannons and the skies filled with smoke; often the thoughts fly to our dear ones who are far away. The war is reaching to the border.. Hope it will end soon. I am fine in between all that happens here and try to make myself strong in heart and fix my eyes to that goal which Don Bosco has given us…”

Bishop Ferrando continues to express his gratefulness to God for protection and providence. He is grateful that he has opportunities for the reception of the Sacraments.

“I have always good reason to thank God, for protecting me always from dangers and He never abandoned me, instead always gave me opportunities to approach the Sacraments and to attend Holy Mass daily

"The letter of 10 September 1916 is a manifestation of a longing to end the war and pursue his goal of becoming a missionary. For more than four months are in the frontier operation area. I thank the Lord that till now I have not been placed in a really dangerous place. How long will the inhuman war last? I am fully resigned to whatever the Lord wants, with firm confidence I hope that once the war is over, I will be able to respond to my mission with more ardour.

He is full of confidence though they have to fight on at the frontline risking their lives as fresh announcements are made about the fierce battle ahead as in the letter of 11 October 1916.

"Fresh days of trial and sacrifices an announced!  All the same I thank the Lord and hope that I will be spared of the real danger. Since 6 months our regiment is on the very frontlines of the war. Lots of emotions and less of reason… It is a hard time… but the Lord takes good care of me pray for me.

In the midst of threatening dangers and perils Stephen Ferrando placed his trust in Divine Providence and always showed a grateful heart.  The letter of 15 November 1916 expresses his sentiments…

I want to thank you from the depth of my being because the soldiers show such benevolence towards me. 1 am in charge of looking after the wounded and the sick. In the

evening we are called around a table and most are priest and clerics… it is almost like a seminary! The enemy plans come suddenly and we leave everything and take refuge in safe places. One day the bomb fill just near us. Our trust in Divine Providence and the good spirit among us are the means which sustain us in this hard time which has lasted for fourteen months. We thank the Lord for everything.

The fear and anxiety of impending dangers increase the faith of Stephen Ferrando and he consoles himself with the thought that there is a God in Israel who will not abandon him to the enemies as expressed in the letter of 17 December 1916 just before Christmas..

Christmas, feast of peace and love this year also I will not be permitted to celebrate it with my confreres. All the same my sentiments and thoughts will be in Turin and the remembrance of the many nights which were spent in great fervour will help me to be strong in heart and will kindle the desire to get back to the religious habit which I had to put away… being in the regiment of health I am saved!  Now they asking us if anyone has legal degrees or equivalent title. 1 only pray that the good heavens have mercy on me and may I be spared from waging war in the frontlines. In any case there is a God is Israel, Deus Est in Isreal.

The brutality and ugliness of the war inspire him to trust in God more than ever to withstand the testing times as he poignantly expresses his feelings in the letter of 14 February 1917. He is grateful that even in the midst of trials God sends him consolation through persons who care for him.

"I have not been able to write for long due to the many things which were happening here. With all those who belong to the period of 1895 I too was asked to pass over to the frontline. With a group of 500 I am in the region of Mirano Veneto, a veritable furnace. It is a very painful situation, but I hope that the good Lord will give me enough strength and necessary serenity, above all the grace to remain faithful to His designs. In the countryside I found a chaplain and a confrere, they gave me great consolation.

Changing over from the title Sanitary Officer to the regiment who handles bombs threatens him and he entrusts his cause to the loving Father and to Mary Help of Christians as seen in the writings of 6 April 1917…

I am assigned to a department which handles bombs and three times in a week they throw bombs.  I have given up my title as master-teacher.  I do not know whether they will in another office.  The changing over from the post of Health Care to the combating field was very painful.  So much so it has changed my life completely. I will always try to do my duties well trusting in God and Mary Help of Christians.

The war progresses with all its vehemence.  Stephen Ferrando is in the war zone for almost three years and once again there is change of place to Macedonia which instead of discouraging, rekindles in him the desire for mission and to save souls. He is surrounded by many dangers but his confidence in God is shaken as expressed in the letter of 25 March 1918.

Thanks be to God I enjoy good health and morale is always maintained high. Our work is very hard. I am constantly engaged in a military division busy with arms, exercises marches and instructions.. From 15 July 1915.1 am in the war zone, but since one year I am in the real battle field.  The Madonna always protected me and saved me from the midst of thousands of dangers.  Now they have asked me whether I wanted to go to Macedonia, and I have said yes, thinking that I will be closer to the East, which I have dreamed of many times! i think of the missions.  For the practices of piety I do what I can, that is bit by bit.  Sometimes in the morning I escape to the church and receive communion. The dangers are many and everywhere but I remember the words of the Sacred Scripture "The soul of the just is in the hands of God. Nothing can ever touch him."

The contingent is ready to depart for Macedonia and the fear of the war front once again pains his heart but with renewed faith and trust be marches ahead as illustrated in the following lines of 26 March 1918.

"Yesterday I had written to you in reply to your last two letters Today I am writting again to inform you that I am destined to a Macedonian Troupe which tomorrow will leave for Trento. By now we are so used to changes, adjustments, testing, sufferings and pains that even this new destination we accept with resignation! I am always going further and further from my dear ones, but all are close in my heart. There are two great loves in my heart my dear ones and my congregation. I hope in Trento they will give us some rest… I entrust myself to Jesus who calmed the turbulent sea and who walked on the waters. I give myself to Mary Help of Christians who saved me from many dangers and to Don Bosco. These days pray for me especially at the sanctuaury of Mary Help of Christians.

Bishop Stephen Ferrando is in constant touch with his superiors and he takes pains to report every event as seen in the following lines of 14 April 1918.

"I have reached the destination and is assigned to the same company of Don Miglia... we are in a safe place and are peaceful.  The distance from Turin is great but you are always close in my heart

The nostalgic memories of the past coupled with optimism poignantly express the inner struggle of Stephen Ferrando as seen in the letter of 16 June 1918.

"All our solemn feasts are over and you can imagine how I wish to participate not only in spirit. Here in these far away places on the mountain ranges my thoughts fly to Turin towards those dear places where I spent days in calm and serenity, and hope to be back there soon. I am fine and I am incharge of a regiment whose officer is a fascist and I do not know how to thank the Lord. There is also a chaplain here, so I can attend Mass and receive the Bread of Strength. Whenever I have no urgent duty I escape for the Mass. I want you to pray for me so that the Lord will keep his hand always on my head, so that my heart may always remain strong, mind always elevated even in the midst of many different opinions and thoughts in which I find myself. Sometimes I feel running… away so many exercises and other things to which we have almost become insensible… However, I try

my best to do any duties well and go ahead entrusting myself the Almighty.

Stephen Ferrando announces the good news that the authorities are granting him a Silver Medal as noted in the following letter of 5 October 1918. He wants to offer it to Mary Help of Christians as a sign of his gratitude for her protection and guidance.

"Since two days we are in rest. For the last ten days we were walking almost day and night finally the Bulgarian ceased to figh.t Now are waiting for any new development. It is raining so much and the soldiers are tired and fed up. However when they are in the tent they sing and in all truth we are happy because so far we have been protected and nobody betrayed us. I delayed in writing to you because I wanted to give you a surprise, good news. The municipality of the place on 13th August decided to give me a Silver Medal of Military Valour. It was proposed since last year but up to now nothing is sure. If I am granted this medal, I will be  very happy not for my sake but since I am a Salesian I want to offer it to Mary Help of Christians in gratitude for all the help and protection she gave me. Pray for me that I may always do the will of God.

" Again the subject of this letter is the Silver Medal and he gives the reason for granting this honor as recorded in the flowing lines of 11 November 1918.

I have the good pleasure to inform you that the Head of the Military has granted me the Silver Medal of Military Volour for the following seasons, With manificent launch and indomitable courage reached to the frontier land of the enemy battle and captured prisoners. When the commander of the company was wounded assumed the commanding of the Groups and with great expertise and skill led them away from the attack of the enemies.(Versic Torite 19.12'17) Reached the goal late but safely completing the victory. All thanks to Mary Help of Christians who in those terrible days of the war helped me and may She give me the grace to thank her at the Sanctuary soon.

24 December 1918 It is Christmas vigil.  Stephen Ferrando nostalgically recalls the many beautiful celebrations of yester years and the misery of the battlefield now. He is sure that Baby Jesus will come to his heart even if he is in the battle tent.  He will ask Baby Jesus to end the war, and promises to offer his loyal and sincere heart.

"A few minutes later it will be the midnight of Christmas! I keep the vigil. How can I sleep during this night? I think of Turin, of Mary Help of Christians, the unforgettable functions once upon a time. Tomorrow I will go for Communion and vespers in a Catholic church at Solanico. I shall spend my Christmas in this way. Today I had not so good news, the news of the miseries of life, and nothing about Christmas! Yes, it is true that it is a day unlike other days in a short time Jesus will be born. He who could have been born in a palace on a throne but preferred to be born in a manger at Bethlehem, therefore he will not mind to be born in this tent. What shall I say to Child Jesus? He will see everything and in the midst of all these miseries he will find at least a sincere and loyal heart which desires never to abandon him. I will ask him the strength to win the battle, to end the war…

The contents of these letters read reflectively will give one a fair idea of the strength and quality of character of young Stephen in the midst of war. With great force he carried on his life inspite of the adverse circumstances.  The qualities he possessed where his total a commitment, boldness, self-sacrificing spirit, union with God and dependence on Mother Mary for his safety, faithfulness to prayer submission to the will of God love and respect for superiors, the compassionate heart for the suffering people in the country due to the war, his longing to see the end of the war, and eagerness to be back in the seminary to follow his heart's deepest craving to be a priest of Christ in the Salesian Society to save countless souls. He was prepared and enthusiastic to walk in the footsteps of his Master, Jesus. All these indicate that his experiences during the war were a rehearsal for his future missionary life in Northeast India.

The World War I with all its toils, death and misery ended on 11 November 1918. Stephen with inexplicable joy and gratitude to God and to Mary Help of Christians and with a strong determination returned to the seminary to resume his studies to be a soldier of Christ.

**A GLORIOUS RETURN TO SALESIAN COMMUNITY**

Stephen Ferrando had no special training in teaching but temperamentally he was apt for this profession.  He was appreciated and admired by his students for his teaching capacity, etiquette and discipline. He taught in the Oratory of Valdocco for a very short period.  His students here took an immediate liking to him, as his lessons were very pleasant and interesting. The boys liked listening to his war stories, astounding experiences of their ex-military teacher. The hero within them arose in those moments which enabled them to prepare themselves for a future full of adventures and promises.

**Theological Studies and Priestly Ordination**

Stephen Ferrando came to the Collegio San Carlo at Borgo San Martino, Alessandria, the Salesian Major Seminary for his theological studies. On December 26, 1920 he made his perpetual profession. One of his companions of him, Louis Ulla in whose company he spent the last years of his life at the Salesian community of Genova-Quarto, spoke of the diligence of Stephan in his studies, piety and discipline which endeared him to his diligence of Stephen in his studies, piety and discipline which endeared him to his superiors in the Theologate and his companions.

During the theological studies he studied Canon law with great interest. At this time he was engaged in teaching in the Salesian school of Borgo San Martino. He was also occupied in assisting the boys and conducted the Oratory. Orestes Marengo who was doing a Latin course at Valdocco at that time made the following statement about Stephen Ferrando Ferrando was a cleric when he had come to replace cleric Emilio de Marchi sometime during 1921 in Valdocco. He endeared himself so much to Marengo and his companions. "The boys particularly liked his drill period, for they knew that he was an ex-military officer decorated with a Silver Medal. This helped the boys to be in their best behavior too. Ferrando endeared himself so much to Marengo and his companions that Marengo considered himself doubly privileged to come with him to India two years later when he was chosen to lead the first group of novices from Italy to Shillong in December 1923.

He prepared himself for priestly ordination through serious studies, fervent prayer and ardent union with God. His later life shows that he lived his life in a reflective and recollected manner.

Stephen Ferrando was ordained on 18 March 1923 at Borgo San Martino, Alexandria by Albino Cardinal Pella. During his ordination he took the motto "On the Cross is salvation." His parents, brother, sister, relatives and people of his native place Rossiglione were present on this solemn occasion, a day they look forward to with much joy and expectation. They gave him a grand welcome and the first Holy Mass was celebrated with much solemnity. Rossiglione wore an air of pomp and gaiety on the day of the first holy mass of Fr Ferrando as he was the pride and honor of the people of Rossiglione.

**DEPARTURE FOR THE ASSAM MISSION**

Immediately after his ordination another surprise awaited Fr. Ferrando.  It was a letter from the then Rector Major, Fr Philip Rinaldi which read "... You are to go to the Indian missions – Assam. Lead the group of young novices to the mission of Assam. Be ready to report immediately...”

Before leaving for Assam, Fr. Stephen Ferrando went to meet his parents, dear ones and the parishioners of Rossiglione to bid them goodbye and to seek their blessings. The parents felt very proud of their son. They felt sad at the departure of their son to a distant land and were uncertain whether they would ever meet him again. His mother asked him when he would return and his single word answer was "Never.” Breavely and with immense joy in his heart he left his homeland to fulfil his longstanding desire to be a missionary in faraway land.  The parents and people gave him a fitting farewell. Stephen visited his native place again in 1938, fifteen years after his departure.

**The Advent of a Missionary Journey**

Fr. Stephen Ferrando left for Assam missions with sentiments of gratitude to God and to his superiors.  He had a great determination and eagerness to bring God's love to all in the land of his mission - in the land of his dream.  He was entrusted with eight young novices: Bacchiarello Giuseppe, Duranti Alvaro, Orestes Marengo, Toigo Antonio Rodolfo, Cinato Eligio, Farassino Giuseppe, Prando Paolo, Rosetti Giacomo and Cleric Giuseppe Foglia.

The suggestion of Fr. Louis Mathias to start a novitiate in Assam was granted by Fr. Philip Rinaldi, the then Rector Major, so that the young novices from Europe could have the formation together with their Indian counterparts.  This would help them to learn the culture and language of the people for whom and with whom they are to carry out their missionary apostolate.

The chronicles of the Salesian Province of Guwahati, Assam records: "We left Turin on the 30 November, after having attended the Mass of Fr. Rinaldi in Don Bosco's room and received the embrace of our beloved superiors. We stopped at Verona and Venice to stir up missionary enthusiasm among the boys and on 2 December 1923 we sailed from Venice. It was a Sunday; the steamer anchored not very far from St. Mark's square, which at that moment was crowded with an immense multitude. Many waved their hands as the bells of St. Mark were ringing. We fell on our knees on the steamer and prayed. The voyage was a happy one. The sea was calm.”

In the same steamer were the famous’ Black Shirts,’ the fascist party who were a group causing a lot of disturbance in Italy .  They were on their way to Afghanistan as they were employed by the Afghanistan government.  The interaction of Stephen Ferrando and his group of young men with this fascist group brought about some transformation in them.  Ever after, their behavior towards the people in the steamer, particularly with Fr. Stephen Ferrando and his group was extremely courteous. Realizing that Fr. Ferrando was an ex-military officer they held him in high esteem and honor. The Salesian presence brought about some change in the attitude of the fascist group even in the eyes of the other travelers.  Thus they experienced the mighty presence of the Lord amidst them which we can consider as their first missionary experience even before they reached their promised land.

Fr. Stephen Ferrando and the group landed in Bombay on 18 December 1923. They proceeded to Guwahati via Calcutta. Msgr.Louis Mathias eagerly awaited the arrival of the Salesian missionary group. He went in haste and with much joy to Guwahati to welcome them. He had two reasons to rejoice as he had taken the initiative to request the superiors in Turin to send young people to train themselves in loco, where they would learn the culture and language of the people which would better facilitate their missionary endeavors. Besides he was there superior as he was the “Perfect Apostolic” of North east India including Bhutan. It took them 20 days to reach Shillong, their destination.

As Fr. Stephen Ferrando landed in the unfamiliar world of his future home, he had feelings of gratitude, great hope and immense joy that his desire of being a missionary was finally being fulfilled. The feelings, expectations and dreams of Fr. Stephen Ferrando were of joy and gratitude to God in the first place and to his superiors; he dreamed of going to the different tribes and races of Northeast India to preach the Good News and accomplish great things for God and His people.  He had only one desire in mind that was to become a great missionary and draw many souls to Christ.  With this-earnestness in mind he mastered the local language which helped him to communicate with the people, and this enabled him to live in the heart of his people.

**The Promised Land - His Future Home**

With sentiments of joy he recalls his arrival at Shillong, the then capital of Assam , on 23 December 1923. "I was leading the first group of Salesian novices, who were going from Europe, in the prime of their youth to train themselves in the field of their future apostolate. The youngest in the group was the sixteen year old Orestes Marengo, who as in the paradox of the Gospels (the last shall be the first) became the first. On that steamer "Tevere "of Lloyd Trieste which was bound for Bombay there were three future Bishops Orestes Marengo, Maria Selvam and the author of this memoirs"

"At that time I was a new priest, twenty eight years old, after having spent four years in the army during World War I; I was happy to have given up the office of the Sergeant of Health, to be the soldier of Christ, as the leader of a missionary group, a sort of Sergeant Major of the new spiritual army. During the first year of his ministry in Assam, he was Assistant (Socius) to the novices.  He carried out this task with great love and utmost diligence.

**NOVICE MASTER AND RECTOR OF OUR LADY'S HOUSE, SHILLONG**

Fr. John De Ponti was appointed novice master of the first group of young novices and Fr. Ferrando was Socius to the novices during the first year of his ministry in Assam. He carried out this task with great humility.  Out of obedience he took up this responsibility and discharged his duties meticulously following the novices in the preventive system of education of Don Bosco which he learned and lived. Unfortunately Fr John De Ponti fell ill and was sent to Italy for treatment.  So Fr.  Ferrando , the Socius was appointed novice master.

**An Ideal Novice Master**

Fr. Ferrando was 29 years of age when he was appointed novice master in 1924. He accepted his responsibility out of obedience and said, "I have not yet learn anything and yet I have to teach others already.” The Lord continues to surprise me…”

The particular gifts and endowments of Fr. Ferrando that inspired the superior to make him the master of novices and the rector of the house at the young age of 29 where the following: His love for Jesus and mission, his dependence on Mary Help of Christians, love for Don Bosco his father and founder, love for superiors, life of piety, untiring zeal for souls, total dedication, obedience, spirit of sacrifice, docility, openness, leadership qualities, jovial nature and family spirit. Besides, "His external appearance habitually manifested composure, gravity, religiosity, and modesty.  He was affable in conversation, gentle in his behavior and amiable in his dealings with others that easily gained the esteem and benevolence of anyone who had to deal with him. " He made everyone feel at home in his company. In a spirit of obedience, dealing in the unfailing assistance of God and with a filial love for Mother Mary he undertook these responsibilities to form numerous vibrant and zealous future missionaries. Moreover, he knew that his superiors trusted him and they would always support and assist him with their advice and possible help that he would require to carry out his responsibilities as novice master and rector of Our Lady's House.

A statement made by Mons. Louis Mathias about Fr Stephen Ferrando is recorded here: "I am the head in the community, Fr. Stephen Ferrando is the heart.  " Being the Provincial , sometimes he used to give strong reprimands to the confreres . Then he would add , " your heart is bleeding now , go to Fr. Ferrando , he will comfort you. "

Under the loving guidance of Fr. Ferrando Stephen the young novice master, there reigned a spirit of piety, mutual understanding, serene joy and above all a great apostolic spirit which kept everyone busy for the cause of sharing the love of Jesus with everyone else near or far.  Under the able leadership of this good master there reigned family spirit in abundance.  Often one could hear peals of laughter rend the air in Our Lady's House The novice master was the perfect example for the novices as he lived what he preached.  He worked conscientiously in true Salesian spirit, cheerfulness and with a spirit of sacrifice.  From 1929 he has served also as a member of the Salesian Provincial Council of India.  His ten years as novice master and rector of the Theologate and Philosophate had endeared him not only to the inmates but also to the people in the villages, in short to all those who came in contact with him.

In the year 1927 cholera broke out in one of the Catholic villages. Fr. Constantine Vendrame, the parish priest was away on a mission tour.  Fr. Ferrando on hearing about the epidemic lost no time.  He rushed to the study hall, informed the novices of the situation in the village and carrying all the medicines that were available left the place for the village immediately with the messenger, recommending him and the victims to their prayers.  The novices were touched by the enthusiasm and fervor with which he did it.  Having done what his apostolic zeal suggested he returned home after week exhausted, with a change of color and appearance in his physique. Yet he had the satisfaction of having accomplished something out of the ordinary, having served Jesus in the sick and the suffering.

He sacrificed his longing for frontline missionary apostolate for a greater cause, the formation of future missionaries.  He taught them not only the doctrines of the Church but initiated them to a practical life so as to be good and effective missionaries, He blended well the formation of the young novices and the missionary zeal in them by taking them out with him.  On Sundays he used to take the novices along with him so different villages to sing and pray, while he heard confessions and celebrated the Holy Mass. They would start early in the morning and return home at noon or early evening often fasting the whole day.  On his walks with the novices and even during family visits he would teach the novices the Khasi language so that they could communicate with the people directly and understand their life situation.

The novices eagerly learned from their master the method of visiting families and how to relate to people in a pleasant manner and so on.  The novices made good use of these opportunities to learn from their master the customs and culture of the people, how to solve a problem or two and the use of correct etiquette on different occasions and so forth.  Thus for Fr. Ferrando teaching the novices was not confined to the classroom According to the novices these occasions were very precious and profitable.  This was a marvelous training for them to live a life of sacrifice and endure every inconvenience great or small in their apostolate as missionaries in future.  His ten years as novice master generated in his novices an ardent personal love for Jesus, genuine missionary spirit and great zeal and enthusiasm for missions.

**The Family Spirit in Our Lady's House**

There existed a rapport between the master and the novices, the other students and the members of the community. Everyone in the community experienced fatherliness, oneness, family spirit and patemal love.  His sincerity and simplicity of him was a factor that enriched his novices for they realized that he saw what he preached.  This had a great impact on those who lived him.  His availability to each one was another element in his dealing with them that endeared him to the group.  His life spoke volumes to the novices and other students.

Mons. Luis Mathias had great love and esteem for Fr Stephen Ferrando. On one occasion when Fr. Orestes Marengo was traveling with Mons. Mathias to Guwahati he said; “I wish all of you could be as humble and obedient as your rector Fr. Ferrando. The humility and obedience of Fr. Ferrando paved the way for his greatness . Again, it ais said of him that because of their extreme poverty he was often hard with cash but never without love and affection for those who were entrusted to his care. Each one felt that he was loved and cared for.

During class and meals if he found anyone standing in the veranda or waiting for any body, he would go himself or send someone from the class to inquire what he or she wanted. He would at once see to their needs and send them away fast considering the distance they had to cover and the urgency of their need. I heard this from one of his novices.

As a novice master he did search for ways and means to promote the much needed harmony between study and apostolate, and human and religious formation. Weekdays were devoted to study and Sundays were devoted to missionary apostolate. “During the weekdays the clerics (Brothers) would fill their note books with Khasi words and phrases, to use them on the following Sunday. But as time progressed they understood that the best way to learn a new language was to leave aside grammar temporarily and begin to speak the language with the children and adults.  During our journeys on foot the conversation was always in Khasi to improve our vocabulary.”

The joy of Fr. Ferrando knew no bounds at the priestly ordination of the first group of Salesians in Shillong on 29 April 1933. He wrote " Glorious page for the Assam Missions and for the Salesians activities for the whole of India…” Again the joy experienced at the ordination exploded in the following words "New Athletes of Christ, formed in the mission, well acclimatized and adapted, with the knowledge of local languages ​​and with a zeal that has grown in them with the passage of time.”

Fr. Ferrando formed many Salesians missionaries during the years he was novice master.  He had a great desire to be frontline missionary. With this in mind he came to India. But God had other plans for him. Contrary to his desire he was appointed novice master. Seeing the will of God in this, he took his responsibility to heart and formed Salesian missionaries not only by his teaching but also by his very life.

**EPISCOPAL ORDINATION**

The strenuous evangelizing efforts of the missionaries in Northeast India bore enormous fruit that the Church felt the need for a shepherd to protect and deepen the faith of the people and further the growth of the Church.

Similarly the Church in Krishnagar developed fast and they needed a shepherd to take care of the flock.  The responsible service of Fr. Ferrando as novice master and his initiation of the novices into missionary evangelization and the practical training he gave the novices convinced the Church authorities and the superiors in Turin that Fr. Ferrando was the suitable candidate to head the diocese.

  Fr. Ferrando recalled: " One day I was in my office . when the superior entered accompanied by a brother. He had a telegram which he gave to me . I opened the telegram and was written there . " Congratulations to the new Bishop of Krishnagar.” He received his appointment to be Bishop of Krishnagar by a telegram and he had no say in this matter but accept the will of God.

On 9 July 1934 Fr. Ferrando was nominated Bishop of Krishnagar and was consecrated on 10 November 1934 together with Bishop Mathias the first Bishop of Shillong.  The Episcopal motto of Bishop Ferrando was “Apostolus Christi “(Apostle of Christ)

Preparation for the double Episcopal consecration and the unveiling of the bronze statue of Don Bosco erected in Don Bosco square, Shillong was worked out in detail.  The novices and clerics worked with great zest to give a festive look all around setting up arches, flags and posters in the town.  They also displayed the motto of the two Bishops elect , " Apostle of Christ’ of Bishop Ferrando and " Dare and Hope " of Bishop Mathias.

By the eve of the festivities there arrived 15,000 Catholics , group after group , with flags from all mission centers of the Northeast, accompanied by their priests.There were Khasis, Jaintias, Oraces, Mundas, Assamese, Bengalis and Garos among the groups who arrived to witness the Episcopal consecration ceremony. Some walked hours, others even days.There arrived a group of Christians from Krishnagar to attend the consecration of their new Bishop , Msgr Ferrando.

On 10 November 1934 , at the foot of the Cathedral Hill , Fr. Stephen Ferrando was consecrated Bishop of Krishnagar together with Mons . Louis Mathias as Bishop of Shillong . Many distinguished guests and dignitaries were resent to grace the occasion .Some of them were Archbishop Mederiet sdb of Madras and Archbishop F. Perier S.J., of Calcutta , the Bishops of Ranchi , Dhaka , Danajpur, Chittagong and Patna and Prefect Apostolic of Sikkim. The consecration ceremony of the two Bishops - elect was performed by  Archbishop Perier assisted by the Bishops of Chittagong and Dinajpur.

Following his nomination as Bishop of Krishnagar Bishop Ferrando had to leave Shillong and the people whom he had loved and served for 11 years.  The people, place and language were dear to his heart.  Yet, he left all these and submitted himself, his new people and place him to the providential care of God and the Madonna.  It was a great sacrifice God demanded of him and Bishop Ferrando surrendered himself to the divine plan.  He set forth for Krishnagar as he was directed, placing anew his trust in him in the unfailing love of God and with unbounded zeal and enthusiasm for His people.  He accepted the new responsibility in a spirit of total dependence on God, in humble obedience with ever burning zeal for souls.

On 21 November 1934 accompanied by Bishop Mathias and Archbishop Eugene Mederlet of Madras Archbishop Perier of Calcutta, and the clerics from Shillong Bishop Ferrando left Shillong for Krishnagar .  He made his entry into the diocese on 24 November 1934. On 25 November the new Bishop received a warm welcome by priests, catechists and people at Ranaghat station.  A great reception was accorded to the new Bishop in the city of Krishnagar.  At the foot of the flight of steps leading to the municipality hall, the Chairman and all the members of the Municipal Board, all non-Christians or Protestants, waited for the new Bishop. The new Bishop was addressed by the Chairman (Mayor) who thanked the new pastor for giving his life to work for the people of Bengal.  He declared that he was seeing in the Catholic Bishop the first authority of the city. He also thanked the Bishop for the humanitarian work the missionaries were doing in Krishnagar and in the mission centres Archbishop F.  Perier thanked the Municipal authorities for their welcome to the new Bishop and for their appreciation of the work of the missionaries.

**The Good Shepherd**

The rite of taking possession of the diocese followed in all its details The Papal Bull nominating Mons Ferrando was read in Latin and in Bengali.  The Bishops embraced the Bonus Pastor, the good shepherd.  The priests then paid their respects to their Bishop.  The Te Deum and the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament brought the welcome function to a close.

The festivities in honor of the new Bishop continued on 26 November.  There was a solemn sung Mass.  The Salesian clerics from Shillong accompanied the Bishops in singing the Mass. After the gospel the new Bishop preached the homily in Bengali.  The Eucharistic procession was held in the afternoon in which all the institutions took part .

The atmosphere of Krishnagar was entirely new to Bishop Ferrando; new language, new people, new culture.  unfamiliar roads, unexpected tribulations and possibilities!  It was a tough task being a shepherd but with trust in the unfailing love of the Lord he began his mission in the unknown land faithful to his motto Apostle of Christ. Bishop Ferrando was not spared trials and sorrows during his short stint as Bishop of Krishnagar. One such was the acute scarcity of food in the villages owing to failure of crops, caused by drought in certain areas and by floods in others areas.  Another great sorrow was the death of Bro.  Aloysius Cesarin aged 23 who drowned in the river when the boat in which he was traveling capsized at Phulbari.

Bishop Ferrando planned to start mission stations at Khulna and Berhampur to work among the Santhals.  He began his work with a pastoral visit of 61 centers.  He lived up to his Episcopal motto, 'Apostle of Christ, by his constant tours to the villages and parishes encouraging the people to love Jesus earnestly and live up to their faith.  He was keen on the all round development of the people that he set up three trade schools.

On 26 November 1935 Bishop Ferrando was appointed Bishop of Shillong at the transfer of Bishop Mathias to Madras.  Before leaving Krishnagar, Bishop Ferrando was able to send a consoling report to the Rector Major;  6.117 Catholics, 766 Baptisms of whom 110 were adults, 4 dispensaries caring for 85,700 sick people;  39 schools with 1384 pupils, and 3 trade schools.  The missionary personnel consisted of 10 priests, 6 clerics, 40 sisters, and 7 members of the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate.  Bishop Ferrando left Krishnagar for the diocese of Shillong on 14 January 1936 and reached Guwahati on 23 January 1936.

**BISHOP OF SHILLONG (1935-1969)**

On the death of Msgr. Eugene Mederlet, Archbishop of Madras, there arose a vacancy in the Sea of Madras. The Holy See found Bishop Louis Mathias as the most suitable candidate to fill up this vacancy. Therefore, he was transferred to Madras as its Archbishop. On the transfer of Bishop Mathias from Shillong to Madras, he suggested the transfer of Bishop Ferrando to the diocese of Shillong to Fr. Ricaldone, Director Major of the Salesian society. In a letter of 29 August 1935 he wrote: “Mons. Ferrando could be the Bishop of Shillong as the majority of Salesians excepted it. He had formed all the personnel and they liked him.”

On November 26, 1935, Pope Pius XI transferred Bishop Ferrando from Krishnagar to the diocese of Shillong. The people, priests and religious of Shillong welcomed the notice of his return with great joy and enthusiasm; the people were elated and began preparations in earnest to accord a fitting welcome to their shepherd.

Fr. Orestes Paviotti sdb wrote: “it was commonly believed that he was happy at his transfer to the diocese of Shillong.” He loved the North East and ,in particular, the Khasi hills. He was a kind-hearted father, simple; closed the people he loved and was concerned about the welfare. He was known to all and loved by all.”

**The Day of Dedication**

Took charge as the Bishop of Shillong diocese on 14 March 1936. My first act was to bless fourteen stations of the Way of the Cross, which my predecessor had started to erect, like a beautiful amphitheater, in front of the Cathedral. It is a perpetual invitation to all passersby to stop and meditate on the sacrifice of the Saviour... I remember the welcome given to me by the clergy, religious and thousands of faithful at the entrance to the district of Shillong .  I knelt down and kissed the ground of my new diocese.  Then mounting a white horse I proceeded six kilometers between two rows of jubilant people.  On reaching Shillong, in my first words addressed to the people,  I entrusted the diocese to Jesus crucified, as a confirmation of my priestly motto, On the cross is salvation As the new pastor I prayed to Jesus to accept the offering of the immolation of my life for the salvation of souls.

At the re-dedication service the newly appointed Pastor spoke of the great "Vision and program he had in his heart for the diocese - for the whole of Northeast India. He blessed gathering and at the end he exhorted them to pray for him and collaborate with him in whatever way they could to accomplish his dreams and plans and work for the spread of God's Kingdom. That was unforgettable day in the annals of the diocese of Shillong.

**Sharing His vision**

The episcopal motto of Bishop Ferrando was Apostle of Christ. Faithful to his motto and following the example of the Divine Master, he was always on the move through his vast diocese consisting of hills and plains. He lived up to his motto. The diocese of Shillong then comprised the whole of Northeast India including Bhutan.  Today the Northeast includes the seven states of Arunachal, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura.  This territory was not easily accessible in those days for several reasons Lack of proper roads, poor communication, scarce conveyance, entry prohibitions to certain areas, illiteracy and numerous languages ​​were all a challenge for the missionaries. The above obstacles did not prevent Bishop Ferrando from going ahead with his mission of proclaiming the love of Jesus and sharing it with all.

Bishop Ferrando wanted to have personal contact with his flock.  He would trek for miles across forests and paddy fields to reach out to the Christians.  No difficulties were insurmountable in his efforts to reach out to his faithful and in search of new contacts.  He loved to attend their Sobha (Annual Catholic convention) and Jingiaseng (prayer meetings) both in the plains and hills.  With hearts full of joy the people awaited the arrival of their Pastor.  His presence of him always brought added joy to the flock, enkindling in them love, enthusiasm and renewed vigour.  On such occasions, he in turn gained their love, loyalty, respect and obedience.  Every visit of their Pastor had a lasting impact on the parishioners and the people in the villages.  He exhorted the Christians to deepen their faith and keep it alive and share the same with others.  He moved among the people sharing God's love, peace and joy.  He won the hearts of all-young and old and children alike.  In the early days most of his tours were made on foot;  so he had ample opportunity to have personal contact with the people.

The missionary priests whom he formed were a great asset to the Church.  They together with their shepherd forged ahead forgetting the inconveniences,ill health and deprivations they faced with a single aim in heart and mind that they must accomplish the purpose for which they had committed themselves, that is, to proclaim Jesus Christ to one and all.  Besides , Bishop Ferrando had a thorough knowledge and understanding of his priests as most of them were his novices. The missionaries had a great spirit of sacrifice and this paved the way for the extraordinary growth of the Church in this area within a very short period .

**The Black Good Friday**

During the first year of his Episcopal service in Shillong on 10 April 1936 Good Friday, a furious fire destroyed Our Lady's House, which served as the Bishop's House, Parish, the Novitiate and the Philosophate, reducing everything to a heap of ashes .  Bishop Ferrando considered this as a great to the Church and the Congregation.  They were rendered homeless and penniless.  All what they possessed was the clothes they were wearing. Yet Bishop Ferrando accepted all this with great fortitude and resigned himself to the will of God.

As a man of God he faced his trial with unwavering faith, undaunted courage, and unyielding hope and with eminence trust in God.  His great trust of him in the providence of God motivated him to master up courage and go on in spite of the loss of everything.  Moreover, he counted on the support of superiors and the solidarity of the people, which he never lacked, for these always stood by him.  He proved himself to superman in moments like this.  His comforting words infused courage and hope in the hearts of his children who were disheartened and dejected by the disaster.  He was a source of encouragement for all.  He said, "Don't be afraid. Easter is preceded by Good Friday. Christ is risen indeed; the Cathedral and Studentate shall rise again in glory\*" A man of God alone could address such heartening words to his children in the face of a great disaster such as this.  he faced this event with daring courage, deep faith and immense trust in God and His providence for the writes; "Among the ashes and the debris that still blazed, we saw the blooming of the flowers of human solidarity and Christian charity". Behold his unfailing faith in a God who was ever generous with him.

"The devastating fire sent shock waves throughout Shillong Sympathy and help came from every quarter. The Governor himself came when the Cathedral was gutted in fire and offered hospitality. He wrote a letter of sympathy. Messages came from the Holy Father, the Rector Major and the Apostolic Delegate from Bangalore. "Besides his trust in God the solidarity and support of the superiors and the people Bishop Ferrando motivated to pluck up courage and get on with the situation despite the loss of everything.

Consecrated at the age of 39, he put himself totally at the service of a young and fast developing Church. He suffer various set backs including ill health Nevertheless discouragement was not in his vocabulary.

**World War II**

  The outbreak of World War II paralyzed most of the missionary work in Northeast India.  The majority of missionaries were intermed.  Bishop Ferrando was totally unprepared for such a turn of events as he counted on his zealous missionaries for the work of evangelization, for the expansion of God's Kingdom.  He was shocked at first to learn of this painful situation.  But as usual Providence came to his scour and he mustered up courage.  Mr.HD.  Dennehy who was the chief secretary to the government of Assam was very kind to Bishop Ferrando.  At his request from him six more priests were allowed to stay back in the region.  These priests along with the others carried on the work of evangelization in the midst of trials and adversities.

Bishop Ferrando was never discouraged by any sort of problems and difficulties, be it personnel, financial, epidemics, ill health of his priests, fire, internment of missionaries or war.  His source of strength, comfort and mainstay was his God into whose hands he entrusted himself and his diocese.  He mobilized and sought the help of the priests who was available and forged ahead with greater enthusiasm for God and His people.  During those difficult times he prayed fervently and sought ways and means to help the helpless of the society - women, girls, children, refugees and the wounded, dispersed and displaced ones as the plight of these tormented him greatly. He who had fought, experienced and seen the havoc of World War I could hardly stand idly by this sad situation, which distressed him very much.

This unfortunate state and the wretched condition of the people haunted him day and night.  He approached the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Sisters of the Queen of the Missions to visit the villages and instruct the women and children in faith. The FMA sisters manifested great acts of heroism in assisting the refugees and wounded soldiers.  He plunged himself into action with the available confreres and religious women to help out the situation.  Thus with unwavering courage he continued to take care of his flock albeit their movements were restricted Nothing would deter him from serving the unfortunate victims of war.

After the war he was able to give a new impetus to the mission because the priests returned from the concentration camps with renewed vigor and enthusiasm and plunged into the work with might and main to make up for the lost days of their missionary enterprise during the war.

  Bishop Ferrando wrote : " Knights of Our Lady were the good shepherds of souls who walked in the footprints of St. Francis Xavier , from Tura to Barpeta , from Kohima to Dibrugarh to Tezpur . I am sure the Magazine will publish the role of honor of these heroes who were efficient instruments of Our Lady. To them we express our boundless gratitude and unfading love. This statement of Bishop Ferrando gives an idea of ​​the sacrificing spirit with which the priests preached the message of Christ far and wide and thus paved the way for the rapid growth of the Church. Bishop Ferrando was very appreciative and grateful to his priests for their selfless service to the poor and neglected.

New buildings were constructed to house the boarding children from the far-flung villages.  The American chaplains and soldiers were generous in their offerings in cash and kind. They gave a substantial donation to purchase a big plot of land with a bungalow in it, in Golaghat, in central Assam which was shared by SDB and MSMHC.  Under the care of F Mellino and Fr. Bolini, the center dedicated to St. Teresa of the Child Jesus prospered and the number of hostel children reached two hundred and six.  "The Americans also left a number of vehicles, horses and mules for the use of the missionaries whose work they appreciated. The work of evangelization and expansion went hand in hand to compensate for the loss during the war. Thus the expansion and consolidation came about." very quickly through the cooperation and zealous work of the priests , sisters , catechists to whom Bishop Ferrando gave full support in all their undertakings.

Fr. L. Ravalico testified to the apostolic zeal of Bishop Ferrando in the following words " His Excellency , Mons. Ferrando , true to his beautiful motto: Apostle of Christ is really making an apostolic pilgrimage he is constantly on the move across his vast diocese which extends from Bengal up to the boundary of China and Tibet.  "His pastoral zeal coupled with his personal and fervent love for Jesus hastened the rapid expansion of the Church in the vast diocese.

**Means used for Missionary Evangelization**

Bishop Ferrando maintained and kept contact with the missionaries and the people of the villages spread through the entire region of Northeast India, through his personal visits He reached out to the scattered mission stations No difficulties were insurmountable for Bishop Ferrando in reaching out to his priests and faithful. He travelers whatever means were available wherever possible he used motorcars. He availed himself of the train services in the plains of Assam. In certain places he traveled on horseback and in bullock carts. Often he trod miles through thick forests and paddy fields, wading for hours through stagnant water and marshy lands. Many a time he came across elephants and tigers in the forests. He had to fight with leeches and mosquitoes, which had a telling on his health. His missionary methods were direct methods which facilitated personal interaction with the people in villages.  The priests, sisters and catechists would teach and instruct the people.  Bishop Ferrando set a marvelous example to his fellow missionaries by making frequent visits to the adjacent and far-flung . In the early days Bishop Ferrando made most of his tours in the hills on foot.  He reaped a rich harvest.  These tours were adventurous tours.

**Amazing Incidents during Mission Tours**

Once Bishop Ferrando was making a mission tour to Raliang accompanied by Fr. L. Jellici.  They arrived at Jowai late in the evening.  They spent the night there.  On the following morning the Fathers at Raliang sent their mule to Jowai for Bishop Ferrando to make his visit easy as he had to make it on foot otherwise.  Bishop Ferrando was very happy to have the mule for the journey because it was a long and wear some journey. The roads were not good. He mounted the mule ceremoniously and started happily. He kept praising the Lord for all that was beautiful around him. He also thanked the Land for the thoughtfulness and generosity of the Fathers and for the mule too for he thought that it would be a good companion to him and it would make his journey less uncomfortable.  After a few kilometers, Bishop Ferrando asked Fr. Jellici to go ahead and informed the Fathers and the Christian of his arrival.  As soon as Fr. Jellici arrived at the mission station he saw the mule stride into the compound and go straight into the stable with much relief.

Imagine the preoccupation of the Fathers. They were alarmed "What happened to the Bishop?" The Fathers queried among themselves. They lost no time and got ready to go in search of the Bishop. Just at that moment he arrived exhausted and wet with sweat through and through treading with heavy steps quite annoyed with the mule. Over a cup of tea be narrated the story of his journey on the mule. The mule was either going too close to the hill side or against sharp stone on the sides causing injury to his foot. At other times he walked just above the precipice as if he wanted to throw him down. On level ground it bent its back and both the legs of the Bishop dragged on the ground. The mule was trying ways and mean to get rid of the burden on its back, not bothered about the dignity of the rider. Finally the Bishop, tired and anxious and little annoyed with it, got off the mule to rest for a while. No sooner had the Bishop got down than the mule felt relieved and galloped off to the mission, leaving the Bishop alone or the road.  One must remember that the Bishop was a sturdy man and the mute must have found that the burden on his back was quite heavy. So it tried ways and means to get rid of him and deserted him, the moment it was freed.

Here is another interesting incident.  This was on a journey by train to a village called Ranipur (place of the Queen) in the plains of Assam.  The occasion was the "Sobha - the annual convention of the Catholics. Fr. Orestes Marengo was the organizer Bishop Ferrando was invited for the convention. Since Fr. Marengo could not accompany Bishop Ferrando, he gave him detailed instructions for reaching Ranipur from Guwahati. The instructions were very clear." When you get down from the train, my people will be waiting for you.  You cannot miss them.

  " Bishop Ferrando writes, " But between saying and doing between words and understanding , there are lots of misunderstanding due to distances , the delay of the trains and the condition of the locality .  The result was that I was marooned like Robinson Crusoe and totally confused and at a loss as dusk approached.  I did not find anyone waiting for me. However, Divine Providence came to my rescue. A forest officer came that way and he took me to a small guest house on the border of the forest. I was terribly tired, ravenously hungry and it was already night. Putting on a brave face and hiding all my hunger and pains, I lay on a bed made of choir and tried to sleep. I was suddenly awakened by a loud commotion; Monsignor!  Monsignor!  Where is the Bishop?  I jumped out of the bed and said, I am here. There were twenty people who came with flaming bamboo torches. There was no time to reflect on anything, as the voice of Fr. Marengo shouted insistently Monsignor.  Please come we have a long way before us. They had been walking for hours searching for me. They had also brought along a small home for me, but it was so small that I preferred to walk.

Ranipur was beyond the forest. I had got down before the station where the train happened to stop.  As we walked through the forest clouds of dust were raised, oh, what a journey!  Fear filled our minds. The forest was filled with wild animals and our night was their day. The forest became alive with the roaring, barking and cries of different animals. It was indeed a unique experience to listen to the noise of the forest at night.  Fear made me forget my tiredness and hunger, the eyes had to be wide open, and the ear attentive so that between so many men and torches the wild animals might not creep in. Fr. Marengo intoned the rosary and we continued reciting it almost till the morning. Finally we came out of the forest and saw the morning star. The Bishop's palace, all made of bamboo was ready to receive its illustrious guest who was hardly recognizable due to the dust and sweat My dress was all tore and it did not look like the white cassock that I had put on in the morning. In those days there was very strict observance of the Eucharistic fast.  We never even thought of discarding this law for a moment.  Being already morning I could not eat or drink anything before the Mass. For the past twenty four hours I had nothing but two cups of tea and I had been walking almost the entire night.  Patience!  "After a bath, which restored some energy, I was ready for the next ordeal.

After such an adventurous journey, Bishop Ferrando conducted the program that was set for him in Ranipur village, during which he administered the sacrament of confirmation for some 350 people, mostly Boros and Santhal. He was so exhausted that from time to time he had to lean towards the assisting catechist who would wipe away the sweat from his face which came down in torrents. As the Eucharistic procession began at the conclusion of the convention, a furious cyclonic storm lashed the place with heavy downpours blowing off half of the church roof. The procession route turned into a rivulet. It was as dark as the forest around. He covered the Blessed Sacrament with the humeral veil and proceeded forward "Thanks be to God the storm finally blew over Calm returned and he gave the benediction. The faithful glorified the Lord with their patience and living faith"

Bishop Ferrando uttered not a word of complaint for all the mess that happened in the arrangement of his tour program. Indeed this journey made him experience the continual protection and providence of God. Each pastoral visit to the villages of the mission was an experience of the Paschal Mystery relieved in his life.

**The Reminiscences of his Flock**

His unforgettable pastoral visits to parishes, his availability for confessions, Sobhas and Jingiasengs, processions, conferences and retreat talks, his visits to the religious and formation houses, hospitals and participation in other functions left a permanent impression in the hearts of people. Everyone felt that he was a shepherd who loved and cared for his flock.  He had a special love for those in formations. He himself was a formator par excellence and information houses he saw the future of the Church.

He was a fatherly figure who was always welcomed by the priests and in particular by villagers. The people in villages longed for his visits from. He always had a word of encouragement for each one, prayed over those in need, laid his hands in blessing on children, gave whatever help possible for those is need and so on. He was very much interested in their well being, be it spiritual, intellectual or material. He was a man of God who made no distinction between rich and poor, educated and uneducated. His visits to hospitals and families brought lifetime comfort and solace to the hearts of people. These little acts are still cherished by them even today. He greatly impressed people with his gentleness, which was the outcome of his great union with God. People in the villages that he visited speak of him today as a holy man.

In 1996, the author visited a Boro village in Bhairakundu in the diocese of Tezpur. She went to one of the houses there. There was an old man in his early 90's. He was healthy though old; his speech was clear and he could hear well. His eyesight was poor.  While conversing with him, he told the author that Bishop Ferrando baptized him. She was surprised that this old man remembered clearly his baptism, the person who administered it and he even pronounced the name it distinctly and correctly. Even in Khasi - Jaintia Hills, the elderly people who knew the Bishop speak of him as a holy man full of love and kindness "He baptized me" , "He blessed my marriage.” "He helped me in my education", "He kept smiling" "He sat in this place" , "He ate whatever was given to him”, were some of the phrases that the people used while referring to him. He was a man for the people and with the people.

When the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando were brought to St. Margaret's Convent, Shillong, there was an incessant flow of people from far and near to pay homage to their Shepherd whom they loved and revered. They spent hours praying fervently near the mortal remains. Some wept remembering the good he rendered them.

As a man of God Bishop Ferrando had compassion for everyone he met with. God's ways were his ways.  He lived very close to God in prayer and instinctively shared this spirit with the priests, his immediate collaborators and with the people in villages. As a person, as a Salesian priest and as a Shepherd he kept nothing for himself, never hesitated in his service but gave himself totally and all he had for the cause of Christ and the salvation of souls.

**His Bond with his Priests and People**

Under all circumstances, there existed a fatherly relationship between the Shepherd, the priests and the people. However, there could have been one or two priests who did not see eye to eye with him, or were unwilling to cooperate with him in certain matters. I have seen him mingling with the people and how he greeted them on occasions such as Christmas, his name feast, Easter, first Holy Communion and Confirmation of children, Procession bah and the like in Shillong. These were days of great joy for him. He made no distinction between the well clad and the not so well clad, well mannered and ill mannered. For him they were all the children of the same Father and his beloved flock whose well being he always sought after. They would bring him gifts such as a basket of oranges, a bunch of bananas, a packet of biscuits or even a chicken or some eggs. They felt happy with the manner in which Bishop Ferrando accepted their gifts. He laid his hands in blessing on the children and their mother for which they longed. In moments such as these his face beamed with joy. He was always available to the people and was happy to be with them, be it in their homes or in the church premises especially with those from distant villages.

To his fellow missionaries he was a friend, a brother and a father. He always attributed the great success of the mission to their apostolic zeal and hard work. At his death the Salesian Rector Major wrote, "He who lived with him knows how heroic but hidden his self sacrifice was, his great patience and fatherly affection which gave to his missionaries that enviable spirit of brotherhood, joy and enthusiasm which made Assam an ideal mission.”

Recalling Bishop Ferrando's great contribution, Archbishop Thomas Merampurampil of Guwahati makes the following observation: "If the Church in Northeast India has grown so fast, the initial impetus was given by Bishop Stephen Ferando. He could inspire great enthusiasm and missionary zeal in all missionaries. The spark of the missionary enthusiasm which he ignited continues to burn and we are proud of the rich legacies which our predecessors have bequeathed as with.

**The Initiatives taken and the Growth of the Church**

Bishop Ferando took up numerous initiatives to give vitality and vigor to Christian life in the vast diocese .  Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament blessed him as he spent long hours in prayer.  His very life of him gave the much needed witness to his priests and people of him.

He exhorted his priests and religious to be persons of prayer. I have lived the values ​​of Jesus.  In his talks and letters, he recommended to all to live a life of union with God. To give impetus to missionary work, he started the monthly meeting on the occasion of the monthly recollection for the priests. The same was done for the catechists who played a major role as the forerunners of the missionaries and were an integral part of the mission. A kind of news letter called "Aemulamini" was published every month to share missionary experiences among the missionaries. There were other publications such as "Ka iing Kristan" (The Christian Family) and "USymba" (The Seed) These served to exchange news and views among the missionaries working in the region and impart faith formation to the laity.

There was formation of groups like Sodalities, Mothers Association, Catholic Action, Youth groups, and Association of Altar Servers and the like. Other features were the procession in the month of May in honor of Mary Help of Christians, Marian devotions in the month of May and October, and the Eucharistic procession in the month of November. These were moments when priests, religious and faithful proclaimed their faith and manifested their ardent love for Jesus and Mother Mary openly. The women religious participated whole-heartedly in the work of evangelization through systematic village tours, teaching of catechism and family visits which were very effective in faith formation and fostered the growth of the Church. In the plains they organized annual Sobhas which concluded with grand processions. The enthronement of the picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was held in families to increase their devotion to the Sacred Hear.

Bishop Ferrando was ever appreciative of the great work put in by his missionaries. He acknowledged the heroic sacrifices of those who were able to continue in the mission. He wrote to the Rector Major "The mission suffered alot during the war because a major part of the missionaries were interned our gratitude goes to the missionaries who continued to labor in Assam without reserve because they have continued to maintain and to multiply their forces to fil up so many vacancies and to face so many situations which are not always easy to overcome.

**Fostering of local vocations**

Bishop Ferrando believed that the Church in Northeast India would grow and spread only if local boys and girls would dedicate themselves to missionary work as priests and sisters. Pope Benedict XV in his apostolic letter Maximum Illud (1919) had already emphasized this idea. The encyclical letter of Pope Pius XI appealed to all Bishops, of the urgency of founding local religious congregations and to establish seminaries for training of local priests.  "Shillong the heart of the diocese is without Cathedral, without seminary, without Bishop's residence and also without a rest house for the missionaries when they are exhausted with hard work!  How can I rebuild all these works? These are formidable problems under which one can be oppressed if not sustained by trust in Mary our Help. But still the thought that pre-occupies me most is to have the earliest a house of formation and the seminary for the local clergy on whom depends the entire future of the Mission.

"The immediate consequences of the war were the many wounded victims of war, displaced people roaming about without food and shelter, the influx of refugees, the sad plight of women and children. Women and children were the most vulnerable sections of society, who suffered from inadequate health care, lack of sanitation facilities, lack of education, and from general neglect and exploitation. Bishop Ferrando was convinced that something concrete had to be done in order to improve their deplorable condition and enable them to live a decent life in society. He sought ways and means for a solution to the several problems he faced. Encouraged by the exhortation of the Popes and seeing the urgent need of caring for women and children for their physical, educational and spiritual needs, Bishop Ferrando thought of a new religious congregation. He went ahead with his vision and plan with eight girls of St. Mary's boarding of the Salesian Sisters, Guwahati, Assam. The official establishment of the Congregation took place on October 24, 1942. He christened it "The Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC)." His vision for nurturing missionary personnel was greatly realized by the founding of the MSMHC. The new congregation was entrusted to the care of the Salesian sisters as Bishop Ferrando wanted his young Congregation to imbibe the Salesian spirit.

When the foreign missionaries were interned during World War II, Bishop Ferrando realized the urgent need to foster local vocations and this strengthened his determination to do everything possible to accomplish the same. To this effect he wrote to the Rector Major: "This terrible war has shown us once again the need for local clergy, and to this purpose all our attention should be directed.

In 1962 he started a diocesan seminary in Upper Shillong and called it St. Paul's Seminary to train deserving boys to the diocesan priesthood. This institution has given several priests to the local Church and it continues to do so. These priests now work in many parts of Northeast India. There ministry has been crucial in the growth and development of the Church in the area.

**Vatican Council II**

“Let the winds of change blow into the Church!" said Pope John XXIII, symbolically opening a window, at the commencement of Vatican II on October 11, 1962. Bishop Ferando and Bishop Orestes Marengo from Northeast India were present in the Council Bishop Ferrando prepared himself spiritually to participate in the Council.

Bishop Ferrando prepared himself spiritually to participate in the Council, seeking the prayers of all, especially of priests and religious.  He sent a pastoral letter to the institutions and parishes requesting prayers. He visited the sister in Little Flower Convent, Malki and St. Mary's Convent, Barpeta Road and other religious communities prior to his departure for Rome and recommended himself to their fervent prayers and asked them to pray for the Holy Father and for the success of Vatican II.

Bishop Ferrando wrote pastoral letters to make known to the clergy, religious and faithful about the developments in the council. From Rome, he kept writing letters to the Bishop's house and to the Missionary Sisters describing the opening of the Council. He also wrote to us the theme that they discussed during the Council: **"To know the Church better and to live as worthy children of the Church."** On his return to Shillong he visited the institutions of both men and women and briefed them on all that had taken place during Vatican II.

While the Council was in session in Rome, the Chinese invaded India in the Northeast. The Chinese troops advanced and reached the military post of Bomdila and threatened the Tezpur plains in the valley of the Brahmaputra. This plunged the territory into a dangerous situation and pumped fear into the hearts of people. Learning of the situation of the region and the condition of the people, Cardinal Gracias, the Cardinal of Bombay announced in Rome "The Chinese have invaded India and are advancing towards Assam. The two Bishops of Assam, Mons. Ferrando and Mons. Marengo will fly back to India tomorrow because in time of danger the Shepherd should be found among his sheep". They returned and immediately met the priests and gave instructions to see to the safety of the people, sisters and the boarding children. The atmosphere was one of gloom and uncertainty about the future. The boarding children were sent back to their homes though a few could not go. He made arrangements for the evacuation of the novices and sisters in Assam to safer places. In every convent two sisters were asked to stay behind to take care of the boarding children who were not able to return to their homes and to take care of the building and the property.

**Major Problems**

Bishop Ferrando had to face major problems and difficulties in his work as the Bishop of Shillong. Some of them were lack of personnel, financial problems, vastness of the diocese, variety of tribes and languages, the war, earthquake and even some unfortunate scandals in the church.

**Lack of personnel**: During the war priests who belonged to enemy countries were interned.  After a few years the foreign priests were asked to return to their country of origin. The foreigners who were already in the Northeast were denied the residence permit. New arrivals from foreign countries were not permitted. Some of the best missionary personnel succumbed to malaria, typhoid and other illnesses. Some died tragically. The situation eased to some extent when the Salesian Province of Madras sent a few of their priests to serve the various needs of the Church in Northeast India.

**Financial problems:** Bishop Ferrando always had financial problems in meeting the various needs of the mission like construction of Churches, schools, boarding homes for children, and dispensaries which were the prime need of villagers as they had no hospitals at all. The sick succumbed to illness for lack of medical care and their number increased day by day. He was at times not able to meet the needs of the priests, to construct Churches, schools and so on. This at times gave rise to some tension.

The catechists played a vital role in the planting of the Church in mission territories and in its expansion and in deepening the faith of the people in villages. Given the variety of language and culture, the lay catechists contributed a major share to the growth of the Church. Bishop Ferrando wanted more catechists to be appointed. He wrote several letters to the superiors in Rome requesting financial support. He wrote to the Rector Major: "I wish to raise a loud cry so that all those who love the mission may hear it: Help us to maintain catechists, and still more catechists! They are the extended hands and spokesmen of the missionary." Constant appeals were made in Europe for financial aid in support of the maintenance of catechists.

**Vastness of the diocese**: The entire seven States of Northeast India and Bhutan comprised the vast diocese of Bishop Ferrando, Roads were badly maintained and means of communication were very poor and conveyance scarce. Besides, there was the Naga insurgency problem, which prevented free movement in Nagaland, Manipur and parts of Assam. The missionaries often went on foot through thick forests infested with wild animals. They waded through marshy lands and had to cross several rivers to reach villages. At times it took days to reach from one village to the other. Under these circumstances the missionaries never gave up. With indomitable courage they progressed rapidly in achieving their goal.

**Diversity of tribes and languages**: ​​was another factor that Bishop Ferrando had to deal with. So far no one has made an accurate assessment of the tribes and languages ​​- the wealth of the seven States of Northeast India, nor is there proper statistics of the same. However the missionaries who hailed from various countries mastered the different languages ​​and prepared prayer books, hymnals, translated the Bible and even wrote dictionaries of local languages, making their missionary evangelization effective. These are considered great contributions of those early missionaries to the society.

Even today there are areas in Arunachal Pradesh and elsewhere where no outsider has ever entered. Bishop Ferrando went ahead with his work despite all the problems because God was his strength. Mother Mary was always at his side. Where human efforts failed, divine grace triumphed.

**World War II**

A good number of Priests were interned. Bishop Ferrando had to bear the brunt of it as it paralyzed the missionary apostolate in the region. However, he did whatever he could with the few priests available. He also appreciated their work. He wrote to Fr. Peter Ricaldone: "... I feel the need to raise a hymn of thanksgiving to God who favours such an abundant harvest. I also want to express my admiration for the dear and indefatigable missionaries who with so much zeal dedicate themselves in the flourishing apostolic fields.

**The Earthquake** that shook the Northeast in 1950 brought untold misery to the people. On Sunday, 15 August 1950 about 7.30 p.m. the earth began to rumple and the ground began to quake violently. Buildings crumbled, bridges and railway lines bent over them as if they were made of plastic. In certain places the water sources dried up and the rivers changed their course, chasing ahead of them men, animals and trees. Our missionaries in Dibrugarh narrated, "After an extremely calm and serene day, the serenity was suddenly broken by an unexpected thunder storm, following which the earth began to dance;  the dance of destruction and terror. Two-storied buildings and factories began to move like pendulums.  For about five minutes, which seemed like an eternity, the earth leaped in such a way that one had to walk on all fours.  After that longest of five minutes, an eerie calm descended on everything, the calm of death. After an hour the thundering sound was heard again and the earth began to move, this time with minor intensity. It seemed like the apocalyptic times!" For the whole night the missionaries did not close their eyes, waiting in the open air outside. It was the longest night of their lives.

Dibrugarh remained isolated from the rest of Assam. The Catholic mission paid a heavy toll to the devastating fury of the nature. The beautiful Church of the Sacred Heart remained disfigured with wide cracks on the wall, the roof was broken, and the residence of the missionaries was no more inhabitable. The new concrete building of Fr. Cerato at North Lakhimpur sank three feet on one side. He was on the other bank of the river and was totally isolated. However, the courage of the missionaries was admirable. They looked serene and inspired their people with courage. At that time I was in America and I read in the newspapers the description of the terrible and cataclysmic event. After a week Fr. Mario Bianchi, with the help of a government officer managed to get a seat in a helicopter and visited the place. The joy of Fr. Bili, the other fathers and sisters was beyond description. The seismographers recorded six and a half minutes of tremor. It was unbelievable.

Although the tremor lasted six and a half minutes, the number of deaths was mercifully not too high. What brought about the greatest loss of lives and damage was the floods that followed the earthquake. One can easily gauge the anxiety and worry of the missionaries who were cut off and could not meet their Christians and offer them help.

The departure of the first local priest from ministry also caused much pain to Bishop Ferrando. It had an adverse impact on the people in Khasi Hills as such a thing was unheard of in those early days.

**Contacts with Superiors**

Bishop Ferrando was able to cope with all these situations by trusting in God and helpful persons. He wrote several letters to the Rector Major and Provincials describing the missionary situation here, problems, possibilities, challenges and the enthusiasm of the missionaries and the positive response of the people to the Catholic faith. Many letters explained the consequences of the war such as military occupation of the schools, the seminary at Mawlai, and the need for more personnel, the urgency and necessity of formation of future missionaries ‘in loco', the paucity of funds for erection of various structures, training of teachers and catechists and so on. His letters to Fr. P. Ricaldone, Fr. R. Ziggiotti and Fr. Peter Tirone, Fr. A. Fedrigotti, Fr. A Pianazzi, Fr. B.Tohil, Fr. Archenti, Fr. Beruti and Fr. M. Casarotti give evidence of this. He kept informing the superiors of all the significant events as well as of his personal life, which gave the superiors a complete picture of the state of affairs in the far away mission territory.

Indeed, he was a true Salesian. The testimony of Fr. Fabian Vitto sdb given on 22 September 1992 bears witness to this.  "He lived as a member of the Salesian community there. He was very affable, very attentive even to the needs of the house. He informed us of everything... Whenever he went out of the house; he informed either the rector or me where he went, when he would return etc.”

"Again, we have the testimony of Fr. Casarotti who was the then Provincial of Calcutta. In 1964, on the name day of Bishop Ferrando, Fr. Casarotti came to greet him.  Fr. Casarotti wrote: "In 1964, I became the Provincial of the Salesian Province of Calcutta. That year I went up to Sunnyside, Shillong to spend my Christmas with that community. On the following morning, I came down to Bishop's House to greet the Bishop on his feast. It was very early, as I wanted to be one of the first to greet him. But to my surprise he was not in the Bishop's house. His room remained locked. I looked for him everywhere and then slowly strolled into the cathedral. There he was hearing confessions as on any other day, what awe I felt for that great man at that moment. Before everything else he was a priest and he knew that very well. I paced up and down, waiting for him outside. After sometime he came out and I greeted him and his answer I could never forget. He said, "Dear Fr. Provincial, your wishes are most welcome, because they come from the representative of Don Bosco in this region. The faith that man I felt so small before that ‘Father of faith'.  I still feel it.”

A number of letters written by Bishop Ferrando to the Missionary sisters from Rome and other places bear testimony to his love of him for the superiors.

**Relationship with Civil and other Church Authorities**

Bishop Ferrando enjoyed a good rapport with the civil authorities and leaders of the other Churches. On important occasions in the Catholic Church, the civil authorities and members of the other Churches were invited and were present. There are incidents to cite as examples. "Whenever there was an attack on the Church they were united and collaborated with each other. When Mr. Katju was Home Minister, there were several attacks in the press and other quarters against the Church. Bishop Ferrando, the Anglican bishop of Assam, and the Assam Mission Council Secretary informed the Government that for Christians the proclamation of the Good News was part of their faith, and that they could not accept restrictions to the practice of their faith." Whenever there was any issue that would go against the faith and Christian principles these groups would meet to discuss and plan as to what course of action was to be taken to safeguard the Church and her interests. When the question of the expulsion of foreign missionaries was announced, these groups rallied together and organized a silent procession through the city of Shillong expressing their sentiments written on placards. The procession terminated in a big playground where eminent Protestant and Catholic leaders spoke to the people. The sky was overcast and it began to rain heavily. But no one moved away. Bishop Ferrando watched the sight from the Cathedral balcony. It was one of the most unforgettable scenes of his missionary life.

**In Touch with compatriots in Rossiglione**

He visited them whenever he had an opportunity. He used to write letters to his parents and the people of his native place. They were delighted to get news from the great missionary. The elderly people of Rossiglione remember him with great love and admiration. They treasure his letters. Whenever possible they invited him to celebrate Holy Mass or to impart the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament which he willingly did. He also celebrated the sacraments. He was always in touch with his people and they appreciated his remarkable work.

**Love for the Missions**

Bishop Ferrando was able to create great love for the missions even among his friends and relatives of him in Italy. He used to speak to them about his missionary adventures and make known to them the needs of the mission. He kept regular correspondence with the people informing them about the development of the mission. This enabled the people to render him financial assistance. They formed an association called the 'Amici del presepio' to raise funds for the missions. There were the co-operators of Don Bosco who used to raise funds to help him. He was regularly in writing articles in the Salesian Bulletin to create missionary awareness among the readers. He also wrote Northeast India-Chronicles of the Kingdom of God in Italian which describes what transpired during his missionary life as Novice Master and later as Bishop of Shillong. This was later compiled into a book in 1975.

**FOUNDING OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF**

**MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS**

Bishop Ferrando longed to enkindle the fire of missionary spirit in as many hearts as he could, so that every human being in his vast diocese would know Jesus and experience his love. During his visits to the villages he had witnessed the sad and wretched situation in which most people lived. He keenly felt the need to remedy this most urgent need of the people and to elevate them to a standard of living with dignity. He understood that the founding of an indigenous women's congregation would greatly benefit the Church in Northeast India. He was convinced that local sisters would be more effective in contacting people with their knowledge of local customs and cultures and that they would be accepted well. He often prayed and reflected over this and waited for an opportune moment to realize this plan.

**The Opportune Moment**

Bishop Ferrando saw that in many places women and children were neglected.  Women were ignorant and uneducated; therefore, they could not bring up their families well. Due to lack of cleanliness and hygiene the people became prey to disease and many succumbed to it.  He was moved by the misery of the people.  He prayed fervently and sought ways and means to alleviate their sufferings.  He thought of gathering a group of dedicated women from among them who would understand their language and culture and break through the pitiful conditions in their homes and help them improve the quality of their life. To add to it all, World War II broke out spreading misery and suffering everywhere.  The Japanese advanced to the Northeast Indian border and turned the area into a battlefield adding to the misery of the people.

The encyclical letters of Pope Benedict XV written in 1919 at a time when the mission lands were depleted of foreign personnel as a consequence of World War 1 and of Pope Pius XI insisting on the establishment of new religious communities better adapted to local conditions gave added inspiration and courage to Bishop Ferrando to go ahead with his plan of founding a new congregation.

Resolutely, he went about praying, reflecting, discussing and seeking advice from renowned and wise persons. Recommending his plans from him and himself to Jesus and Mary, he started the process of founding the congregation.  He was certain that God approved of his plan and action.

A few girls who were students on the boarding of the Salesian sisters expressed their desire to opt for the life of the sisters with whom they lived. But the sisters declined their request as these girls were not mature in their faith. Moreover they had not completed their studies. However, the girls did not give up their desire to belong to Jesus totally. During the vacation they refused to go home. This matter was reported to Fr. Attilio Colussi, the parish priest. I have met these girls and during his conversation with them he came to know of their plans. This was indeed welcome news for Fr. Colussi as he knew the mind of Bishop Ferrando. He lost no time. Immediately he informed Bishop about the intentions of these girls. Bishop Ferrando followed up the matter without delay. He requested Fr Colussi to take care of these girls in the meantime as his movements were restricted due to the War

**A Momentous Dream**

It is interesting to mention here an extraordinary dream of Sr Luigina Saletta who was looking after the boarding girls in St. Mary's Convent, Guwahati.  She saw a beautiful garden with fresh white lilies. She plucked six lilies and gave them to Mother Mary to offer Jesus.  Although she narrated the dream to the sisters and the girls in the boarding, nobody could interpret its meaning then. It took a few years to understand the significance of the dream. Of the seven sisters who made the religious profession, six persevered in their vocation. These girls who became sisters gave meaning to the dream of Sr. Luigina and they narrated it to the younger generation

**The Foundation of the Congregation**

Relying on the providence of God and the continual assistance of Mother Mary Bishop Ferrando laid the foundation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians with eight girls on 24 October 1942. Of these one was a Khasi girl and the others were Adivasis from Assam whose parents had migrated from Bihar in search of work.

These girls received their postulant medal on Easter Sunday, 10 April 1942 from Fr. Mariano Uguet, the Salesian Provincial. The girls were jubilant to realize that their dream of becoming sisters was being fulfilled. Replete with joy Bishop Ferrando wrote in the chronicles: "Today, the sixth anniversary of the fire is a red letter day in the history of Northeast India. Six years ago, one Our Lady's House was destroyed by fire. Today another house of Our Lady has come into existence which will not be destroyed by fire. O Felix culpa... May the Lord bless the work He has started."

Meanwhile a small house was constructed under the supervision of Fr. Colussi in the half bigha land Bishop Ferrando had purchased for the MSMHC adjacent to the convent of the Salesian Sisters. Eight girls were admitted to the novitiate on 24 October 1942 on a day dedicated to the Mother of God and a day very dear to Bishop Ferrando. He and Fr. Colussi felt extremely happy and were grateful to God. These girls formed the first members, the cornerstone of the congregation.  I knew these sisters well as I lived with three of them in various communities and had close contact with the others.

They are Sr. Agnes Surin, Sr. Elizabeth Kujur, Sr Mary Surin, Sr.Tulia Dumria, Sr. Blandina Tirkey, Sr. Veronica Kujur and Sr. Antonia Tirkey. Out of the seven sisters who professed, Antonia Tirkey left after a couple of years. The six pioneers had a very tough time in the early years of the Congregation. They loved God and depended on Him for every little and great thing in their life. Through their struggles and hard work and above all through their powerful prayer and holy life they laid a solid foundation for the congregation. Their zealous missionary apostolate contributed much to the growth of the congregation. The Church in Northeast India grew rapidly through the missionary evangelization they carried out especially in the interior villages. They had to walk through forests and cross rivers, at times risking their lives. They were commissioned to visit villages two by two, staying in the huts of the people, eating whatever food they offered. They would evangelize, teach women cleanliness and hygiene and how to take care of children and the family. They would teach children prayers, singing, and so on.

Fr. Orestes Paviotti wrote: "By far the most important and spirit-inspired event of the war years was the foundation of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians

**Formation**

The Salesian sisters (FMA) were entrusted with the formation of the Missionary sisters so that the new congregation would be imbued with the Salesian spirit which Bishop Ferrando so much desired. The names of some Salesian sisters who made a special contribution to the growth of the MSMHC are mentioned below:

**Sr. Severina Schiapparelli (1906- 1980)** was the Novice Mistress under whose guidance the novices learnt to love Jesus deeply and they shared that experience with the people during their mission tours. The second Novice Mistress was **Sr. Teresa Medvesek (1906-2001)** who discharged her duties with motherly care and great diligence. **Sr. Nellie  Nunes (1908-1983)** built up the spiritual edifice of the novices under her vigilant care as she was most loving and motherly in her attitude towards her formees. She was loved by the novices in return and they would put into practice whatever she taught them for they realized that she taught them what she herself lived. The Salesian sisters guided the congregation in the capacity of Mothers General from 1955-1969.

**Sr. Luigina Saletta (1905-1965)** the first Mother General was appointed on 2 February 1955 but she could not complete her term as she was the Matron of the Civil Hospital in Guwahati. She realized that she could not do justice to her two responsibilities, both of which she considered equally important. Realizing the problem, Bishop Ferrando relieved her at her own request in December 1955, of her responsibility as Mother General. He was ever grateful to Sr. Luigina Saletta for the role she played in the formation of the Sisters

**Sr. Teresa Villa (1903-1989)** was appointed Mother General on 8 December 1956. During her term as Mother General the congregation began to grow and develop. She was very approachable and helped anyone in need. She was a real mother to us. She bravely put up with the inclement weather of lower Assam. On completion of her term of six years, she returned to her community, yet she continued to take care of us with her powerful prayers and occasional visits to our convents.

**Sr Nellie Nunes ( 1908-1983 )**. At the completion of Sr. Teresa Villa's term as Mother General, Sr. Nellie Nunes who was till then Novice Mistress was appointed Mother General on 15 September 1962. She made great sacrifices for the growth of the congregation. She went as far as Kerala a few times to recruit vocations and the number of vocations increased due to her untiring effort. The MSMHC remain ever grateful to the FMA superiors and to the Novice Mistresses and Mothers General for their sacrificing spirit and their generous contribution to building up a solid foundation that keep us going still. These names will remain etched in the hearts of MSMHC sisters and will appear in the annals of our congregation for all time to come.

Fr. Attilio Colussi SDB was appointed the first Spiritual Director.  He helped the young girls grow in the right spirit and in deep personal love for Jesus.  They had confidence in him and they made steady progress in their spiritual life.  He taught the sisters, novices and candidates Don Bosco's method of education - the Preventive System.  He was eager for their spiritual formation and he gave monthly conferences, monthly recollection etc.  At the request of the Bishop, he took care of the material needs of the new congregation as well, as Bishop Ferrando's movements were restricted due to the war.

By entrusting the formation of the members of the new congregation to the Salesian Fathers and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the founder ensured that the spirit and spirituality of Don Bosco were imparted to the Sisters from its inception and that the sisters lived these in their day to day life. When the novitiate was shifted to Tezpur on 9 March 1948 the responsibility of spiritual care fell on Fr. Joseph Dal Broi, sdb, who was a faithful interpreter of the Bishop and carried out his instructions and wishes. Other Salesian Priests who contributed greatly to the formation of the MSMHC were Bishop Orestes Marengo, Fr. Michael Devalle, Fr. Remus Morra and Fr. Joseph Zubizzaretta. These priests ensured that the MSMHC acquired the Salesian spirit and lived it faithfully

**Charism and Spirit of the Congregation**

Article 4 of the Constitutions of 1991 clearly lays down the main motive for the founding of the congregation: "The congregation is dedicated, first and foremost, to the missionary apostle. Therefore, the evangelization and catechetical instruction, especially of womenfolk and children in the villages of the dioceses in which they work, shall always have pride of place among the apostolate and charitable undertakings of the Missionary Sisters."

The primary charism of the congregation is missionary evangelization that affects and permeates the life and activities of the sisters. Bishop Ferrando experienced this missionary charism deep within him and passed it on to the congregation. Articles 4 and 67 of the Constitutions of the congregation capture the vision, charism and spirit of the Founder. The quality and vitality of the Institute is always measured by the degree of the missionary spirit its members possess. It is a commitment to spread the Good News through a witness of life, preaching the Word of God, prayer and sacrifice. It calls for an authentic love for Christ and a deep personal faith in him.

Bishop Ferrando was personally interested and involved in the growth, development and expansion of the congregation and in the spiritual and material welfare of its members. However, his movements were restricted during World War II. For every movement out of the city of Shillong, he had to seek the permission from the police authorities as they controlled the movements of the foreigners. Hence, Bishop Ferrando entrusted Fr. Colussi with the affairs of the congregation which he carried out faithfully. Through retreats, talks and occasional visits to the convents, Bishop Ferrando helped to strengthen the charism and spirit of the congregation. The letters he wrote to the superiors and to his spiritual daughters in the congregation were means of animating them.

**Relationship with the Sisters**

There existed a cordial and loving relationship between the Founder and the sisters especially with the pioneering members. Bishop Ferrando could not visit them as often as he wanted to because of World War II that was raging furiously. But he visited them whenever an opportunity came by. He gave them instructions and exhorted them to love Jesus dearly and to have special devotion to our Blessed Mother. He also contacted them through Fr. Colussi to whom he entrusted the spiritual formation of the younger members of the congregation. Bishop Ferrando had full trust in Fr. Colussi. He kept giving directions to him which he faithfully communicated to the pioneering members. Bishop Ferrando used to write letters to the novices and sisters and exhorted them to be holy by a life of union with God.  "During the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, I shall always remember you that the good Lord may help and protect you along the path of holiness.” In another letter, he wrote: "Practice union with God by acquiring the habit of sanctifying your work by many ejaculatory prayers, many acts of love for God and by walking in his presence." From these we can comprehend how preoccupied Bishop Ferrando was about the sanctity that his daughters should cultivate.

The expansion of the congregation was due to the instrumentality of Bishop Orestes Marengo who had a great bond with Bishop Ferrando and the MSMHC. Bishop Ferrando was his novice master and as a result Bishop Marengo knew his mind. In the earlier years Bishop Marengo preached many of the spiritual retreats for the Missionary sisters. Through these retreats, he inculcated in them the Salesian spirituality.

Bishop Marengo served as Bishop in the dioceses of Dibrugarh, Tezpur and Tura. He has opened several convents for MSMHC sisters in these dioceses to carry out the missionary apostolate, to take care of the boarding children to run schools and dispensaries. He built the required structures and furnished them so that the sisters could be comfortable in carrying out the apostolate. He gave them the ownership of these convents and schools and allowed the sisters to run them as independent institutions. His interest in him in the spiritual and material welfare of the MSMHC can be gauged from the fact that he used to visit them frequently, preach retreats, give conferences, inquire about the well-being of the sisters and make sure that they live out the Salesian spirit.

The fond memories of Bishop Ferrando are still alive among the sisters. They remember many of his outstanding qualities: thirst for holiness of life, zeal for souls, ardent love for Jesus, filial and tender devotion and love for Mary, Mother of God, passionate love for the missions, spirit of sacrifice, tremendous love for the poor, impoverished way of life, spirit of humility and obedience, love and concern for his daughters, family spirit, jovial nature, deep piety and union with God. According to J. Thadathil, "the historical memory of the Founder and the early pioneers of the congregation, their example and heroic lives, will serve as a permanent source of inspiration in our search for Christian holiness, missionary evangelization and pastoral service."

**FAREWELL TO INDIA**

After spending 46 years of his energetic life implanting of the kingdom of God and experiencing the growth of a vibrant Church in the missions of Northeast India, Bishop Ferrando returned to Italy at the request of his superiors, which was made known to him by Most Rev. Caprio, the then Pro-Nuncio. The growth and expansion of the diocese required a younger and more energetic person. Besides, the Government of India asked the Bishop's Conference of India ( CBCI ) to appoint Indian Bishops to head the Indian Churches so as to curb the entry of foreign missionaries to India especially to Northeast India and to restrain the missionary activities of those already working. Hence, Bishop Ferrando tendered his resignation to Pope Paul VI on 26 June 1969.

Bishop Ferrando accepted the decision as the will of God, though deep down in his heart he greatly desired to remain in India. He left the Northeast for Italy with a heroic spirit though his heart was bleeding. He would have liked to remain in any of the mission stations in the Northeast. While living in Italy, in one of the Salesian houses, he once mused: "At least as the chaplain of my sisters, I would have remained with them in a corner." But as a man of obedience, he obeyed the orders of his superiors though it cost him much. This proves to a great degree, the deep spirituality of Bishop Ferrando.

Bidding goodbye to India was probably the most difficult and painful 'fiat’ uttered by Bishop Ferrando in his life. He came to India, to the Northeast, as a missionary at a very young age. He gave his whole-hearted and selfless services to the Salesian society and to the Church for an entire span of 46 years. He was then asked to resign and leave the country which he had adopted as his second home. He accepted it with dignity befitting a religious, a Salesian, and most of all, a man of God who had surrendered himself into the care of the Almighty and left the country for good. He did not manifest reluctance or lack of resignation to the will of God. His general attitude was to accept the will of God for the greater growth of the Church for which he toiled untiringly.

**The Final Goodbye**

Volumes can be written about the final goodbye given to Bishop Ferrando from Shillong. This was a twin event as the Diocese welcomed Archbishop Hubert D'Rosario sdb as the first Archbishop of Shillong-Guwahati, and the Church organized a fitting farewell to Bishop Ferrando.

The diocese gave its Pastor and Father a moving send-off. Thousands of people poured in from far and near to have a glimpse of their Shepherd for the last time and to receive his paternal blessing. In appreciation of the great work done for the growth of the Church and for the social and cultural development of the people of Northeast India, Government officials, Anglican Bishop and leaders of the various Protestant denominations, priests, religious, leaders of the Catholic Church and a large number of Catholics from all over the diocese were present. They paid their homage to their beloved Shepherd Bishop Ferrando.

Archbishop Hubert D Rosario sdb gave an impressive talk in appreciation of the missionaries who toiled hard to implant the Church with great determination in spite of the hardships they faced. He lauded their achievements with great joy and gratitude in the following words: "At this historic moment, I want to extend my thanks to all the missionaries who have traversed this region and dedicated their lives for the cause of Christ in this land of their adoption. They suffered extreme cold and heat, hunger and thirst, they traveled through forests infested with wild animals and insects, reached areas served neither by roads nor vehicles. They have been victims of malnutrition and sicknesses having become part of this land, which has been watered by their sweat and sanctified by their mortal remains. It is true that the blood of the martyrs is always the seed of Christianity. They have generated many spiritual children in Christ, who will become their successors."

As he saw how the people were visibly moved by these words, Mons. D’Rosario added: " As we still feel the pain of the recent expatriation of some of our beloved missionaries from Assam, without any fault of theirs, we shall accept the establishment of the new Archdiocese as an eloquent testimony to their disinterested love and self-sacrificing work." The Archbishop then spoke at length about the great achievements of his predecessor, who has been now made the Titular Archbishop of Troina and who guided ably the diocese for 35 years. "In all truth," he concluded, "Mons. Ferrando is the architect of this new Archdiocese."

The President of the Catholic Union John Deng Pohrmen read out a moving address in Khasi in the name of the entire Catholic population of Shillong diocese.  It beautifully summarized the sentiments of the people as a glowing tribute for the building up of the Church: "... You did so much for us, for our spiritual and material wellbeing: you built churches, hospitals, seminaries, set up 20 parishes, and above all, you have given us a local congregation of sisters to take care of us ... How can we, O beloved Father, not feel at a loss, broken and lonely after years of your being with us!

22 September 1969 was a sad day for many people in Shillong as they bade a tearful farewell to Bishop Ferrando. The sisters and novices went to meet him in the Bishop's House an hour before his departure for Guwahati. He consoled them with these encouraging words: "My good sisters, I am leaving my heart with you. Do not be afraid. Our Lady will take care of you. I am giving you dear Fr. Kenny. He will look after you. Remember that Mary Help of Christians is the Superior of our humble congregation."

Accompanied by Fr. Maurus Casarotti, the Provincial of Calcutta and Fr. Mario Bianchi, the Secretary and Chancellor, Bishop Ferrando left for Guwahati.  A touching demonstration of the love of the people was visible at that moment. They lined up on both sides of the road about six kilometers from Bishop's House to bid him farewell.  As the motorcade passed by slowly the people with tears in their eyes kept waving their hands silently, Bishop Ferrando kept smiling and waving his hands and occasionally blessing the crowd.  Bishop Ferrando and his God alone could gauge what went through his mind behind that smile on his lips.

Even during his last journey there was a demonstration of his virtues of love, humility and forgiveness. A priest who was not in good terms with the Bishop never approached him to bid farewell. However, the priest stood by the roadside. Seeing the priest, Bishop Ferrando stopped the vehicle, walked towards him and greeted him. What a fatherly gesture of the Bishop!  Behold what an example!  What a great humility and sign of forgiveness! Bishop Ferrando personified the goodness and kindness of Jesus in his words and deeds.

On 29 September 1969 on the day Bishop Ferrando left Guwahati an estimated crowd of 3000 people accompanied him to the airport at Guwahati to bid him goodbye as a sign of their love, gratitude and appreciation for his long 35 years of shepherding them so tenderly.

**TITULAR ARCHBISHOP OF TROINA**

**AND NINE YEARS OF HIDDEN LIFE IN ITALY**

Bishop Ferrando was nominated Titular Archbishop of Troina in Sicily in recognition and appreciation for the great work he accomplished for the Church in Northeast India.  But this meant nothing to him except that it served as a title.  A truly humble person is not concerned about name, fame and recognition.  This was the case with Bishop Ferrando.

Bishop Ferrando arrived in the Salesian community of Genova - Quarto in June 1970. Away from his active missionary life, Bishop Ferrando lived a very happy life among his confreres who loved him in turn and were of service to him in whatever way possible. On the other hand Bishop Ferrando's pre occupation was not to inconvenience anyone. So he decided to spend the last days of his life in prayer, recollection, in reading and writing the marvelous work that was accomplished in India through the illustrious sons of Don Bosco. His confreres saw in him a true model of Salesian Spirit. He was very grateful for any little attention shown him by the confreres. In return, he showed his appreciation to the community by giving them the gifts that he received from friends and well-wishers. During his stay in the Salesian community at Genova-Quarto, he endeared himself to one and all.  He would willingly render any help to those who approached him.  His friendly, jovial and smiling nature was so catchy that he soon became very popular.

Fr. Giulio Barchielli , the Rector of the community wrote : " When Mons . Ferrando came back from India he inserted himself into the community very inspiringly, that is to say, his presence was positively constructive. His insertion into our community had a unifying element, which soothed and calmed especially when the situation was a bit tense as it often happens in a community. In those moments, he was there with his quick wits, great communicative skills and deep interior serenity. He was a man of deep spirituality, a man of genuine love and a man of profound humility,"

Fr Fabian Vitto, the Economer of the community, reminisced about Bishop Ferrando: "With great satisfaction he used to narrate how he used to visit the villages, mission centers and churches. His missionary spirit urged him to go out and be with the people. I used to take Bishop Ferrando sometimes to visit other neighboring Salesian centers. All through the journey he spoke about Don Bosco or matters concerning spirituality and sanctity. He was a very spiritual person. He set a wonderful example for us in the community. Every week during the meditation he used to make his confession without fail. The stipend that he received from Rome, he used to hand over to me as a means for his maintenance. He used to say, 'I do not want to be a burden to anyone.' He used to hand over the account every month and used to speak to the Rector without fail. Now and then he used to go to meet Giuseppe Cardinal Siri, his friend.  Occasionally, I have visited his native place Rossiglione.  Whenever he went out of the house, he informed either the Rector or the Economer where he went and when he would return." Oh, what an exemplary life this saintly man lived even after his retirement!

Fr. Fabian Vitto, Fr. Ranieri , the Provincial and Fr. Pasquale Liberatore, the Provincial of Ligure - Toscana spoke convincingly about the sanctity of Bishop Ferrando.  Some of the impressions of Fr. Fabian Vitto are given below: "Bishop Ferrando had his room on the first floor. He lived as a member of the community. He was very affable, very attentive even to the needs of the house. He informed us of everything ... He was very precise, discreet and orderly. He was very poor. His office had very few things. His room was very simple. "Fr. Ranieri recalled: "What a wonderful man, what an example. In the house he is like a good novice asking permissions, depending on the superiors, following the time - table, helping in every way especially in conducting all liturgical celebrations.

With great apostolic spirit, Bishop Ferrando offered his services to the community and to the parish nearby joyfully and enthusiastically. He was available for hearing confessions, administering confirmations, ordaining priests, preaching and giving conferences. The community knew him as a spiritual person. He was obedient, humble, simple and generous.  He was cordial and kind to all irrespective of their status. With his characteristic simplicity, he made everyone happy and at ease at table and at recreation.

Giuseppe Cardinal Siri of Genova had a great esteem for Bishop Ferrando.  He was a great confidant of Bishop Ferrando and used to invite him to celebrate Holy Mass and administer first Holy Communion and Confirmation in some of the parishes. He loved these occasions as they reminded him of his missionary life in Northeast India. The Cardinal also used to visit him to ask counsel about problems faced by the Church in Genova.  As the President of the Italian Episcopal Conference, Cardinal Siri sought advice from Bishop Ferrando. In this way, he served the Church and maintained a close contact with the clergy and religious of the Archdiocese of Genova. The funeral oration of Cardinal Siri at the Requiem Mass celebrated for Bishop Ferrando is a clear proof of his great esteem, love, appreciation and admiration for him.

Bishop Ferrando continued to love and help the Assam mission even from Italy. He kept regular correspondence with his priests and sisters in India. Whenever possible he rendered them financial and material help with whatever he received from friends and well wishers. Bishop Ferrando visited India after his definitive departure on 8 November 1972. Archbishop Hubert D ' Rosario, sdb the successor of Bishop Ferrando, invited him to participate in the celebrations to mark the Golden Jubilee of the arrival of the Salesians in Northeast India. The entire Northeast gave him arousing reception. He was given a warm and moving welcome by thousands of people at the grotto chapel.  A Pilgrim Apostle 'as he called himself was very happy to go around and visit his flock at different mission stations of his former diocese.  He received great welcome wherever he went, and was happy to note the flourishing growth of the Church everywhere.

Bishop Ferrando's happiness knew no bounds as he was able to visit many of the convents of his dear sisters and to know personally how they lived and carried out the charism of the congregation.  He had a firsthand knowledge of the spectacular growth of the Congregation and the wonderful work the sisters accomplished in their various centers. Together with Bishop O. Marengo, Bishop Ferrando consecrated the Cathedral of Mary Help of Christians, Shillong.  During this time he received the final profession of 20 sisters and accepted 25 postulants to the Novitiate at St. Margaret's convent, Shillong.  On 25 April 1973, accompanied by Fr. Ivan Giacomello SDB, Bishop Ferrando left for Italy after having spent six months in Northeast India.

**DEMISE OF BISHOP FERRANDO**

Bishop Ferrando passed away in the Salesian community at Genova-Quarto, Italy. Fr Giulio Barchielli, the Rector of the Salesian community in which Bishop Ferrando lived gives an account of the last days of Bishop Ferrando. "On the day of the incident (17 June 1978), Mons. Ferrando celebrated the Holy Mass around 11 am for some of his benefactresses who requested for the same. After that he went for a cup of coffee with them. After seeing them off, he wanted to go up to his room. Probably he felt dizzy and fell down at the staircase. Usually I used go to his room around 12.00 pm with the post. But on that day, I do not know why, due to some premonition decided to visit him before the usual time. I went by the internal stair case from my room and found that he was not in his room. Then I came down by the stair case of the corridor. There I found him, lying in a pool of blood unconscious. Immediately we administered the sacrament of anointing and called for an ambulance and took him to the hospital. Unfortunately he never came back to consciousness. He had a cerebral hemorrhage. Next day we brought him to the house, because we wanted him to spend his last days with us. We are very grateful to God for giving us the grace to have him with us for some years.

A stroke of apoplexy caused the end of Bishop Ferrando's earthly life. Even though advanced in age, Bishop Ferrando considered himself an old oak still resisting the wind and storm. So he did not take seriously the exhortations of his doctor and confreres to take rest. Bishop Ferrando worked till the day the Lord called him to Himself. He died in harness. He was not suffering from any long-standing illness. The confreres of his community assisted him with much love and care during his last days.

Fr. Fabian described the disposition and attitude of Bishop Ferrando during his sickness in the following words: “Even when he was sick, I never found him sad." He accepted everything as the will of God and was totally resigned totally to every discomfort that visited him.

Although the author was not present there during the last days of Bishop Ferrando, she would like to furnish all that took place before and after his demise chronologically. The author with St. Bridget Jacob visited the Salesian community at Genova - Quarto and spoke to the members of the community. They have interviewed some of the relatives of Bishop Ferrando and have read the letter written by Fr. 1. Giacomello to the Mother General, who was present at the funeral of Bishop Ferrando.

On 20 June 1978 at the age of 83, Bishop Ferrando went to his eternal reward. On confirmation of his death the superiors transmitted the news to the Archdiocese of Shillong-Guwahati. They informed all concerned in Northeast India.

In the Salesian community the funeral Mass was presided over by His Eminence Giuseppe Cardinal Siri of Genova. The confreres from the communities of Ligure Toscana, his superiors from Rome, missionaries especially those were on home vacation, his relatives and friends from Rossiglione were present to bid farewell to this great man of God. Fr. Thomas Panakezham sdb, the Regional Councilor for Asia represented the Rector Major. Funeral Oration was given by Giuseppe Cardinal Siri.

After the impressive function, the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando were taken to Rossiglione, his native village to be interred in the family tomb. The coffin was carried by his nephew Gianni Pizzomi and other family members. The relatives and parishioners of Rossiglione organized a grand funeral during which all his loved ones and friends, young and old, together with the Mayor were present. Bishop Nosiglia from Rossiglione, priests from Rossiglione Parish, benefactors and parishioners from nearby parishes attended the funeral. From Shillong Fr. Ivan Giacomello sdb, who was the secretary of Bishop Ferrando for over 20 years, was present for the funeral to represent the Bishops, priests, religious and the numerous people of Northeast India who loved him dearly.

In the following letter he worte to Mother Mary Rose Thapa, the Mother General, Fr Giacomello gave an account of what he witnessed at the Salesian community when Bishop Ferrando died : "Yesterday at noon my  brother Augustine from Turin phoned to me: "Come at once, Archbishop Ferrando is dying. "I took the fastest train from Padua at 8.04 am and arrived in Genova - Quarto at 1.00 pm. The mortal remains of Archbishop Ferrando were laid in state in the chapel when I reached.  I am just coming from the chapel where I said the Requiem Mass for the repose of his soul from... On17 June 1978, Archbishop Ferrando was fairly well. He said Mass at 11.00 am for two of his benefactresses and gave them Holy Communion under both species.  He then accompanied them to take a cup of tea in the refectory.  When he took leave of them, it was past 12.00 noon.  Fr. Da Bove was with them as he usually assisted Mons.  Ferrando at his Mass of him.  Archbishop asked Father to accompany the two ladies up to the gate of the Institute.  Archbishop Ferrando was on his way to his room. It was on the platform of the staircase from the ground floor that Monsignor had a haemorrhage in the brain.  He lost his consciousness, fell down and remained there unconscious for some time.  As soon as the confreres saw him they rushed him to the hospital only to hear that nothing could be done. So at about 4.00 pm.  on 19 June 1978 they brought him home still unconscious. He remained in that state till 3.00 pm of yesterday 20 June 1978. Cardinal Siri visited him yesterday and also today at 3.30 pm.  This morning there was a Requiem Mass concelebrated by many priests.... This evening at 4.45 there is the holy Rosary in common.  Tomorrow at 10 am there will be the solemn Mass in the chapel presided over by Cardinal Siri.  Then many will go to Rossiglione where the Bishop of Acqui will celebrate another solemn Requiem Mass in his native parish.  The Rector Major is sending our Regional Superior Fr. Thomas Panakezham.  Fr. Pianazzi and Fr. Casarotti are also expected to be here tomorrow. I will say more about this beloved Father of ours when I get back to Shillong.

As the news of the death of Bishop Ferrando spread condolences poured in from eminent persons from every comer of Italy and India. In Italy, Angelo cardinal Rossi, the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples and His Grace Archbishop Simon D. Lourdusamy, the Secretary of the same Dicastery, immediately sent telegram of condolences to the Rector Major.

Angelo Cardinal Rossi appreciated the missionary zeal of Bishop Ferrando. In his condolence message to the Rector Major of the Salesian Society he wrote:

Following upon our telegram to you of 23rd June last, I would like to renew once again the deep sympathy of this Sacred Dicastery over the loss of His Excellency the Most Reverend Stephen sdb, a member of your illustrious Society who labored so zealously for so many years in the Lord's vineyard in India . this sacred congregation will remember the indefatigable zeal and the profound example of missionary dedication which this fervent prelate demonstrated throughout his brilliant career, 35 years of which 35, and then as the Bishop of Shillong from 1935-69, at which time he resigned from that See and was named Archbishop by His Holiness Pope Paul VI.  His generosity was always total and his love for the implantation of the Church was manifested in a special way by his establishment of an indigenous missionary Congregation of religious women, "The Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians", in 1942 just recently elevated to the status of religious institute of Pontifical Right.

So often His Excellency visited these Offices in recent years and on every occasion his love for India and his continuing desire to be of whatever service he could, both to the Church in that country as well as to Propaganda was most evident.

I would like to assure you, very Reverend Father General and all the members of the Salesian Society, our most fervent prayers for this zealous prelate-member of your Institute, whom the Lord has called to enjoy eternal rest and an everlasting reward for his years of Christian, religious, priestly and Episcopal service, always undertaken without personal self-interest and with a generosity and willingness to be ever available for whatever task the Society and the Church wish to entrust him. May his missionary heart and zeal always continue to be for the members of your Institute an inspiration and an example of religious and priestly fidelity!  We are certain that his memory and his life will be recorded not only in the annals of the history of the Salesian family, but above all, in the lives and hearts of its members.

May I take this occasion for expressing to you, very Reverend Father, and to all the members of the Society, my sentiments of esteem and my promise of prayer for the repose of the soul of this great missionary figure whose presence will always remain in the life-blood of the Church in India.

In India, condolence letters were sent by His Eminence Lawrence Cardinal Picachy S.J. of Calcutta and the President of the Episcopal Conference of India; Rt . Rev. Patrick D'Souza, Bishop of Varanasi and Secretary General CBCI ; His Enimence Joseph Cardinal Parekattil , Archibishop of Ernakulam, Kerala; the Bishops of Northeast India ; Dr D. D. Pugh , Chief Minister of Meghalaya , Dr S. D. Kongwir , Deputy Chief Minister Meghalaya, and President of the catholic Association, Shillong and many of the admirers and well-wishers of Bishop Ferrando.

Bishop Ferrando left behind a Will in writing, a copy of which is preserved in the archives of the MSMHC Generalate, Guwahati, Assam.

**TRANSLATION OF THE MORTAL REMAINS TO SHILLONG**

When Bishop Ferrando left Shillong for good, the Missionary sisters could do nothing to keep him back in the land he labored and among the people whom he loved sincerely. The sisters felt helpless. However, when they received a clear message from Bishop Ferrando that he had a desire to remain back in Shillong where he ministered for the last 46 years of his life, the sisters thought it proper to translate his mortal remains from him to the Mother House in Shilong. "If he could not remain with us as he desired; at least let us bring back his bones to rest in the land of his adoption" mused his daughters.

Bishop Ferrando had expressed this desire to different people on various occasions. When Sr. Bridget and the author were in Rome, Agenzia Notizie Salesiana (ANS) conducted an interview with the author as they wanted to know the purpose of the transfer of the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando to India. Here is an excerpt from the interview. "First of all, it was our Founder's ardent desire to be buried in the soil of his mission field. But he died in a country far away and we could not take his body then. Secondly, as his spiritual daughters, we want to have him close to us, so that his presence may continue to inspire and guide us in our apostolic endeavors and in living out our commitment to missionary evangelization through the spirit and charism that he has given us. We want our younger generations who have not met him alive to be deeply attached to him, know him and love him. This opportunity can be provided to them if his mortal remains are brought to the Northeast. We consider this as an invaluable treasure not only to our congregation that Bishop Ferrando has founded, but also to the Church in Northeast India where he labored for nearly half a century.

In 1975, when Fr. Tarsius Resto sdb, Vicar General of Shillong, visited Bishop Ferrando in Genova - Quarto, he expressed his desire to be with the people of Khasi - Jaintia Hills in the following words : "Nga Kwah ban buh ia ki shyileng jong nga ha Ri Khasi - Pnar" (I want my bones to be laid in the soil of Khasi -Pnar Hills).

Again, when Bishop Ferrando met Mother Mary Rose and the author at Genova-Quarto in 1976 in a message that he gave to the members of MSMHC, Bishop Ferrando mentioned his longing to be back in India. He said: "For me it is a sad day, and you are about to go to the station and you are leaving me. Many come from India, from Assam and I am only to see them at the station with the heart bleeding and suffering so much, because I cannot accompany them to India. But my heart is always with you. "After knowing his desire the Congregation did its best to fulfill it.

With the help of the Rector Major Fr. Egidio Vigano sdb, Fr. Pasquale Liberatore sdb, the then Salesian Provincial of Ligure - Toscana Province and Gianni Pizzomi, the sole surviving nephew of Bishop Ferrando, the MSMHC sisters managed to transport the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando to Shillong.

Sr. Bridget Jacob and the author took the initiative to accomplish this daring task. On 10 August 1984, they visited the Salesian Community at Genova - Quarto where the beloved Founder had spent his last 9 years and met the members of the community. They gave an account of the life of Bishop Ferrando when he was with them in the community. All of them had one thing in common to tell, "Bishop Ferrando is a holy man." These Fathers spoke of the exemplary life that Bishop Ferrando lived in the community. Everyone in the community of Genova - Quarto cherished the fond memories of Bishop Ferrando and with much love and respect they spoke about him. They gave the visitors the Pectoral chain and Crosses, ring and some other mementos of Bishop Ferrando which they brought to India with much love, joy and pride. A kind of feeling crept into the author who shared it with Sr. Bridget: "We are taking the Pectoral cross and ring, the Bishop will follow us." He did follow them after three years.

The two Indian visitors also met with Fr. Louis Ulla, the novitiate companion of Bishop Ferrando and his Confessor during the last nine years in the community. It was he who really inspired and initiated the sisters for this venture of translating the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando to India. He said: "Your Founder loved India very much and he desired to be buried in Shillong. Why don't you transport his mortal remains to Shillong? Your Founder is a holy man. It is up to you, his daughters, to raise him to the honors of the Altar. He further said that unless the sisters made a quick move nothing would happen. "They took to heart the advice of Fr. Louis Ulla as a God given inspiration. These words of wisdom were an eye-opener to them. The author did not realize the greatness of her beloved Founder till then. They marveled at what he said and asked for further advice and sought his help to transport the mortal remains to India. They requested him to inquire from the civil authorities the procedures for transporting of the mortal remains to Northeast India. They on their part promised to inquire in Shillong about the possibility for the same.

On their return to Shillong, both the author and Sr. Bridget Jacob gave a detailed report to Mother Mary Rose, the then Superior General and her Council about their visit to the Salesian community at Genova - Quarto where Bishop Ferrando had spent the last nine years of his life and his last journey to his eternal home. They explained to them about the great impression that Bishop Ferrando left behind among his confreres and their conversation with them, particularly with Fr. Louis Ulla about the possibility of transporting the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando Mother Mary Rose and the General Council gave the green signal to proceed with the plan for transporting his mortal remains.

The author lost no time to collect the necessary procedures for transporting the mortal remains. Upon inquiry from the Civil Authorities about the procedures for the transportation of the mortal remains, they received clear instructions regarding the measures to be followed.  After collecting all the necessary documents from the Government departments in India, they duly filled out the forms, and they informed Fr. Louis Ulla about their progress.  Fr. Louis, on his part, collected all the information regarding the procedures required from the Government of Italy and kept informing them.

In 1986, the author together with Sr. Bridget Jacob undertook another visit to Genova-Quarto in order to gather additional information and to obtain necessary permission from the Salesian superiors. Accordingly, on 16 October 1986, they went to the Salesian Generalate in Rome and met the Rector Major Fr. Egidio Vigano to seek his permission to transfer the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando to Shillong. The Rector Major inquired as to who was helping them in this venture.  The author told him about the advice and help given by Fr. Louis Ulla who was around 85 years of age. The Rector Major, then , remarked : "How can you rely on such a senior Priest? You approach the Provincial of Ligure - Toscana, Fr. Pasquale Liberatore."

The visitors then paid a visit to His Excellency Rt . Rev. Livio Maritano, the Bishop of Acqui, the diocese to which Bishop Ferrando's family tomb belonged.  He encouraged them in the following words: "I am happy that you have come with this fervent desire to take back your Founder's mortal remains to the place where he had spent all his active years. The apt place for a missionary to be laid to rest is the place where he worked. So, dear Sisters, I wish you all success in your effort to take him back to India." After meeting the Rector Major and the Bishop of Acqui, a ray of hope dawned.  As directed by the Rector Major, they approached Fr. Pasquale Liberatore, the Provincial of Ligure-Tuscany who received them with joy and with an attitude of generosity.

Fr Liberatore welcomed the visitors warmly and listened patiently to their request. He suggested that they get permission rather the opinion of Gianni Pizzorni, Bishop Ferrando's nephew, to transport the mortal remains as he is buried in the family tomb in his native place Rossiglione. Fr Liberatore contacted Gianni Pizzomi. He came to Genoa immediately. In their presence, Fr. Liheratore explained to Gianni Pizzomi, the purpose of their visit to him. Fr Liberatore asked Gianni whether he was willing to part with the mortal remains of his great uncle Bishop. After a long silence Gianni responded with a note of sadness: "I feel sad to part with the mortal remains, But I feel happy for one thing, that as long as the congregation lasts, the sisters will show signs of love for him by placing flowers and lighting candles at the tomb of my uncle. Here he will be remembered by me and my sons only. After us nobody will bother to light a candle or to put some flowers on the tomb. Therefore, let the sisters take the mortal remains of my uncle, they have a right for it." The joy knew no bounds when the author heard this. While the conversation went on between Fr. Liberatore and Gianni the author kept praying fervently for a positive answer.  Extremely happy with the decision of Gianni and the promise of Fr. Liberatore to extend all possible help for the transportation of the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando, they left the place with great joy thanking God for His steadfast love and assistance.

In Italy wherever they went people kept asking about the purpose of their visit. They told them that they were trying to see whether they would be able to transport the mortal

remains of their dear Founder to Shillong. People were surprised to hear this and told them that they needed plenty of money to do it. To this the author responded that they did not have money but believed that God will provide whatever was required to transport the mortal remains of their holy Founder. With gratitude to God and to the people of Rossiglione, it must be acknowledged that the only expenditure the congregation was incurred the journey of the two sisters to and from Shillong to Kolkata to accompany the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando. This is indeed a miracle that Bishop Ferrando wrought for the congregation.

While the author was in Italy, Fr. Corni Armando Sdb, Bro. Aldo sdb and some other friends too gave them some financial help. They left this amount with Fr. George Venturoli sdb, a friend of the congregation, so that this amount could be used for the transportation of the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando. Fr George promised to help them too. They left his reference to him with Fr. P. Liberatore for further contact.  But, unfortunately, the only help that Fr. George Venturoli provided them was the information about the casket containing the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando leaving Genova. He made two phone calls and informed about the arrival of the mortal remains in Calcutta.

Fr. George Kottuppallil sdb, belonging to the Salesian Province of Guwahati, Assam, was then carrying out his doctoral research in the archives of Salesian Generalate in Rome. He extended all the necessary assistance and promised to help them in contacting the Rector Major and Fr. P. Liberatore.  The congregation is grateful to Fr. George for whatever help he has rendered in bringing the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando to Northeast India.

On their arrival back in Shillong, both Sr. Bridget Jacob and the author began to work earnestly to get permission from the Civil Authorities. They got it done fast and mailed the same immediately to Fr. Louis Ulla at Genova - Quarto.  Fr. Louis Ulla wrote back saying that they have begun the process and that they will send the mortal remains accompanied by some people from Rossiglione. The members of the congregation, on their part, waited eagerly for further news and intensified their prayers to see the miracle taking place.

On 8 July 1987 Mother Mary Rose received a letter informing her that the agency for the transportation of the mortal remains had contacted the authority in Rossiglione cemetery and has begun the work. Ever since then the sisters anxiously waited for further news regarding the arrival of the mortal remains of their beloved Founder.

The agency known as Pompe Funebre of Genova prepared the coffin as per the international law for transportation of the mortal remains and took the package straight away to Milan to be transported to India. The Mother General had received a letter earlier mentioning that the mortal remains would be accompanied by his nephew Gianni Pizzorni and Nemisio Mosconi, a Pizzorni family friend.  "Our hearts rejoiced on hearing this happy news - a dream being realized" said Mother Rose.

In Rossiglione, the Agency completed the required formalities. The relatives, friends and the people of Rossiglione assembled in the cemetery. The Parish Priest led the prayers. The Mayor gave a farewell speech highlighting the qualities of Bishop Ferrando whom they loved and admired greatly.  They hoped that he would get a much honored place of rest in the land he loved dearly and among the people for whom he toyed and particularly in the hearts of his sisters. Sr. Bridget Jacob and the author went to Calcutta to receive the mortal remains. The casket containing the mortal remains left Milan for Calcutta, via Frankfurt and Delhi on 30 November 1987 and landed in Calcutta on 1 December 1987.  They had no information whatsoever about the personal data of the two people who would be accompanying the casket, even though they were told about the implications of entering Assam, Meghalaya and the need to obtain a special entry permit. The author had requested them to send them a copy of their Passports with personal data so that entry permit to Meghalaya can be obtained. But they did not receive any information. Hence they could not make any arrangements for making their entry permit to Meghalaya. However, they had taken a letter of recommendation from Mr. Peter Marbaniang, the then Member of Parliament, to Mr. Som of Meghalaya House at Calcutta so as to get permission for our two Italian guests to enter the State of Meghalaya. While the sisters, novices and aspirants stormed heaven, Sr. Bridget Jacob and the author at Calcutta approached the authorities at Meghalaya House several times. On 2 December, they received the news from Peachlands to collect the permit. They had started working for the permit only at 6 pm on 30 November and on 2 December by 4 pm the permit was collected. Ordinarily it takes 3 months to get a permit. Who will not call this a miracle!

There were a number of hurdles to overcome for the release of the casket. First of all, the Agency in Calcutta could do nothing for the release of the casket as they had to embalm the body of an aeronautic Engineer who died during his flight from India to Amsterdam. They were engaged in that task and asked the sisters to take the delivery of the casket from the airport themselves. They gave all the relevant documents pertaining to it.  In the meanwhile, Sr. Bridget went with Gianni and Nemisio to show them around the city of Calcutta Fr. Dominic Kachira sdb from the Salesian Provincial House, Calcutta dropped the author to the cargo department of the International Airport, Calcutta to take delivery of the casket.  The officers in the department were very kind and helpful and released the casket without much delay. The casket was huge as it was packed in a heavy wooden case over which some course materials were wrapped. It was packed very well with three brass handles on either side to hold the casket. There was a beautiful brass cross with the image of Jesus, fixed in the center of the coffin. It had an elegant look; everything was beautiful about it. The author felt very proud, privileged and happy to carry out this noble task.

The casket was indeed heavy weighing 242 kilograms. The casket was brought to the domestic flight department in a truck. The author went ahead with the procedures of booking the casket. In order to book the casket, the author had to produce her ticket which was not booked earlier. So, the author purchased the ticket to Guwahati for 3 December. The officer at the counter taking for granted that the author was traveling on the evening of 2 December proceeded to book the casket. Once I realized that the author was traveling only on the following day, the officer asked her to take away the casket from the airport premises and bring the same on the morning of 3 December. The author was in a predicament and was at a loss as to what is to be done. The truck that carried the casket had already gone. It was dark and late in the evening. The author was alone, puzzled and confused. She stood there for some time, heart raised in prayer, mind actively pondering as to what she should do next, whom to approach for help. They insisted that she carry the casket to the city and bring it with her in the morning.

Sensing the helpless situation, and seeing that the author was much troubled the officer suggested that it is enough to keep a person in the airport who would own up the casket in case of an inquiry is made by the airport authorities. They had orders not to keep any unclaimed baggage in the cargo section, as there was an unfortunate incident that took place a week ago for which they had to close down the airport for two days. They explained the incident to her and the author understood the reason for their persistence in not permitting her to keep the baggage. Yet she needed their help and support in her helpless situation. Now where was she to get a person from? The author gave them a sympathetic look and told them that she had nobody in Calcutta to render her any help as she came from Meghalaya. They were compassionate towards her, but at the same time, they explained their helplessness in this matter. The author prayed fervently and unceasingly to Bishop Ferrando to come to her. I did help. Finally, the two security men who were on night duty agreed to claim the casket in case of inquiry provided she returned to the airport before they signed off their duty in the morning. I consider this as a favor received through the intercession of Bishop Ferrando.

Further, the airport authorities asked her to get a police verification certificate mentioning that the packet contains the mortals remains of Bishop Ferrando. The author felt very absurd about it all; yet she had to get it. In the dark, she went alone inquiring from people the location of the police station. On meeting the police officer, the author explained the reason for her being there at that hour. The police officer was very understanding and he immediately gave her the required document which she presented at the booking counter in the airport.

On the following morning, December 3, as promised the author reached the airport and took charge of the casket before the security personnel could sign off. The author thanked them profusely and assured them of her prayers.  She owed all these to the intervention of Bishop Ferrando from whom she kept seeking help whenever difficulties came on her way. The author grumbled at him and said: "You have come from so far. Do not give further difficulties. The author accompanied the mortal remains to Shillong while Sr. Bridget together with Gianni and Nemisio came to Shillong the following day. Thus the desire of Bishop Ferrando to return to his dear people in Assam was literally fulfilled when his mortal remains reached Shillong on 3 December 1987, a day dedicated to the missionary saint, Francis Xavier, the patron of the missions, as if to signify that the hearts of both Xavier and Ferrando were coincided in their love for Christ and his gospel." Arrangements were made to bring the casket from Guwahati airport to Shillong, Mother Mary Rose Thapa, the Mother General accompanied by the sisters from Peachlands,

Malki, Nongpoh, Sonaighuli and Damra was present at the airport. When the airbus landed at Guwahati airport there were no porters to give a helping hand to carry the casket. The casket weighing 242 kilograms was carried into the ambulance by two men and the sisters. They proceeded first to Sonaighuli. With the help of Fr. Mario Porcu, the Parish Priest, the coarse material that wrapped the casket was removed. Together with the children and the few people present there, the sisters paid their homage to Bishop Ferrando and then left for Shillong.

With much love and reverence for the person of their dear Founder Bishop Ferrando, the sisters traveled to Shillong praying and singing during the entire journey. The author's heart throbbed with joy as they were getting nearer and nearer to their destination. In the meantime a large crowd gathered at Peachlands awaiting the arrival of Bishop Ferrando. The sisters and the aspirants were waiting eagerly for the arrival of their beloved Founder. The casket reached Shillong at 9.30 pm. People left as it was getting late. On the arrival of the casket the sisters and aspirants sang a hymn to their Founder.

Let voices now be raised in song To praise our Founder dear. To guide, protect, encourage, guide, We ever feel him near.

The casket was then placed on a decorated table on the veranda on the first floor. Most Rev. Hubert D' Rosario sdb, the Archbishop of Shillong - Guwahati , announced that a concelebrated Mass would be held in the Cathedral Church, Shillong on 12 December and a notice to this effect was sent out to all the parishes and institutions. The entire Northeast was informed of the arrival of the casket and about the interment of the mortal remains. The news of the arrival of the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando and holding of the concelebrated Mass were also announced at the regional news bulletin of All India Radio, Shillong on two successive days, 8 and 9 December both in Khasi and English. Newspapers like The Dongmusa, The Shillong Times.  The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel and The Telegraph gave wide publicity about the arrival and interment of the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando.

People kept pouring to St. Margaret's Covent, to pay their respects and pray near the mortal remains of their beloved Bishop. They kept coming from far and near, alone or in groups with their family members and friends. Some of them were emotionally moved seeing the casket. Everyone prayed fervently to their former Pastor for their various needs.  Most of them had something to tell.  "Sister, he is my benefactor, he has visited my house, he was my father, he loved me very much, I cannot forget him, he gave me first Holy Communion, he baptized me, etc." Most of the people spent considerable time in silent prayer while others prayed the rosary near the casket.

One of those days an elderly lady, while praying near the casket cried bitterly. Sr. Elizabeth Thamarassery, seeing the lady crying, went near her and inquired the reason for her weeping.  She replied: "Sister, I am remembering the words spoken by Bishop Ferrando, at the Borjhar airport, the day he was leaving. He blessed us and said, I will not come back but my bones will come back. See, he has come back, as he said. The sisters had never heard this before nor had they any plan earlier to bring the mortal remains to Shillong. Wonderful are the ways of God.  May His name be blessed!

On 12 December 1987, as announced earlier the procedure for the interment started at 1.30pm. The casket was taken to the Cathedral, in the ambulance of Fr. John Larrea sdb driven by him for the concelebrated Pontifical Mass. Schools being closed and institutions on holidays, the sisters feared that there may not be many people to participate in the Holy Mass and to attend the interment services. But to their great surprise, the sisters found the Cathedral he built full to the capacity. In fact, people were standing even at the entrance. 26 Priests concelebrated with Archbishop Hubert D'Rosario. Fr N.J.  Kenny and Fr. N. Tuligi spoke about the life, virtues and apostolic activities of Bishop Ferrando.

During the Holy Mass, Fr. Kenny spoke about three aspects in the life of Bishop Ferrando. "He was loved and admired by all for his zeal for souls... his tender devotion to Mary Help of Christians... his love for Jesus for one cannot love the Mother without loving the Son. Secondly, he highlighted the history, spirit and growth of the Congregation of the Missionary sisters, emphasizing its missionary charism and its effective evangelization... Thirdly, he explained the wonderful manner in which Bishop Ferrando's mortal remains came to Shillong without any financial burden on the sisters and the little miracle that enabled Bishop Ferrando's nephew and his friend to come up to Shillong... Fr. Kenny ended by expressing the prayerful wish that the presence of Bishop Ferrando amongst them would inspire all the sisters to live their religious commitment with greater love, fidelity and generosity.

After Holy Mass, the coffin was blessed. Then, his mortal remains of him were brought in procession back to St. Margaret's Convent with the accompaniment of the Parish band and BSF band followed by a large crowd who attended the Holy Eucharist. The sisters wanted at any cost the army band to accompany the funeral cortege as Bishop Ferrando had served his country as a soldier during World War l, and hence, to give him a fitting homage by the personnel from the army.

After the last service in the convent, Sr. Pushpa George read the following words of adieu

Dearly beloved Bishop Ferrando, our Father and Founder, on behalf of your daughters, here I stand to welcome you in our midst and in the midst of the people whom you loved dearly. A cherished dream is realized today. Your longing to be among your dear people you expressed several times, and with feelings of emotion, you said more than once that your heart bled when you saw people going to India, and you could not go along with them. Your earnest desire to be among those whom you loved and for whom you laboured as a Bishop for 34 long years is now a realization, and you are here to stay on with us.  Welcome! Welcome!!! It was in July 1984, that Fr. Louis Ulla, who was your confessor in Genova, suggested that we bring your mortal remains to Shillong. He let us know that your conversation in the community was so often about your mission experience and about the flock that was yours. This only manifests your love for those you care for.  Encouraged by Fr. L. Ulla for the past years, we your daughters have been seeking ways and means to fulfill the ardent desire of your heart to come back home, and it seems that you kept inspiring and guiding all our endeavors to this end as Fr. Egidius Vigano, the Rector Major of the Salesians put it, "If it is the desire of the Bishop to be among his people, he will go, certainly go there." These words gave us added courage, and now we can say, "Since you loved to be among us, you have come. “we are confident that you by your presence in our midst will continue to help, inspire, guide and encourage us, so as to draw us nearer to Christ.  We beg your pardon for our faults and infidelities in the past, for our departures from the way of life you so wisely traced out for us, and today we solemnly renew our fidelity to the charism that you have given us, convinced that your presence among we will be a spur to all of us to do ever better and to strive ever more for true holiness.

While leaving for Genova via Bombay, seeing the shrine of Mary Help of Christians at Matunga, you said to Fr. Alessi, "Do you remember my Cathedral of Mary Help of Christians in Shillong? And noticing two sisters praying in the shrine, you whispered to good Fr. Alessi , " Oh the sisters of Mary Help of Christians at Shillong, they are wonderful !  "and you had tears in your eyes as you spoke. Behold, a Father's love for his children. May you rest in peace among us, and intercede to God for us and for the people whom you loved so dearly. May your presence here with us inspire us to do greater things for souls, and for our own first of all, and may the joy we experience today be increased.

Then the mortal remains were interested in the specially prepared tomb in the chapel, which was artistically designed by Fr. L.B. Anthony sdb and constructed under his supervision. An estimated crowd of 3000 and a good number of priests and religious took part in the functions.

Bishop Ferrando was laid to rest in the sanctuary of the chapel where he often celebrated Holy Mass and exhorted his daughters to live faithfully their life of consecration. On visiting his tomb one sees the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus standing above the grave with arms outstretched as though watching over his valiant soldier awaiting his final resurrection.  He, who lived so close to God in life, lies here so close to Him.

The people were well disposed towards such a function and manifested their love, joy and reverence by coming in large numbers. They marveled at all that was taking place, particularly filled with great joy that their Shepherd was back to be among them.

The faithful keep visiting the tomb of Bishop Ferrando and seek his intercession for their various needs from him. There are several people who have received favors through his intercession, such as spiritual healing, physical healing, marriage settlement, recovery of stolen article, gift of children and so on. A book is kept near the tomb for recording the favors and graces received by the people through the intercession of Bishop Ferrando.

**HE VIRTUES OF BISHOP FERRANDO**

"*I rejoiced greatly in Yahweh, my soul exults for joy in my God, for He has clothed me in the garments of His salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, like a bridegroom wearing a garland, like the bride adorned with jewels." Is 61:10*

The Lord adorned Bishop Ferrando with many virtues that characterized him as a human, religious, priest, Shepherd and a Salesian above everything else. These virtues enabled him to live selflessly. They supplied the energy that was essential to withstand the storms during his priestly and Episcopal ministry. Some of his outstanding virtues are presented below.

Faith

Bishop Ferrando received the gift of faith with the reception of the sacrament of Baptism after two days of his birth. The seed of faith that was sowed in his tender heart by the creator was developed and nurtured by his dear parents as they were rooted in Christian faith and in the practice of the traditions of the Church.

Bishop Ferrando nurtured, developed and practiced faith during the various phases of his life in a heroic manner. The deep faith inherited from his parents of him nourished and lived by him stood him in good stead all through his life of him. He realized that in moments of pain, struggles and uncertainties it was his faith in him in the strength of his unfailing God that sustained him. He not only kept it alive but nurtured it throughout his life and shared it with others. His faith and trust in him in God enabled him to embrace every danger and challenge with great sense of courage and serenity.

Bishop Ferrando carried on fostering the faith during his seminary life. His life as a soldier manifested his deep faith in God. As a priest, novice master, Bishop and Shepherd he manifested tremendous faith in God, in his co-workers and all those who were under his care. He had practical faith to see God and His loving hand from him at work in every circumstance of his life and in every person he came in contact with.

The homilies of Bishop Ferrando were often centered on practical faith. He illustrated his own personal examples to encourage the people and to cultivate faith and love for Jesus. He always lived in the presence of God in union with Him.

The characteristic expression of Bishop Ferrando's faith was seen in his great composure and serenity.  He was in personal touch with his God whom he felt very close and steered his life in moments of consolation and desolation. He clung to his God unflinchingly in trying situations and emerged out of all this with great faith and trust. He believed that "Est Deus in Israel - There is a God in Israel.

He put his absolute trust in God. It was with tremendous faith in divine providence and Mary Help of Christians that he started the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians. In his letter dated 31 May 1977, Bishop Ferrando wrote to Mother Rose: "Undoubtedly it was the Holy Spirit who inspired them to make this oblation of themselves for it was against overwhelming odds and impossible circumstances that the step was taken.” Only a man of immense faith could have written so.

Emphasizing his deep-rooted faith in Jesus, Bishop Ferrando wrote: "Remember this; we are nothing, we can do nothing, but if Jesus is with us, we have nothing to fear. Be humble, be obedient, and Our Lord will be your guide, light and strength." Elsewhere he wrote: "Place your love and trust entirely in Our Lord who loves you and will never abandon you."

Prayer, meditation on the Word of God, sacramental life, devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, great love for the Holy Eucharist and Don Bosco were the means that Bishop Ferrando used in order to nurture faith. He lived in constant union with God. He spent long hours in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. He approached the sacrament of confession every week which edified the rest of the confreres in the community while he lived in Italy. His devotion to the Blessed Virgin was very remarkable. In all his talks and writings, he would mention the virtues of the Blessed Mother Mary Help of Christians and exhort all to love her and imitate her virtues. He attributed the success of all his work to Mother of God. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin was very dear to Bishop Ferrando which he inherited from his parents and he kept nurturing it at every stage of his life.

Bishop Ferrando had special devotion to the saints. In the first place he had great love for Mother Mary and then to his own dear Father and Founder Don Bosco. He was also devoted to St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, St. Joseph, St. Mary Dominica Mazzarello and St. Dominic Savio. Often he spoke about the exemplary life of these saints and exhorted the sisters to imitate them.

Bishop Ferrando manifested his faith in him in more difficult moments of his life in an eminent degree thus proving his worth in him as a man of God.

**World War I**

When Bishop Ferrando was forced to take part in World War I, he fought fiercely in defense of his country. God and Mother Mary was his mainstay in the battlefield. He went ahead placing his trust in God.  He prayed fervently for the end of the War so that he could pursue his studies for priesthood.  Yet he realized that he was doing the will of God by serving his country.  His faith and trust in him in God sustained him throughout this ordeal.

**The Fire**

Witnessing all that the Salesians owned were reduced to ashes, Bishop Ferrando was upset at first. Then he composed himself seeing the will of God even in such disastrous event.  When the fire destroyed the house and all that the Salesians possessed there, he said: "Don't be afraid! Easter is preceded by Good Friday. Christ has risen indeed! The Cathedral and the studentate will rise in glory." He placed his trust in God and in His providential care. He went ahead to build a magnificent Cathedral which stands as a witness to his unfailing faith and trust in God.

**World War II**

Italy joined the War on 10 June 1940. Great tension and fear gripped all, especially Bishop Ferrando, as he fought World War I and knew the consequences of a War of such magnitude. He was shattered and visibly moved when the missionaries were taken to concentration camps. Only a handful of priests were available to serve the needs of the vast mission area. On such occasion too, placing his trust in God, he carried on his work with undaunted courage.

**Earth quake of 1950**

The earthquake of 1950 was another occasion when Bishop Ferrando remained steadfast in faith as he realized that everything depended on God.

**Refugees**

In 1964 when there was an influx of refugees from Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) to Garo Hills, Bishop Ferrando put his trust in God and plunged himself into relief work. He convened a meeting of the priests and heads of the institutions and asked them to come to the rescue of the refugees and serve them in the camps. He personally visited these camps and made sure that all that was needed for the wellbeing of the people was provided. He made sure that all those who served the refugees were also taken care of. On occasions such as these, he was always calm and serene, for he had strong faith in the God whom he served.

**Departure from India**

This was perhaps the saddest event in the life of Bishop Ferrando. He had to leave for good the people and the place he loved most. Leaving his beloved India, his country of adoption, was indeed heart-rending. However, the pains of that parting did not disturb the habitual serenity of his soul. He knew how to control and overcome his feelings by his total abandonment into the hands of God. "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Job 1: 21

Bishop T. Resto, sdb while speaking on the characteristics of Bishop Ferrando pointed out his great faith in the following lines. "He was a man of great faith: faith in God and trust in his own missionaries; faith in his own efforts. Even in the most trying times, he was always cheerful, because he knew that God never abandon those who trust in Him. With his own co-workers he always showed that he fully trusted them and has faith in their undertakings.

Fr. John Kalapuraputhenpura, sdb describes in moments of darkness be it interior or exterior he testified his faith heroically: "All through his life he had hard situations to face - fire, war, refugee problems, Foreign Missionaries going back, few personnel, internment of his Missionaries in consecration camp and so on. Yet he was a man of faith. On one occasion during the procession of Mary Help of Christians he blessed the rain and was able to stop till they had the procession in good weather.”

**Hope**

The Theological virtue of hope helps one to long for eternal life for which one is created. Even in moments of difficult and adverse circumstances of life Bishop Ferrando placed his hope and trust of him in God which never failed him. This was very evident in his life as a young seminarian when he was called upon to serve his country during the World War I. He kept his hope high that he would return to his seminary to resume his studies in preparation for the priesthood. The young soldier lived happily even in the midst of a hopeless situation because he was interiorly nourished with hope to be able to attend his mission of life that he cherished in his heart.

He was an icon of hope to his formees whom he trained in the Novitiate for long ten years. Although he came to India to be a front line missionary he accepted his appointment of him as Novice Master with much hope that God will make use of him in the manner He pleased.

Sr. Philomena Dahanga testified to the life of hope that sustained Bishop Ferrando in and through the thick and thin of his life: "He had hoped that everything will turn out for the good of those who loved and obeyed God. He hoped in the promises of God and in the reward of eternal life.”

Speaking about the “Good Friday Fire", Bishop Ferrando said :"The hand that struck us down will also raise us up. He manifested concretely the virtue of hope in the daily living of his life and in various circumstances. One can notice the following characteristics in his practice of hope:

**Bishop Ferando exhibited trust** in the goodness and mercy of God. He was able to get the best out of all the unfortunate events that took place in his life. He was hopeful that the church in the Northeast India which was like a mustard seed would grow gradually to a mighty tree despite the many difficulties, persecutions, failures and sufferings because he had tremendous trust in God whom he loved immensely.

**Bishop Ferrando always maintained serenity of spirit** in spite of the trials that he experienced in his life. Events like the destruction of Our Lady's House, World War II, interment of the missionaries in concentration camp, paucity of funds, the earthquake of 1950, Chinese Aggression, etc.  were moments of great trial for Bishop Ferrando. In all these circumstances, Bishop Fernando maintained the serenity which was the fruit of childlike confidence in God.  "The strength of his character and his singular ability for taking initiatives in difficult situations were all inscribed in his serene composure as that of the Holy Founder Don Bosco himself,” opined Giuseppe Cardinal Siri of Genova during the funeral oration

**Bishop Ferrando had a tremendous trust in the providence of God** for economic and material needs. This was very well depicted in all that he said and did. When Our Lady's House was reduced to a heap of ashes, Bishop Ferrando wrote: "However, divine providence did not fail us in that sorrowful night of tragedy. Among the ashes and debris that still blazed, we saw the blooming of the flowers of human solidarity and Christian charity." He knew for certain that his God would never abandon him.

Archbishop Joseph Mittathany attributes the credit of all the missionary activities of the Church in Northeast India so the triple qualities of faith, hope and trust of Bishop Ferrando: "He had tremendous hope. The whole of the Church of Northeast was entrusted to him but with great hope he went on. He had to manage solely the missionary activities of the Church. If he did not have tremendous faith, hope and trust in the Lord he would not have been able to undertake the great work of the Church". "Bishop Ferrando demonstrated the virtue of hope especially in his hopeful waiting for the Lord's call with such detachment from earthly things. Hope shone in him as he advanced in age. He edified those who lived with him.”

Time and gain Bishop Ferrando wrote to his spiritual daughters as a means of training them in virtues. The following extract from his letter to the sisters and novices highlight the importance of Christian hope: "Let nothing trouble you, we are the children of God who loves you. Think of the great happiness which Jesus has prepared for us. Our Lord said to the Apostles after the resurrection: "I ascend to your Father and to my Father, to your God and to my God." It means that His victory is ours, His Father is our Father. His resurrection, our resurrection. We are one with Jesus! This is the foundation of our joy.

Bishop Ferrando made use of several opportunities that came on his way to him in order to nurture the virtue of hope both in his life and in the lives of those whom he came in contact with. During his early childhood, Bishop Ferrando learned to practice the virtue of hope from his parents. The life in the seminary in Italy, life as a soldier during World War I and life in Northeast India shouldering various responsibilities like the assistant of the novices, novice master, rector and Bishop, Ferrando had ample occasions to practice the virtue of hope. He was also able to instill the virtue of living hope in others. His hope never failed him because he always trusted in God's providence. In his discourses, homilies and other writings, Bishop Ferrando dealt with the theme of hope. Many of the letters that he wrote to his daughters manifest the sense of hope that he practiced: "Ask the sisters and novices to storm heaven with their prayers that we may succeed in our plans.” In another letter he wrote: "I will pray to Our Lady she is rich enough also for you." On another occasion, Bishop Ferrando exclaimed: "Oh, in the sufferings of this world remember the great reward which Jesus has prepared for you.” In this way, we can conclude that Bishop Ferrando was a person who nurtured hope and at the same time instilled the same among those he ministered.

Pastoral letters and other writings of Bishop Ferrando expressed his ardent hope in God. "God has always taken care of His Church. We trust in God without reserve. If God is with us, who can harm us? God is our Good Shepherd. He will continue to lead his sheep. So fear nothing." In fact, when Bishop Ferrando had to visit his flocks in the villages he had to wade through several rivers or rivulets and often face inclement weather. At times, he came across wild animals and spent sleepless nights in huts for fear of them. In moments of material deprivations, he trusted in a God who would look after his affairs for he served a God who was rich and generous to those who served him faithfully depending totally upon Him.

**Charity**

"Love God and have an ardent charity towards other novices and neighbors." Bishop Ferrando once advised a group of Novices.

**Charity towards God**

Bishop Ferrando held in high esteem the Christian values ​​above all other interests. He practiced them in his life and encouraged others to emulate them.  Rev Fr. N.J.  Kenny sdb narrated an incident in the life of Bishop Ferrando. One day the Deputy Commissioner of Shillong came to the office of Bishop Ferrando and told him that he had ordered to burn a church in one of the villages. When Bishop Ferrando heard this he was very angry. He asked: "You ordered to burn the church!" He rose from his chair, opened the door and ordered him out.  The man silently went out. Such was Bishop Ferrando's love for God and his Church.

Bishop Ferrando manifested great love for God throughout his life. While he stayed in Genova-Quarto, Italy, every week, during the meditation, he used to go to an old priest of our community to make his confession every week without fail, in reparation for his own sins.  He also spent a considerable amount of time before the Blessed Sacrament in the church.  Besides, seeking blessings from Jesus, he spent part of this time atoning for his own sins and the sins of others. He often recommended others to love God fervently which would help them not to commit sin.

Bishop Ferrando wrote to his daughters "Everything is good for those who love God and seek Him, who is our unique treasure and possession. Nothing must bind us to the world in order to fly higher and higher. If there is a chain which binds, it is the chain of Christ, that is to say, his love. Let the chain of Christ bind us in the heart and soul for the community of faith, hope and charity.

Bishop Ferrando was saddened when he learnt about the theft of the Sacred Host with the ciborium from the chapel at St. Mary's Convent, Barpeta Road, Assam in December 1961. He exhorted the sisters and novices to make reparation for the sacrilegious act. He wrote “the sad event made our heart bleed.  As an act of reparation, I exhort you, for 10 days make the Stations of the Cross in the chapel all together. We shall pray for the offenders and for all the sinners. By remembering the outrages Jesus received at the hands of his enemies, we shall pray "Jesus have mercy on them. Jesus we love you. Jesus we offer you all the acts of reparation the blessed Virgin offered you on Mount Calvary.

**Apostolic commitment** for the extension of the kingdom of God was dear to Bishop Ferrando so that God may be truly loved and praised by all people. The motto that Bishop Ferrando took at the time of his Episcopal ordination was “Apostle of Christ”. It showed his fervor for the spread of the kingdom of God.  The extensive and difficult missionary journeys that Bishop Ferrando undertook in his vast diocese were yet another proof of his commitment to the furthering of the kingdom of God. It was very evident in the life of Bishop Ferrando that he accepted cheerfully fatigue, sickness, sufferings, spiritual desolation, material deprivations, trials and difficulties with resignation in order to accomplish the will of God. As a novice master he would start early in the morning with his novices to the distant villages and come back at noon often fasting.  He accepted sickness and suffering of any kind as the will of God.  Fr. Fabian Vitto said: "Even when he was sick I never found him sad." He instilled apostolic spirit among the novices and wanted them to be great missionaries for the extension of God's kingdom.  He gave full freedom to his priests to do everything possible for the furthering of the kingdom of God.  With this in view, he built churches, boarding schools and even founded the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians.  I have accomplished all these with a single purpose, namely, God's kingdom may be established far and wide.

**The spirit of self-immolation for God** was another characteristic feature of Bishop Ferrando.  Once , during the blessing of the fourteen Stations of the Cross , he said : " l entrust the diocese to Jesus Crucified as a confirmation of my priestly motto , ' On the Cross is salvation . As the new pastor I prayed to Jesus to accept the offering of the immolation of my life for the salvation of souls." He gave a helping hand to all those who approached him for any kind of help, at any time, no matter how busy or how tired he was.  Rev Fr. Anthony Alessi reminisced how Bishop Ferrando was ever ready and available to preach and hear confessions when priests were on holidays, away in mission stations or when they were ill.  Often at the end of a busy day, when tired and preparing to go to bed after supper, he would approach him to hear confessions of a group of people who came to church just then and wanting to return to the villages early in the morning.

Bishop Fernando would make no excuse but stare at him for a few moments and then with a smile he would say that he was going to the church immediately to hear confessions.  He would celebrate two masses on Sundays, preach during another mass when the preacher was not available and would hear confessions.  Thus he gave himself to God's work even at the cost of his own personal comforts.

**Bishop Ferrando made efforts to maintain constant union with God**.  As a man of God, he lived close to Him in prayer and he instinctively shared this spirit, with his novices while he was their novice master and with the clergy during his Episcopal ministry.  In the building up of his diocese and in the founding of his congregation, he was beset with many problems and worries of every sort.  Yet he maintained a calmness of the spirit which was borne out of his deep rooted union with God and a life of prayer.  He had the experience of the Father deep within him.  This was often the source of his energy from him in moments of frustration and trials.  I have attributed all his success to God.

Advising the sisters, Bishop Ferrando once wrote: "The innermost strength of our congregation is within your soul. The leaven that raises the whole mass is the interior life. The greatness and beauty of our congregation is within you Jesus has chosen your heart to be his." throne that you may live always united to him by this spiritual bond which is the grace of God. This inner life is the power and glory of the congregation. As the leaven transforms the flour, so this inner life of union with God will transform your life.  "Whenever Bishop Fernando wrote to his daughters he exhorted them to practice union with God: "Practice union with God by acquiring the habit of sanctifying your work with many ejaculatory prayers, many acts of love for God and by walking in His presence," Another time he wrote : " ALL FOR JESUS ​​" should always be upon your lips . They will turn all your work into prayer ... The courage , strength and fortitude to withstand many trials and remain serene in his person and apostolate is derived from his constant union with God. Fr. Fabian Vitto, who spent one and a half years with Bishop Ferrando in the community at Genova - Quarto, summed up the life of Bishop Ferrando as union with God. He had a joyful spirit- a soul in feast always is the result of his union with God. He imitated Don Bosco who is defined as union with God.

Fr. M. Casarotti made the following remark about Bishop Ferrando: "Whenever, Bishop Ferrando was in Bombay, he would approach me like a child saying  : " Fr . Rector , take me to the sea .  On our way to the sea shore, we would drop in a hotel where there was an Italian.  At those moments of relaxation he was not a Bishop, but a simple familiar man enjoying the simple joys of life in a relaxed mood, fully trusting God.  Reaching the seashore, his face would light up and he would be lost in thoughts.  I have no doubt, those were moments of great communion with his Lord and Master.

"It was very evident in the life of Bishop Ferrando that he cheerfully accepted fatigue, sickness, sufferings, spiritual desolation, material deprivations, trials and difficulties with resignation in order to accomplish the will of God. As novice master, he would start early in the morning with his novices to the distant villages and come back at noon often fasting.He accepted sickness and sufferings of any kind as the will of God. Fr. Fabian Vitto said: "Even when he was sick I never found him sad

**Charity towards Neighbor**

Bishop Ferrando was concerned about the wellbeing of others."  He was very generous in helping the poor and showed himself always full of charity towards them.  Bishop Ferrando was exemplary in the exercise of charity towards others.  He helped a good number of young boys financially for their studies.  Some of these beneficiaries are today's priests while others are well placed in different walks of life.  Many of them have acknowledged in public the help that Bishop Ferrando rendered them.

Three years before his departure to Italy, a Khasi Salesian priest asked for dispensation from priesthood.  This pained Bishop Ferrando very much and he asked him to refer the matter to the Provincial.  He got a dispensation, but ever since he did not have the courage to meet Bishop Ferrando.  But as Bishop was leaving Shillong for good and his car was passing by, this ex-priest rushed to the middle of the road and threw his arms wide open.  Bishop Ferrando alighted from the car.  He talked with him, blessed him and then proceeded to Guwahati.  On the same journey, as the Bishop reached Nongpoh, another ex-priest approached him crying like a baby.  Bishop Ferrando talked to him and consoled him like a father.  In this way Bishop Ferrando was able to overcome unpleasantness situations of life.

He had great capacity to forgive every person no matter what the gravity of the offense was.

Bishop Ferrando's life as a priest and later as a Bishop was one of uninterrupted dedication to the welfare of others.  He was a man for others always and everywhere.  In his visits to the villages and in his instructions to people during liturgical moments, Bishop exhorted everyone to help one another.

The amiability, tenderness, goodness, approachability, availability and understanding of Bishop Ferrando were admirable.  Fr. Fabian Vino wrote: "He was very affable, sweet and at the same time a man of strong character. Already as novice master, on seeing any person walking through the veranda in front of his office or classroom, Fr. Ferrando would immediately excuse himself and go to inquire what the person wanted. Then he would tell the novices or the confreres: "These poor people walk for hours and hours to come and see the Fathers.  Never keep them waiting.  It is quicker to attend to their needs than to explain that you were busy or tell them that it was not the proper time to come or to ask them to wait until the classes were over.  " Even as Bishop , he would leave the dining table to go and attend to the needs of the poor . Fr. Anthony Alessi spoke about Bishop Ferrando : " He was ever ready and available to preach and hear confessions and came in for the ministry when Priests were on holidays or unavailable.  His examples of him were more than a hundred sermons preached.  His personal life of him was the greatest lesson for his novices.  In the various duties and assignments of his ministry he manifested constantly generous will, spirit of work and sacrifice. Fortitude of spirit in the face of difficulties is praise worthy.  Without counting fatigue and in a spirit of sacrifice, he always showed great attraction for the missions especially the most difficult ones, giving constant example of abnegation, charity and compassion for the people.

Bishop Ferrando had preferential love for the poor, particularly for the abandoned and neglected women, girls and children of the villages.  The aim of founding the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians was to look after them.  Again, the establishment of a convent and school at Malki.  Shillong, then known as a notorious place, speaks eloquently of his love for the poor.  Speaking to the sisters Bishop Ferrando said: "What strikes you in this village is the great multitude of children. Malki is a poor village, of poor people who work hard day and night to keep their body and soul together. Our Lord Jesus Christ is very pleased to be here and has entrusted this garden to your care, to your attention. So you must be glad to go around like the Blessed Virgin to villages like Malki where there are so many poor children and so many needy people.

Bishop Ferrando wanted to start the convent at Malki, the priests objected to it and proffered several reasons: It is situated on a hillock, one could reach the place only on foot, it is a notorious place, any and every unpleasant incident springs from here, there will be no safety for the sisters etc. The priests felt that the sisters would have to face problems from the people.  They wanted the convent to be built at the fool hills where the sisters would have easy approach, a better atmosphere to live away from the interference of the people and above all they would be safe.

But Bishop Ferrando wanted the sisters to live in the midst of the people to care for their souls by visiting and instructing them in their families.  He wanted the sisters to begin a school for the education of the village children, which in turn, would afford the sisters their livelihood.  He wanted the integral development of the people.  He asked the sisters to run a dispensary to ensure health for the ailing.  He exhorted the sisters to show love, care and concern for the children in whatever way possible and bring them up, teaching them the values ​​of Jesus, and above all, teaching them to love Jesus.

On 2 February 1976 when Mother Mary Rose and the author visited Bishop Ferrando in Genova he spoke about the children and the school at Malki.  This convent was very dear to Bishop Ferrando because of the great number of poor children.  While accompanying the visitors to the Genova railway station, Bishop looked out and saw a house built of stone.  He turned to the author and said: "Look, that building looks like the one in Malki, isn't it?" Tears welled up in her eyes as the author looked at the building and recalled Bishop Fernando's love for the poor and his fond memories of Shillong .

Every year, on the day of their First Communion in the Cathedral, the children were given refreshments.  Bishop Ferrando would move among the children with ease and comfort talking to them.  The children thronged around him catching his hand and kissing his ring.  His face would beam with joy in the company of these innocent children enjoying their refreshments.  He would organize an outing for them every year to Shillong peak.  He himself would accompany them and with the simplicity of a child he would play with them.  Whenever Bishop Ferrando used to climb up to Malki his pockets would be filled with sweets.  When the children greet and swarm around him, he would give them sweets.

On 26 December the feast day of Bishop Ferrando, people would organize games and competitions every year.  The day culminated with a Jing Khawai (festive meal) All the parishioners including children, youth and elders used to take part.  Bishop Ferrando used to enjoy every bit of that day by joining with the people in their merry making.

  By opening day schools and boarding schools, providing fee concessions and free education, establishing charitable dispensaries and distributing the CRS supplies in an organized manner, Bishop Ferrando came to the aid of the poor and needy people.  When there was the influx of the refugees from Bangladesh to Garo Hills, with the help of various institutions, he has had to rescue.

In whatever way he could, he practiced charity towards his clergy.  It was a hard time for him to find finance for the various constructions that were going on and to maintain the existing mission stations.  He spoke appreciatively of the efforts of his missionary priests establishing God's Kingdom.  This was very evident in his books North East India and Chronicles of the Kingdom of God.  He knew how to support his missionaries and get their whole-hearted confidence and cooperation.  He had a listening heart and inquired about their successes and failures and their future plans.  He would tolerate any mistake of his missionaries, even obedience to the rules and the instructions of the Bishop, if he saw that they were done for the promotion of the missionary work.

Bishop Ferrando was gentle and understanding towards those who contradicted and opposed his ideas.  He knew how to forgive his offenders.  Faced with misunderstanding, injuries and hurt feelings he was able to pardon the offenders easily and promptly with a generous heart.  He easily forgot unpleasant things and remembered only good things about people.  He bore up the occasional misunderstanding and problems in a spirit of resignation.  He never made an issue out of them.

All through his life, Bishop Fernando manifested great spirit of sacrifice, dedication and untiring zeal in the service of his flock.  Bishop Ferrando really lived up to the motto of Don Bosco: "Give me souls and take away the rest. His own motto Apostle of Christ 'manifested his thirst for souls. His visits to his flock in the villages far and near was made only with this intention.

**Prudence**

Bishop Ferrando was a man of prudence. It can be gauged from the way he made decisions in matters like choosing his own state of life and in carrying out his duties at various stages of his life. In his relationship with persons of the opposite sex, he was always reserved, simple and sincere. In his pastoral letters and the letters that he wrote to his spiritual daughters, he spoke about the need to practice prudence.

As a Bishop he exercised prudence in selecting the priests for studies abroad and in the appointment of personnel for holding various responsibilities in the Church. In his letter to Sr. Nellie, he wrote: "Exchange milk for rice with the utmost prudence.  "He exercised great prudence while administering the sacrament of reconciliation, offering spiritual direction and in giving corrections to individuals.

**Justice**

Bishop Ferrando was diligent and observant in carrying out his religious duties and practices of piety despite the many apostolic undertakings he was engaged in. He gave the first place to God. Early morning he would be present in the church and in the confessional. Even on birthdays and feast days, he never absented himself. He always attributed the success of his pastoral animation to God. He was well aware of his deficiency and nothingness. He depended totally on God and gave the first place to Him in his life and activities.

He spent long hours in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament from where he drew inspiration and strength for his charitable works for the poor and needy. These were moments of encounter with his Lord and Master. He greatly trusted in God. An article written by Bishop Ferrando published in the Souvenir of the Golden Jubilee of the arrival of Salesians in the Northeast in 1972, entitled, "All is the Blessed Mother's work, Mary Help of Christians, "brings out his filial sentiments of love, praise and gratitude to the Mother of God, for all her maternal assistance for the growth of the Church in Northeast India. He believed that there was an invisible hand of Mary behind every achievement.  Rightly so is the saying that Mary would grant anything that Bishop Ferrando would ask for.  He claimed no honor for himself but attributed all to God and Mother Mary.  He never wanted to be in the limelight but he always lived a very humble and modest life.  He was loyal and just in his relationship with others: superiors, confreres, friends and benefactors. He kept correspondence with them all.

A man who hailed from Rossiglione and served in the army showed the author one of the letters that Bishop Ferrando wrote to him.  It indeed contained a mine of spiritual wealth , About his co - workers , Bishop Ferrando wrote : " I wish to express my gratitude , admiration and love towards my confreres who had been selfless missionaries in Northeast India His book North East India bears testimony to his loyal and just relationship with everyone, paying tribute to each of his missionaries and the catechists who collaborated with him in the expansion of the Church. Ever since he became a member of the Salesian Society, Bishop Ferrando gave abundant proof of his decisive will and constant exercise of both Christian and religious virtues He showed his gratitude to benefactors and colleagues and he kept in touch with them through letters and visited them when ever there was an opportunity and gave them gifts as tokens of his love and gratitude.

**Fortitude**

Bishop Ferrando manifested a sense of fortitude in bearing the difficulties arising from the different life situations with faith and great trust in Jesus and his  blessed Mother . He accepted all the joys and tribulations of his life as coming from the hands of God.  He had an optimistic outlook always and in everything that happened to him.  He was a man of unwavering faith, firm hope and great courage.  He was always calm and composed.  Giuseppe Cardinal Siri of Genova had the following to say about the fortitude of Bishop Ferrando: “Bishop Fernando was blessed with a strong personality.  The War was like a general rehearsal for his future mission work. The strength of his character of him and his singular ability for taking initiatives in difficult situations were all inscribed in his serene composure, as that of the holy Founder Don Bosco.

  There were many occasions during which others observed the fortitude of Bishop Ferrando.  On 10 April 1936 he witnessed the Cathedral and the Salesian house going up in flames.  Great pain and loss inflicted his heart on that painful occasion.  Yet he remained serene, calm and composed offering all this sufferings to the Lord, the Master of his life.  World War II and subsequent internment of his missionaries and the Chinese invasion in 1962 during which the sisters and some of the missionaries had to flee from Assam and go to Calcutta for safety were moments when Bishop Ferrando exhibited great fortitude.  What is admirable in him was his fortitude in the face of uncertainty, doubts, problems and trials of life.  His power of endurance was sustained by faith, courage, confidence and trust in God and in Mary Help of Christians.

**Temperance**

Those aspiring to holiness necessarily have to embrace some form of asceticism.  Bishop Ferrando was not only an ascetic but he instructed his novices and spiritual daughters to achieve sanctity of life through asceticism. He acquired certain mastery over self and natural inclinations.  He overcame his impatience to a great extent and could adjust easily with any unpleasant situation of life.

 Bishop Ferrando's general attitude towards food and drink was one of moderation.  He observed meticulously the fasts and abstinences prescribed by the Church even during his missionary tours.  He used to keep the Eucharistic fast very strictly.  He never carried food with him, no matter how distant the village or tiring the journey was.

**Discipline**

In Genova-Quarto his dispositions and general attitude were one of a fervent religious and a good Salesian.  He did show serenity of spirit, patience, conformity and abandonment to the will of God during the last years of his life.  The virtue of discipline shone in his life.  Fr. Fabian Vitto spoke about these during his conversation with the author in Rome on 22 September 1992. Speaking about Bishop Ferrando, Francesco Grasso mentions: "What a wonderful man, what an example! In the house he is like a good novice, asking permissions, depending upon the superiors, following the time-table, helping in every way especially in conducting all liturgical celebrations." This is how the saintly Bishop Ferrando spent his last days in Genova-Quarto.

**Tolerance**

Bishop Ferrando was able to see God in persons belonging to other denominations and religions.  It must be kept in mind that Bishop Ferrando started his missionary apostolate not in a Catholic ambience and not even in a Christian environment.  He was a friend of all.  He wanted to do good to all.  The civil authorities and other Christian denominations were very friendly with him and admired his competence in leading the Church proficiently.

The attitude towards those who contradicted and opposed the ideas and opinions of Bishop Ferrando or in moments of misunderstandings, injuries and hurt feelings was one of pardon, acceptance, love and respect.  He readily forgave every offense meted out to him.  It could be stated that Bishop Ferrando practiced the gospel maxim: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become the sons of your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:43b 45a).  He considered everyone as the children of the same Father.

**Chastity**

Bishop Ferrando lived the vow of chastity with great delicacy.  With utmost care he lived up to the expectations that his state of life enjoined with regard to this virtue.  He always exhorted his novices and the sisters of his Congregation to observe virtue of chastity.  His writings amply manifested it "May the Blessed Virgin keep you under her maternal mantle, look upon this immaculate mother, that you may always live like angels of purity in this sad world. In all temptations, in all trials, look at the star of your life, call upon Mary, and always try to be her worthy children.He was very delicate and decent in words, conversations, demeanour, looks, gestures, friendships, writings and readings. Nothing contrary is heard about his mood of behaviour with regard to this virtue. Everyone who lived with him had high esteem for the exemplary life that he lived.

**Poverty**

Bishop Ferrando practiced the virtue of poverty in his personal life. The linens that he used were very simple his bed room and office in the Salesian House in Genova - Quarto were barely furnished.  He possessed nothing.  His confreres told him to purchase a car for his use which he did not.  He must have thought purchasing a car needed money, then a driver to take him around for whom he had to pay a salary Whatever money he received from his benefactors was sent to the needy priests in the mission stations in Shillong.

**Bishop Ferrando was detached** from earthly goods He was not at all attached to material things and had very little things as his personal possession.  The Bishop's House in Shillong in which Bishop Ferrando lived was a very simple building constructed with ordinary materials and had limited space with simple furniture.  Everyone who had seen the Bishop's House can vouch for this.  He could have built a palatial house with better facilities but for Bishop Ferrando there were much more important and worthy things to accomplish.  He gave greater value to building churches, boarding schools and hospitals to give wholesome life and service to the people in the villages and thus spread God's kingdom among them.

  The following anecdote was narrated to the author by Angela Pizzorni, the wife of Gianni Pizzorni, the nephew of Bishop Ferrando.  One day, Bishop Ferrando went to their house wearing an old and worn-out pair of shoes.  Seeing the condition of his shoes from him, they took him to a shop and bought for him a new pair of shoes. He accepted it gladly.  During his next visit to the family, he wore the same pair of old shoes.  On inquiring about the new pair of shoes, he narrated to them that while he was going home, he saw an old man wearing a pair of torn shoes and he gave the new pair of shoes to him.  If he was a man attached to material things, he would not have made such a sacrifice.

Fr. Fabian Vitto commented about Bishop Ferrando: "He was very poor. His office had very few things. His room was very simple... He did not want to be treated differently from his confreres. One year during Christmas the sisters presented a very good blanket to Archbishop Hubert D Rosario of Shillong, the successor of Bishop Ferrando. When they went to his room to prepare the bed, they were surprised to see very old bed sheets and blankets. These were the rugs that came in the parcels from England Commenting on them, Archbishop Hubert told them that those were the things used by Bishop Ferrando. The sisters were moved by the virtues of simplicity and poverty manifested by these great Bishops.

He manifested the spirit of evangelical poverty and detachment from the things of this world in his life style. In his poverty, he wanted to resemble the life of Jesus, his Master He educated the sisters on this important virtue through his letters and conferences. He spoke to the sisters: "Jesus was poor and when he was nailed all fled away, but poverty followed him as Jesus died stripped off everything.  We must rejoice when we are detached from everything. " Our small Congregation must imitate the spirit of Bethlehem where there is so much joy, peace and simplicity in the midst of poverty of the manger.  "But remember that we must have poverty in our hearts to be true spouses of Our Lord." "Be always careful about the vow of poverty to imitate the Child Jesus who being rich became poor for our sake.  "" I recommend you always to love the poor children, the sick and to be always poor not only by word, but also by imitating Our Lord Jesus Christ, who had not even a stone where to lay his head.  You must be detached from everything and be very delicate in the observance of poverty, that you may become rich with Jesus.

**Obedience**

Bishop Ferrando practiced the virtue of obedience heroically when he was asked to leave India for good in 1969.  He returned to Italy after 46 years of his stay in Shillong, India.  His obedience to him was complete and unquestioning, Bishop Ferrando instructed and educated the sisters, novices and seminarians on the virtue of obedience through letters, conferences and talks.  Bishop Ferrando's life of obedience was much more than many sermons preached or articles written on obedience.

To the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians Bishop Ferrando wrote: "In our obedience we must not be moved by natural feelings, but by the spirit of faith, seeing Our Lord Jesus Christ under the appearance of our Superior. It is very hard for our pride to judge and act in this manner, but to be a religious is to sacrifice our will for the love of God, in submitting ourselves to the authority of God, that is, to our superiors.

Again, on 14 August 1942, Bishop Ferrando wrote the following to the novices: "A novice who follows the example of Jesus is a model of obedience.  It is through obedience that we overcome our pride, deny our will and please Our Lord A humble obedient novice is always cheerful, glad of her vocation because she is carried in the arms of obedience like a child in the arms of its mother.  The road which leads straight to heaven is Obedience Road.

Bishop Ferrando had the habit of asking suggestions from others and taking into consideration the piece of advice given by superiors, friends and confreres before making decisions.  As a Bishop of a vast diocese, he would not do things on his own.  He received with docility and reverence instructions from superiors and in matters of importance he never failed to seek advice from serious and prudent persons. This was evident especially when he consulted wise persons like Archbishop Perier, RNDM Provincial and Rev. Fr. E. Merio, Director General of the Holy Childhood, Paris, when he was thinking of starting an indigenous congregation. He also took advice from Mons.  E. Bars, Frs.  Joseph Arokia swamy, R. Dal Zovo, E. Gutierrez and Fr.N.J.  Kenny.

Bishop Ferrando accepted in obedience to the various responsibilities entrusted to him always seeking to do the will of the Father, such as Assistant of novices in a spirit of obedience and humility, Novice Master accepting it as the will of God - Fiat, Bishop of Krishnagar in a spirit of obedience and sacrifice, Bishop of Shillong in a spirit of obedience, retirement and return to Italy he accepted as the will of God in an act of immolation. Nobody could fathom the depth of his feelings when he had to return to Italy. Yet, he bowed to the will of God, even though his heart rends in sorrow, Accepting the will of God was his law of life, no matter how much it cost him.  In all this he walked the footsteps of his master, Jesus.

**Humility**

One's true greatness lies in humility the mother of all virtues.  This was the case with Bishop Ferrando.  He always recognized greatness in every person and in everything they accomplished.  It was his great humility that enabled him to write to Fr. Berruti on 28 April 1947 requesting him to find another Bishop in his place.  What induced him to write this letter was that he upheld the good of the souls and the honor of the Congregation rather than his position of him as Bishop.  The virtue of humility was very dear to him and he exhorted the sisters to walk in the way of humility as our Lord did.

  In the foreword to the book **From the Heart of a Father who Loves You**, Bishop Orestes Marengo sdb wrote: " On one occasion when Mons. Mathias and I were traveling to Guwahati he said the following words to me: " I wish all of you could be as humble and obedient as your Rector Fr. Ferrando, May your Founder's great humility, chastity, obedience and simplicity guide your Congregation to ever greater missionary success and religious perfection!  Bishop Ferrando witnessed to evangelical simplicity and humility by his manner of life which endeared him to the people.  They admired his simplicity of life and his dealings with the poor and lowly.  These virtues adorned his personality.

Bishop Ferrando was not a lover of honors and public recognition.  However, he received a number of honors from others especially from high dignitaries for his valor in the battlefield.  He was not fond of seeking name and fame as these mattered nothing to him, instead he renounced everything for the sake of the Kingdom-for his Master Jesus.  Those who had the opportunity of living with him found him simple in his life style and humble in his demeanor.  Extracts from his letters give ample proofs to his love for humility: "A humble novice does not grumble or put on a gloomy face when she is corrected... A humble novice does not work or act in order to obtain honor, esteem, popularity or praise but to please God and seek the glory of God." "Don't try to do miracles or wonderful works but learn to be meek and humble... Be simple with the people, your simplicity and availability will bring people closer to you and people will love you more and more, which will help you to love God and His people ... May God bless you and Mary Help of Christians help you to acquire the two great virtues of simplicity and humility.

**Mother Mary in the life of Bishop Ferrando**

Our Blessed Mother found a place in the heart of Stephen Ferrando from his childhood. He inherited it from his parents. He developed a tender love for Mother Mary As he grew in age and wisdom his love for the Madonna kept growing. He lived this filial devotion all through his life attributing to the heavenly Mother the fruitfulness of his apostolate.  He owed everything to her and believed that Mother Mary whom he loved and revered had a significant place in his life.  She greatly influenced his life.  He attributed to Mary Help of Christians his safe return to the seminary from the battlefield of World War I. His letters from him from the battlefield bear this out.

He founded our congregation and wanted that "Mary Help of Christians" was added to its name.  I have placed the congregation under her care and protection.  He writes, "I am sure that in our congregation you will continue the spirit upon which the blessed Virgin founded this congregation that it must be the congregation of charity, for the little children, for the sick, for the aged, the women, and by your charity you will draw all people to Our Lord Jesus Christ. Bishop Ferrando inculcated devotion to Mother Mary under the title of Mary Help of Christians as taught by Don Bosco who took her as the principal patrons of the Salesian Society. Don Bosco - performed many miracles through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians. Bishop Ferrando's love for her enabled him to achieve the impossible through her intercession. He built the Shillong cathedral and many other churches under the name of Mary Help of Christians. The founding of the congregation of the MSMHC was another act of love for the mother of Jesus. “ May the Blessed Virgin Help of Christianswho is always the mother and superior of the congregation stretch her maternal mantle over you," he wrote.  It was his desire that we observe the 24 "of May in a worthy manner." The 24 "May is drawing near. We must consider this day as the most beautiful day of the year because it is the feast day of our heavenly Mother, the patrons of our congregation. The 24" of May must be for us: Thus the day of gratitude, day of love and day of devotion.  Thus, Bishop Ferrando shared his love of Mary Help of Christians with the MSMHC enriching them with the love of Mother Mary whom he loved himself deeply.

Having had a peep into the virtues of Bishop Ferrando, I would like to share a few more of his outstanding qualities that will enable us to compare his personality with the Divine Master whom he followed very closely, imitated genuinely and served faithfully.  He was a reflection of God's love and goodness. Many are the qualities that he possessed in imitation of the One whom he chose as the lodestar in his life's journey.

The outstanding qualities of Bishop Ferrando can be summed up in the following: **His personal love for Jesus** in the Word and in the Holy Eucharist in whose presence he was lost and experienced Jesus within him, around him and in all those who came into his life.  **His filial and tender love for Mary**, the Immaculate Help of Christians was something unique.  He achieved nothing from her without her help from her.  He had a **passionate love for the missions**.  Whenever there was an opportunity he would be out in the village with his people.  The name he gave to the congregation be founded speaks eloquently about his love of him for the missions.  He wanted his sisters to be always and everywhere Missionaries.  **His personal love of him for Don Bosco**, his spiritual Father whose motto he had made his own and worked zealously to save souls speaks volumes of his love for Don Bosco and the Salesian spirit.  Don Bosco's love for the young was a passion for Bishop Ferrando.  No matter what position he held, he was always a Salesian in his speech, actions and life style.  **He had a tender and compassionate love** for the people in whose presence he felt quite at home - be it in the church premises, in the villages, in their homes or during festivals.

**His availability** to all those who needed his help at any moment was admired by all-the priests, brothers, sisters people, and especially the poor who knocked at his door who were special objects of his love and concern.  Another characteristic that was outstanding in him was his **love for local culture**.  Bishop Ferrando, by preserving and promoting the local culture, was able to get to the heart of the people with the message of God's love and peace.  He approached the people, especially the tribals with love, and labored to preserve all that was good, for example, their dances and songs, at the same time to utilize all this in the work of evangelization.  Bishop Ferrando had **tremendous love for the poor**.  The poor and the neglected always enjoyed certain privileges such as financial support for their education, payment of hospital bills, and food stuff for the poor.  The opening of boarding schools for the poor children of villages in the plains and the hills is another testimony of his love for the poor.  He not only loved the poor but identified himself with the poor by living a poor and simple life.  He was a man of **great sacrifice**.  He was ever available to lend a helping hand to anyone in need, be it at any time of the day or no matter how busy he was or how tired after the day's work.  He was there to render any help that was needed.  He had remarkable love for saints such as **St. Joseph, St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, St. Mary Dominica Mazzarello** that he enlisted them as the patron saints of the congregation and exhorted the members to have great devotion to these saints.  In his letters to the sisters and novices he would elicit their virtues and qualities and would recommend them to emulate these as they will indicate a sure way to heaven.  By his very life he enriched all those who lived with him.

**The Fame of Sanctity of Bishop Ferrando**

In the exercise of Christian virtues, Bishop Ferrando manifested maturity, constancy, perseverance, promptness, generosity and heroism.  Because of these virtues the superiors could entrust him with delicate and important responsibilities from the beginning such as master of novices, rector of studentate and Theologate.  These virtues were persistent in him even in difficult, painful and hard situations of life and he perfected his life to achieve greater things for God and his kingdom.  The personal contact with Bishop Ferrando and whatever learnt from others about the holiness of his life strongly urged the author to desire the canonization of Bishop Ferrando.  He is indeed a holy man!  The people the author encountered in the Northeast and in his village in Rossiglione, Italy, the priests who have known him, the priests in the community at Genova-Quarto with whom Bishop Ferrando lived the nine years after his retirement of him speak highly of the holiness of Bishop Ferrando.  He is a man of God, who lived in union with God always.  "Those who knew Bishop Ferrando from close quarters can testify that he was a man of God. For him God was not a distant reality or an occasional presence, but was an ever present reality in his life. He lived in God and with God.  This union with God enabled him to have absolute trust in God that enabled him to carry out many formidable tasks.

In 1984 when St. Bridget Jacob and the author met his Excellency, Cardinal Lourdu swamy, the then Secretary of Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in his Office de him in Rome, he inquired about Bishop Stephen Ferrando and Bishop Orestes Marengo.  During the conversation the Cardinal said : " These are living saints , you must see to the process of canonizing them later . " The author was very much surprised to hear such a statement from Cardinal Lourduswamy , one of the great persons in Rome who knew these Bishops as they met him on several occasions for the various needs of their dioceses.  Bishop Orestes Marengo was alive at that time but Bishop Stephen Ferrando had already gone for his eternal reward on 20 June 1978. The author took to heart the exhortation of Cardinal Lourduswamy.  At an opportune time, inspired by those who knew Bishop Ferrando well and his holiness of life like people in the villages, Cathechist in the diocese of Shillong, priest and other religious the MSMHC went ahead collecting data about the life and virtues of Bishop Ferrando.  Archbishop Dominic Jala sdb , Archbishop of Shillong , set up a tribunal for the Diocesan process of Bishop Ferrando in the Archdiocese of Shillong .  Many of the Salesians, friends and the people of Shillong and Assam spoke about the holiness of Bishop Ferrando.  The impressions about Bishop Ferrando given by some of his  close collaborators are given below:

1. Fr. Silvanus Sngi sdb: "Bishop Ferrando was a holy man. We cannot explain many things which he did without this key to his personality. His holiness of life accounts for the extraordinary growth which he himself witnessed, by the emergence of 3 other dioceses during his time.The growth of the congregation which he founded speaks volumes of the sanctity of the Founder We must become holy in the way he became holy through cheerfulness, optimism, love, availability, simplicity, austerity and sacrifice "
2. Fr. John Topno sdb : " Bishop Ferrando was holy and simple . Holiness and simplicity shone out in his personality . "
3. Fr. Cherian Moolamattom : " In spite of the many problems associated with the administration of a vast and difficult diocese , Bishop Ferrando was happy and cheerful and made everyone happy, because he was a great saintly Bishop.
4. Bro. Jerome Lyngdoh sdb: "Bishop Ferrando was a holy man.  He devoted himself to charity and prayer.  Many times I found him praying in the Cathedral right infront of the blessed sacrament.
5. Bro.  Paul Sebastian sdb : " Anyone who came in contact in front of the Blessed Sacrament . " with Bishop Ferrando could experience holiness exude from him .  In 1956 we had the Mahasabha in Dhekiajuli and it began to rain heavily.  I noticed Bishop raising his eyes to heaven and moving his lips.  After the Mass I asked the Bishop "What prayer did you say to stop the rain?  He told me what he prayed, "Dear Jesus, have pity on this poor people." And believe it or not the rain stopped at once and the Mass continued to the great joy of all.  Bishop Ferrando taught us by his example.  He never preached to us on holiness.  It was enough to see him and live with him. Aman who influences people with virtues gets close to the heart of the people.  But for me the greatest sign of holiness is the way the congregation that he founded grew by leaps and bounds during these past 50 years.  I have no doubt that he is a saint and that one day the Church will officially declare him so.
6. " Fr. Albinus lawphniaw : " I was privileged to be a sacristan in the Cathedral for six years .  By my own eyes I have noticed and seen that our dear Bishop not less than three times a day came and prayed in front of the Blessed Sacrament.  I could see him praying devoutly and at times, he seems to be thinking something of heaven.  His lips were constantly moving , he must have been constantly pronouncing the holy names of Jesus and Mary. I have been greatly influenced by the holiness and prayer life of my good superior.
7. Mr. J.D. Pohrman : " In between his missionary activities Bishop Ferrando made a point that he must never miss his prayers.  While praying he seemed to have a serious dialogue with God and also with Our Lady from whom he got the inspiration to work with holiness and humility to win more and more souls for Christ.  "
8. Fr. Alberto Lorenzelli : " Among the Salesians there is a sense of esteem and veneration .  I seek the intercession of Bishop Ferrando.
9. Dr. Gian Luigi Sfrondrini:" The fame of sanctity of Bishop of Ferrando began to increase after the transportation of the mortal remains.  Every family in Rossiglione has his books, pictures and prayers.  I think of an incident where I experienced the intervention and protection of Bishop Ferrando during one of my journeys.  I was saved from a fatal accident and at that moment I was thinking of the Servant of God.  "
10. Fr. Fabian Vitto sdb , Genova - Quarto , Italy : All through our journey he spoke of spirituality , sanctity , Don Bosco. He was a very spiritual man . He set a wonderful example for us in the community .

In the following years after his death and eventual transportation of his mortal remains to Shillong Bishop Ferrando's fame of sanctity has been increasing and spreading People from different villages keep visiting the tomb seeking his intercession and exhibiting their love and respect for the man of God and to thank him for the favors they received through his intercession. His memory and fame of sanctity is diffused strongly and is alive among the people of Meghalaya, and at his native place in Rossiglione, Italy and among the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians. The people in Meghalaya and Rossiglione , the sisters and their family members have been receiving favors through the intercession of Bishop Ferrando .

Bishop Ferrando lived a very humble and simple life possessing virtues of different grades.  He was considered as a man who lived the beatitudes.  He was a spiritual leader to his priests, religious, catechists and a true pastor and shepherd to his flock of him.  He was ever available to anyone who needed him at any time of the day.  He was a man of Eucharistic piety.  People loved to participate in his Holy Mass as they felt that he was immersed in the mystery of the Eucharist as he celebrated it with great devotion.  He spent long hours in prayer gazing at the tabernacle, communicating with the Lord.  People who observed him state that his countenance revealed that he received responses from the Lord.  In his letters he exhorted sisters to be Eucharistic souls and to make frequent visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament

Bishop Ferrando instilled love for the Pope and the Church by frequently referring to the teachings of the Pope.  Pope's day was a yearly feature during the time of Bishop Ferrando and it was celebrated with great pomp and honour.  People and children in the school looked forward to for this day of celebration.

There is a bust of Bishop Ferrando put up in the Novitiate at Mawroh, Shillong.  The road from Ladmawroh to Umschkhlur a distance of 1.20 kilometers is named as Stephen Memorial Road after Bishop Ferrando.  This road was ceremoniously inaugurated by Shri.  F.S.  Khaji , the MLA of Mawlai Constituency in the presence of PWD officials, Mr. Embha Syiemlich MDC, Mr. Maristella Umdor then Provincial , the sisters , teachers , students and village people.  A street is named after him in Rossiglione.

  Bishop Ferrando wrote North East India and The Chronicles of the Kingdom of God.  He was a regular writer in Salesian Bulletin published from the Salesian Center in Italy.  He wrote a number of letters to the superiors, sisters and novices.  These were compiled and published under the title From the Heart of a Father who Loves You on the occasion of the Birth Centenary of Bishop Ferrando.

**Favors Received**

The author has come across persons who have received graces and favors through the intercession of Bishop Ferrando.  A number of instances have been recorded where Bishop Ferrando proved himself a powerful intercessor before the Lord for his spiritual daughters and the people whom he loved and served.  These could be categorized as cure of physical illness, settlement of marriage, conversion of sinners, recovery of stolen articles, gift of children etc.  The following are some of them.

Blistilla L. Mawlong : " I was sick in the month of April 1999. I was operated in Down Town hospital in Guwahati , Assam on 12 May 1999 as I was suffering from hydrolyst lungs . I prayed a novena in honor of Bishop Ferrando during the time of my sickness. After the operation I had to take bed rest for three months and could not eat anything. I was in despair but God helped me through the prayers of Bishop Ferrando. Slowly I started to eat and tried to walk. I kept interceding to him and I was slowly getting healed of my sickness. From the month of August 1999, I felt a little better. So I went Peachlands by myself and I prayed at the tomb of Bishop Ferrando. I thanked Bishop Ferrando for his powerful intercession "Now I am alright. I stopped taking medicine for the last nine months. Still I keep interceding to him that he will bless me throughout my life especially for good health" (Pendengumiong, Mairang, Meghalaya, 21 April 2000).

Martha Myrthong "My Uncle Krekorius Symlich, since 1990, never went to church due to some misunderstanding with the church leaders. He also stopped teaching in the mission school. On hearing this news, my heart was full of sorrow and I could not believe that my uncle, a fervent Catholic would stop going to church.  But my faith kept me strong and I prayed to our Founder to enlighten the heart and mind of my uncle.  My humble prayer was heard.  To my surprise and great joy in December 1997 I received the news that my uncle started going to church once again and he allowed three of his children to receive the first Holy Communion on Christmas day.  On hearing this news my heart was overwhelmed with joy and I went to the tomb of our beloved Founder in St. Margaret's Convent to thank him for the favor I received.  There are many other graces which I received through the intercession of our Founder" (Resurrection Convent, Sonaighuli, Guwahati, 8 November 1998).

Joseph Varkey: "My name is Joseph Varkey and my wife's name is Ancy Philip.  We hail from Kerala, but live in the UK.  We got married in 1989;  we could not get a child even after three years of our marriage.  After three years we went to a doctor, who gave some medicine for both of us, which we took for nearly one year.  Even after the medication, my wife could not conceive and so we decided to pray to Jesus.  In the meantime, one day my sister, a nun working in Meghalaya, told us about Bishop Ferrando and asked us to seek his intercession.  In 1995, Ancy became pregnant and we got a baby girl whom we named Joslin.  Praise the Lord and glory to Jesus!  After a year, we also got a baby boy whose name is Jobin.  We believe that it was through the intercession of Bishop Ferrando that we received these graces.  We still pray through Bishop's intercession for our daily needs, (34 Mile Lane, Harble town, Canterbury, UK. 25.04.2002)

**Recovery of stolen Crucifix from the Tomb of the Founder**: Bah Stephan was closely associated with the Salesians of Don Bosco and in particular with Bishop Stephen Ferrando.  Stephan had 8 children, the youngest son turned out to be a cause of concern for the rest of the family members One of his daughters narrates the incident.

"One fine morning I took my brother along with me to St. Margaret's convent, Peachlands, to pray at the tomb of Bishop Stephen Ferrando for his conversion. After spending an hour in prayer at the tomb, I got out of the chapel. Imet Mr. C. Kharpuri and she spontaneously invited me for a cup of tea. My brother was still inside the chapel praying. When no one was around in the chapel he took the cross from the tomb, hid it in his shawl and walked home quietly Without any suspicion, I too went home on my own At mid day a group of sisters from Peachlands, came to my house and inquired indirectly about the missing cross from the tomb. My brother understood his evil act and when the sisters asked him he answered: 'why do you look at me with fishy eyes? sisters felt embarrassed and left the house with a heavy heart. The sisters did not give up their search. They prayed a chain of novena to get back the missing cross. Months passed without any further news.  One day a sister who used to visit our family occasionally came to our house and informed that the cross was found in one of the houses in our neighbourhood.  On inquiry, it was found that my brother had sold the cross to a lady (Mrs. X) in the village for Rs 200.A visitor to Kong B's house asked about the cross, as this type of cross is usually found in churches or religious houses.  Finally it was found that Mrs. X bought the cross from my own younger brother.  He had stolen it to sell and buy alcohol which he did without any prick of conscience.  I went to the house and spoke to her about the cross.  She immediately agreed to return the cross to the sisters.  Kong B, my brother and I took the cross with love and joy and handed over the missing cross to the sisters at Peachlands.  We gave it in the hands of Rev. Mother Elizabeth Packumala.  After saying a thanksgiving prayer she asked my brother to place the cross on the tomb to the joy of everyone.  Everybody beamed with joy and gratitude to God for the miracle Bishop Ferrando worked for us.  This took place exactly a year after theft.  Bishop Ferrando did intercede for us to get back the lost cross that adorned his tomb.  Thank you Jesus, praise you Jesus for the wonders you work in our lives!

  " Sr. Sabina M. Marak : " My nephew Tejce N. Marak was born at Rongjeng on 9 March 1977. In November 1988 , he had an attack of epilepsy .  It used to occur up to 15 times in some days.  He suffered for two long years and many doctors treated him without any improvement.  At last I started to pray to our beloved Bishop Ferrando and through his intercession I obtained great blessings from the Lord.  My nephew was completely cured.  By 1991 he could join the school again.  He became a brilliant student and used to participate in science exhibition at district level.  He stood first in every competition and in studies.  Doctors certified that he is completely cured.  My words are inadequate to express my gratitude to God and our Founder.  I will praise him all my life " ( Rongjeng - Garo Hills , Meghalaya , 24-04 -1997 ) .

There are people who visit the tomb to pray and seek the intercession of Bishop Ferrando for obtaining graces and favors . The comments the author heard about Bishop Ferrando from many priests and the people of Shillong and Rossiglione is this: "Bishop Ferrando is a holy man.  " A number of priests who lived in the Salesian community at Genova Quarto had the same comment to make : " Bishop Ferrando is a holy man .  He lived a holy life.  "The author was convinced of this when she read through the letters he wrote to his daughters on various occasions and the talks he used to give. These letters are of great spiritual treasure for the Congregation.

Bishop Ferrando lived a holy and heroic life for God and his people. He was another Christ to the people. Therefore it is just and proper that people give him due homage and reward his noble life by recognizing the great contribution he made in the lives of his fellow priests and people through his exemplary life. Everyone needs to pray earnestly and work hard to get this dream realized for the greater glory of God. May Bishop Ferrando's life be a model for all of Christians to imitate!

Archibishop Hubert D' Rosario sdb, the successor of Bishop Ferrando to the See of Shillong testifies the spiritual life of Bishop Ferrando in his obituary letter in the following words:

"Our Archbishop's (Bishop Ferrando's) life in Christ was seen by all and it was clear that he had d experience of God.  This union with God made him a man of prayer and he followed in the steps of his Master.  His faithfulness to the practices of piety and his spirit of prayer pervaded his active missionary life.  Our people loved him, respected him, and wanted him because of his intimacy with God.  The man of God filled with the spirit of prayer passed on this spirit to his missionary priests.  " ( Archbishop Hubert D ' Rosario CP . Vol VII , p . 2202)

The spiritual portrait of Bishop Ferrando reveals the virtues that characterized him as a man of God . His heroism in bearing the cross , Eucharistic piety , devotion to the Sacred Heart , filial love for Mother Mary, love for his founder, relationship with priests, religious and people, love for youth, joy and optimism, love for the Pope and the Church, fortitude of spirit in the face of difficulties and spirit of sacrifice even to the extent of giving his life for others are some of them.

**THE PROCESS OF CANONIZATION OF BISHOP FERRANDO**

The memory of Bishop Ferrando was very much alive among the people of Shillong, Rossiglione and Genova. The Salesians, sisters of the congregation whom he founded and people whom he served with great zeal and sacrifice kept alive his memory and the fame of sanctity spread as the years passed by. The missionary spirit and the legacy which he lfet behind inspired the people, the sisters and the priests to start the process of beatification and canonization.

It was at the request of Fr. Luigi Ulla sdb, the confessor of Bishop Ferrando at Genova-Quarto, Italy that his cause of beatification and canonization introduced. In 1997, Mother Elizabeth Packumala, the then Superior General of the Missionary Sisters, approached the Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco who offered his whole hearted support for initiating the process. The cause of beatification and canonization was entrusted to Don Pasquale Liberatore sdb, the then Postulator General of the Salesians of Don Bosco. Sr. Philomena Mathew MSMHC was appointed the Vice Postulator.  Most Rev Tarcisius Resto sdb, then Archbishop of Shillong, requested the Archbishop of Genova

on 17 April 1998 the permission to initiate the Cause in Shillong, since Bishop Ferrando died in Genova. The permission was granted through his letter dated 25 May 1998. However, the untimely death of Archbishop Resto caused delay in following up the process.

Most Rev. Dominic Jala sdb, on his appointment as the Archbishop of Shillong, followed up the Cause. He applied to the Congregation for the Cause of Saints, Rome, for the Nulla Osta (No Objection) to start the diocesan process in Shillong, and it was granted on 28 April 2003.

There were two diocesan processes: one in Shillong and the other in Genova. The process at Shillong was officially inaugurated by Most Rev. Dominic Jala sdb , Archbishop of Shillong on 3 October 2003. The one at Genova was initiated on 27 May 2006. Both the processes were concluded together in Shillong on 13 August 2006 in the presence of the Local Ordinary and the Postulator General.

The first Postulator General was Fr. Pasquale Liberatore sdb.  At his sudden demise on 30 October 2003, Fr. Enrico dal Covolo sdb was appointed the Postulator General.  When the latter was elevated as Bishop of Eraclea on 9 October 2010, Fr. Pierluigi Cameroni sdb was appointed Postulator General on 6 July 2011.

The Decree of validity was granted on 17 October 2008 by the Congregation for the Cause of Saints. Rev. Fr. Cristoforo Bove, OFM Conv.  was appointed the Relatore of the Cause on 21 November 2008. At his sudden demise, Fr. Zdzislaw Kijas, OFM Conv, was appointed Relatore on 5 November 2010.

A total of 93 persons gave witness at the diocesan inquiry. In Shillong there were 70 witnesses among whom 2 bishops, 10 priests, 8 religious and 50 lay persons. At Genova there were a total number of 23 of whom 10 priests, 2 religious and 11 lay persons.

The Positio is not yet submitted, the work is in progress.

The tomb of Bishop Ferrando is a source of inspiration and guidance for the people of Northeast India. Many have received favors through his intercession from and they experience peace and healing.  In Rossiglione, his native place, people remember the sanctity of their compatriot Bishop Fernando and receive graces through his intercession.

**REMINISCENCE OF FRIENDS OF BISHOP FERRANDO**

The Magnanimity of Bishop Ferrando

His Eminence late Giuseppe Cardinal Siri

In the Gospel of today, we have just listened to some of the guiding principles which should direct our lives and help us to present ourselves worthily before God.  Let us reflect a little on this.  The late Archbishop whose Requiem Mass we celebrate now, lived up to this Gospel principles.  He fulfilled them with such magnanimity of soul, which some humble souls keep buried in the depths of their hearts.

Essentially he was a missionary, for that matter a Salesian missionary. He lived in the period which immediately followed the life of the holy Founder - Don Bosco. The magnetic touch of inimitable warmth infused by Don Bosco was still alive in the lives of persons who knew him personally. Bishop Ferrando acquired this warmth and cordiality, and thus enriching himself with the spirit and zeal of Don Bosco, left for India, at the age of 28.

Bishop Ferrando was blessed with a strong personality.  He proved to be an 'iron-soldier' ​​during the First World War and secured the Silver Medal for his military valor. The War was like a general rehearsal for his future mission work.  The strength of his character of him and his singular ability for taking initiatives in difficult situations were all inscribed in his serene composure, as that of the holy Founder, Don Bosco himself.

The simplification of problems and the quick pastoral intuitions came from that serene and firm personality without pomp, yet armored with fortitude, without fears and doubts, yet steeped in complete trust and abandonment to God. Till the end he kept up that attractive amiability acquired from the ambience of his education which experienced the warmth of Don Bosco's spirit.

He hailed from one of our valleys which descended from the mountains of Genova. He always carried with him an indelible mark of his native place, in the sense that he never forgot his dialect and its accent. Bishop Ferrando was a front line missionary. His spent his life in the Assam missions during the period of its nascent Church. He was one of the first heralds of the Gospel in that region of Northeast India.

He dreamed of evangelizing the people of the region profoundly and religiously, by visiting them in their villages and homes. But contrary to his dreams and desires of him he was entrusted with the formation of the future missionaries of his congregation. The road he walked was long;  he reached some important positions in life.  When he left Shillong in 1969 the ecclesiastical structure was established. That which usually takes slowly over a long period of time, occurred there during the government of a one single man named Bishop Stephen Ferrando.

He returned to Italy, handing over the reins of the diocese to others. Here in Italy we have known him, appreciated him, loved and admired him and understood what treasures were hidden in his past years. He came back to India in 1972 for the consecration of his Cathedral at Shillong. I have known, and know more than one Bishop either retired or in exile, but I have never come across one who would accept the idea of ​​returning to his own country. He felt very much in exile.  For this reason many people in the diocese of Genova took the place of Indians in his heart. When he used to help me to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation, I could read his sentiments... he was seeing India ... his spirit from him was still in India.  These exiles loved God, loving only what God loves. Not only that this strong and rich personality had to take another stand: at 39 years of age, he was made the first Bishop of the nascent diocese of Krishnagar, a little later to be transferred to Shillong where he remained till the time of his retire from him. He was the second Bishop of Shillong. The head of the newly born Church lives, absolutely in a different and meritorious experience in comparison to any other conditions and positions - all in the hope and complete abandonment to the Providence of God which in such cases must intervene everyday.  In fact, he had not only to maintain structures but needed to adapt himself to new situations and new people which were totally different from his own, think and speak in a new language and live in a country of adoption, it seemed as it were changing ones nature itself. Mons. Ferrando faced all these heroically and built materially and spiritually without ceasing. He founded an indigenous congregation, he walked beside a people who were in search of their own identity, liberty and dignity, a people who were waking from the slumber of colonial experience. All this bring to light the magnanimity, the equilibrium and intuitive qualities of Bishop Ferrando whom we lament today.

For him India was beautiful, full of promises, it was lovable, it had a bright future. His face would brighten up looking towards India, the land of his dreams. The Church in Shillong will remember him always.  All these events of his life rightly fit in to the spirit of beatitudes the guiding principles of his life. Thus after fulfilling the divine designs in his life he appeared before the throne of God, full of trust and confidence, at 3.30 pm. of 20 June.  Now let us pray for him. Amen.

**Unforgettable scenes of Bishop Ferrando's Missionary Life**

Rector Major Late Rev. Fr. Egidio Vigano sdb

Dearest Confreres,

Mons. Stephen Ferrando concluded his long and laborious day on 20 June in our house at Genova - Quarto, at the age of 83. He was Bishop of Shillong, North East India for 34 years and 9 years Titular Archbishop of Troina. He was a great Missionary.

The solemn funeral Mass was presided over by the Archbishop of Genova, His Eminence Cardinal Siri. Many confreres from the communities of Liguria-Toscana, numerous friends, superiors and missionaries participated in the function. The Regional Councilor for Asia Rev. Fr. Thomas Panakhezam represented the Rector Major. Deep sentiments of condolences and adhesion were expressed by Cardinal Angelo Rossi, the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Archbishop Lourduswamy, the Secretary of the same, Cardinal Picachy, President of Episcopal Conference of India, Doctor D.D. Pugh, the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Dr. S.D. Kongwir, the Deputy Chief Minister, our Archbishop of Shillong-Guwahati, Mons. Hubert D’Rosario and many other admirers and collaborators.

He spent his last eight years in Genova-Quarto, where he was like a retired soldier, retreated from the battlefield, with the pain of loss and nostalgic memories of the by-gone days. His heart was glued to Assam, though physically he was in Genova. He spoke continually about Assam Missions. On 26 June 1969 for reasons of age and in the spirit of the Vatican council, he resigned from the Bishopric of Shillong. The Holy Father as a sign of and in recognition of his service in the missions of Assam elevated him to the dignity of the Titular Archbishop of Troina.

**The Marvels of Gospel in India**

His heart always remained in India of which he spoke constantly, and for which he offered all his prayers and dedicated all his remaining energies and resources.

In that Asiatic continent he saw immense possibilities of Christian hope among its generous people who are not so much affected by the materialism and consumerism of the West, instead are open to the spiritual values and pro-life activities.

Europe which is immersed in socio-political and cultural crisis, he felt as if in exile, even when surrounded by the affection and admiration of his confreres and many others who knew him and loved him. The great India of his love, impressed him for its spiritual traditions, openness to the Gospel and promise of numerous vocations. He loved very specially North East India, the then known Assam, with its capital in Shillong, which was seat of his long missionary sojourn. He had witnessed there many marvels of the Gospel.

In 1972 when the Assam Mission celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the arrival of the Salesian Missionaries, Mons. Ferrando, despite his age, wanted to be present for the occasion. In fact, he was the Guest of Honor of that important event. What memories and what thoughts might have crowded his mind during those days!

50 years ago, Assam had only 5000 Catholics; at the moment of his Episcopal ordination the number had arisen to 40,000. Now it has mounted to 400,000. Fifty years ago, there was a small group of six Salesian Priests and five brothers. Now instead there are six dioceses of which two are already entrusted to the diocesan clergy, and the seventh one is already in the offing. The dioceses are by now directed by the Indian Bishops and the presence of the local priests and indigenous Sisters prove that the local church has grown much and taken roots in the soil.

Many mission stations, elementary, middle and high schools, colleges and technical schools, dispensaries and hospital, seminaries and convents have been constructed. Mons. Ferrando always referred to this immense growth of the Church in his discourses and writings and attributed it all to his missionaries, whom he considered as friends, brothers and at the same time he was always a father to them. He always stayed in the background, remaining silent about his works and sacrifices.

But those who were close to him knew how heroic and hidden his immolation, how patient and kind his fatherly goodness, how zealous in imparting the indomitable missionary spirit of joy and enthusiasm were, which transformed Assam into an ideal mission field.

He always acclaimed that the good works accomplished in those 40 years were possible only because of the maternal solicitude of Mary Help of Christians. While writing to the new Rector Major he mentions: “I can’t work anymore, but I can always pray, and I do it incessantly, experiencing the marvels and joining in spirit to the activities of the Congregation who is ever young and vibrant, always under the guidance of Mary Help of Christians.”

**In the Spirit of Don Bosco**

Beginning from 15 September 1912, on the day of his first profession at Foglizzo, Stephen Ferrando developed his personality and nurtured his love for Christ in the style and spirit of Don Bosco. His Episcopal Ordination had its roots in the earlier Salesian formation ambient which favoured an evangelical and ecclesial sense along with apostolic inspiration.

It is said by someone that to become a Bishop is like going out of one’s religious Congregation. It is a mistaken notion, when we consider the examples of first Bishops from among the Salesians like Cagliero and Lasagna. It becomes all the more inapplicable to an integral Salesian like Mons. Ferrando.

Chosen from among the best Salesians, Mons. Ferrando, when consecrated a Bishop instead of going out of the Congregation, all the more grew in the richness of the spirit of Don Bosco and it was seen and expressed in his apostolic zeal and fervour. He discovered in the charism of Don Bosco, the resources and original impulses needed for his new ministry as Bishop. It is better expressed perhaps, in the profound truth of the Constitutions, which states: “the center of Salesian Spirit is pastoral charity, or apostolic zeal which makes us search for souls and serve God alone.” (Art 40)

It is beautiful now to contemplate on the life of many Bishop Confreres who from the beginning of the story of the Congregation showed to the Church how useful in the establishment of God’s Kingdom is the Episcopal ministry, which is saturated by genuine spirit of Don Bosco.

Such a spirit enables in building up an evangelical ambient permeated radically by the zeal for souls marked with goodness, untiring work, optimism and hope, option for the youth, anchored on the vital power of the holy Eucharist and Mary Help of Christians.

This Salesian spirit was seen brilliantly shining in the entire life of Mons. Ferrando, especially during the 34 years of his episcopate. He presents himself to us as a true Salesian confrere Bishop, who perhaps not to forget the beautiful years he spent as Master of Novices teaching true Salesian spirit, leaves behind a trail of practical lessons in Salesianity.

**The Adventure of a New Church.**

The young priest Stephen Ferrando arrived in India towards the end of 1923, heading the expedition of the first group of novices, destined for the new mission at Shillong. They were to be formed ‘in loco’ in the place of their future apostolate. It was only a year since the arrival of the Salesian missionaries in Assam. Mons. Ferrando was one of the protagonists of that nascent church, which was guided by the pastoral dynamism of Mons. Mathias who was an exceptional Salesian, intelligent, practical and gifted with a magnanimous and generous heart.

The priestly vocation of Mons. Ferrando grew stronger and blossomed soon with the apostolic enthusiasm favoured by the dawning of a privileged ecclesial situation in the Assam missions. It was an era of the growth of faith for him as he and the pioneer missionaries witnessed and underwent the birth pangs of new Christian communities, just like the first disciples of the first century. It was a sacred experience which left an indelible mark on his life. With this experience there came about such faith which eliminated all fears, uncertainties and doubts about one’s vocation. In that mission experience, there was neither time nor place for faith crisis or vocation crisis.

The Archbishop of Genova, Cardinal Siri addressed the faithful during the funeral homily in the following words: “Mons. Ferrando witnessed the adventure of a nascent Church, he was an “intrepid missionary”. In fact, he experienced the epoch of primitive Church. He was one of the first heralds of the Gospel in North East India. At 39 he became bishop. The head of a newly born Church lives in an absolutely different and meritorious experience - all in the hope and complete abandonment to the Providence, which in such cases must intervene everyday. In fact, he had not only to maintain structures, but needed to adapt himself to new situations and new peoples which were totally different from his own, think and speak in a new language and live in a country of his adoption, it seemed as it were changing one’s nature itself Mons. Ferrando faced all these heroically and built materially and spiritually without ceasing. He founded an indigenous Congregation; walked beside a people who were in search of their own political freedom and dignity, a people who were waking up from the slumber of a long colonial experience. All these bring out the greatness, the equilibrium and intuitive qualities of Mons. Ferrando whom we lament today ... the road he walked was long; the steps taken were important. When he left Shillong in 1969 the ecclesiastical structure was ready and dioceses were established. That which usually takes place slowly over a long period of life, occurred there during the leadership of one single man, Bishop Ferrando.”

**From the Alpines to Himalayas**

Rossiglione falls under the diocese of Acqui, situated on the border of Piedmont and Liguria in one of the valleys surrounded by the lofty mountain ranges sloping down the Alps. Mons. Ferrando was born there from Augustine and Salvi Josephine. He carried with him always the peculiar characteristics of his native place which was marked by practical faith and intelligence. He loved his native place and never forgot the dialect of the place with its accent.

His elementary school was at Fossano and later on in Valdocco. The family spirit and the atmosphere of piety which reigned there helped to nurture the call of God in Stephen and decided to dedicate his life in the Salesian congregation.

At the age of 17 made the first profession at Foglizzo. During his seminary formation the First World War broke out and he was called in to take up arms. After the long 4 years of military life, as an assistant officer of Sanitation, he returned decorated with Silver Medal for his valour and presence of mind. We can very well conclude that the hard and difficult services of the War helped to lay a firm foundation for his future life.

In 1920, he was sent to Borgo San Martino to pursue his theological studies as well as to teach in the school there, where he made his Perpetual Profession. On 18 March 1923 was ordained a Priest. In the December of the same year left for India. On that famous ship “Tevere” headed towards Bombay, Mons. Ferrando and his companions traveled weaving dreams of their future mission. There were three future Bishops in that vessel: S. Ferrando, Orestes Marengo and Paolo Maria Selvam. They arrived in Assam at the foot of the Himalayas exactly on the vigil of Christmas: a good premonition!

**A Formator-Missionary**

His first assignment in India was the preparation of future missionaries. Began as the

Socius and Assistant of Novices, then as Master of Novices and Rector of the studentate of Philosophy and Theology. He was a formator for a decade of years and formed generations of young Salesians. In him the firmness of character or rather the youthful impetus which made him excel during the War, had been mellowed down and made him a person of goodness and gentleness.

Fr. Pianazzi Archimede one of his collaborators in those years recalls with sympathy:

“Fr. Ferrando was all “heart” and all loved him; his familiarity, cheerfulness, goodness and jovial nature were such that, we the clerics used to fool him. At times he used to shout at us, but behind his words we could sense his half-smile as if saying “I understand you, young boys” and his words did not hurt us. In case, his impulsive words sometimes did make us feel bad, he would soon apologize and regain the good spirit.”

His sense of God, large-heartedness, spontaneous availability, understanding and forgiveness made him dear and loved by all. He formed those who were with him in prayer, self-sacrifice and missionary zeal.

**Bishop: From Krishnagar to Shillong**

In 1934, at the age of 39 Mons. Ferrando was consecrated Bishop along with Mons. Mathias. The latter the Bishop of Shillong and the former that of Krishnagar, in Bengal. It was a difficult and poor region, but irrigated by the sweat and blood of many missionaries. Mons. Ferrando put his heart and soul in to the given task, however, his absence from Shillong did not last long. In December, the same year, with the sudden demise of Mons. Mederlet the See of Madras became vacant and to fill that place Mons. Mathias was transferred. Consequently Mons. Ferrando was brought to Shillong as its Bishop, and remained there for 34 years.

Mons. Mathias was a man of exceptional qualities of head and heart, and to succeed him was not easy. But the goodness of Mons. Ferrando, his untiring dedication to his Episcopal responsibilities, the intimate and personal knowledge of all his missionaries, most of who were formed by him made the change over rather easy. He was happy to return to Shillong his first place of missionary work, and the confreres were contented to have him back again with them.

Mons. Ferrando himself narrates with moving simplicity in his memoir *Nell’India dell Nord Est,* the event of his arrival in Shillong to take possession of the diocese on 14 March 1936. “I remember the welcome given to me by the clergy, religious and thousands of faithful, at the entrance to the district of Shillong. I knelt down and kissed the ground of my new diocese. Then, mounting a white horse, I proceeded three kilometers, between two rows of jubilant people. The evening shadows were beginning to fall and the procession with lighted torches seemed to be a luminous ribbon. On reaching Shillong, in my first words addressed to the people, I entrusted the diocese to Jesus Crucified, as confirmation of my priestly motto: “On the Cross is Salvation.” As the new pastor I prayed to Jesus to accept the offering of the immolation of my life for the salvation of souls.”

He was convinced that his entry into the diocese was the beginning of his Way of the Cross. The first year itself, in fact, it was marked by a mournful event. On 10 April, Good Friday, 1936, the church, the Parish, the Bishop’s House, the Formation House all the buildings which were made of wood were reduced to ashes, perhaps due to a short circuit. It was disgraced and a moment of test for Mons. Ferrando. However, he soon began the work of reconstruction and new edifices came up quickly among which the more important ones are the Cathedral, St. Paul’s Seminary, Nazareth hospital and the Leprosarium of Nongpoh.

Yet, another painful test was awaiting him. By now the mission work was more or less stabilized and everything seemed to move normally. The out break of World war II, paralyzing almost all the activities of the mission and confining about 150 missionaries both Italian and German into concentration camps.

We need to appreciate the influence of S. Ferrando on the civil authorities, that before interning the Italian missionaries, the Bishop was able to indicate some who will be needed absolutely so that the mission works would not be completely stopped.

Finally when they were taken away, the authorities were kind enough to send back the missionaries in 1945. With the return of the missionaries to their respective mission fields, Mons. Ferrando was once again able to give new impetus to the apostolic activities of his Diocese. The missionary endeavours not only were restored but also much more progressed and expanded during the post war period. Thus all the necessary structures for the foundation of two new dioceses of Dibrugarh and Tezpur were laid.

In 1948, the following year of the Indian Independence, the Federal Government declared that foreign missionaries would not be allowed in India from then on. In Shillong, as he himself record in his memoirs, the faithful themselves organized a silent protest march. With the Rosaries hanging from their hands and big placards screaming protest against the Government and praising the missionaries held aloft, a great crowd of people from diverse denominations lined up the main thoroughfare of Shillong. Here was the voice of the silent court. The Catholics did all the organization in secret and on their own; for once the Bishop and clergy were kept in the dark and they came to know of the developments only at the last moment. . . The procession terminated in a big playground where eminent Protestant and catholic leaders spoke to the people assembled there. The sky was soon overcast and it began to rain heavily but no one moved away. I watched the sight from the Cathedral balcony and it was one of the most unforgettable scenes of my missionary life.

**Pastoral Solicitude**

Enhanced by the pastoral zeal and animated by Salesian charity of “Give me souls”, Mons. Ferrando was untiring in his visits to the newly baptized Christian communities and in a continuous search to maintain contact with his missionaries. In the spirit of this ardent solicitude for mission, he journeyed thousands of kilometers writes Fr. Piananzzi - making use of all the means available - by air, train, vehicles and most of all on foot. Ah! The walks he had to make through the jungles amidst dangers of every sort, like St. Paul, dangers of swelling rivers, danger of being lost in the forest, danger of being devoured by the wild beast, danger of insects like leeches which to penetrate into the body unnoticed and would fall down only when they were saturated leaving bleeding wounds, mosquitoes in thousands bringing germs of malaria, and other diseases. Mons. Ferrnado suffered bouts of malaria throughout his episcopate, but having a robust physique which he developed as a soldier made him not to mind the ailments, and would continue his journey even with high fever.

On reaching the village, his joy seemed to have no limits. He enjoyed the songs of the Christians; he loved to receive their greetings and to listen to their news. In the midst of his people he would forget his tiredness, sickness and other physical discomforts. He used to eat with great appetite whatever the people had to offer - rice and dry fish, chilly sauce which really made a ball of fire in the mouth!

Mons. Ferrando himself narrates one of his visits which can be presented as an emblematic apostolic pilgrimage. It was the pre-Vatican era when the Eucharistic fast was observed very scrupulously. He writes: “We never even thought of discarding this law for a moment. It was already more than 24 hours that we were walking towards a village facing all kinds of difficulties. We had taken only two cups of tea and had been walking all the time. We lost the road in the forest and had to spend the night in the forest in great fear which made us to forget hunger and tiredness. At last towards the morning we reached the village and soon we had to get ready for the Mass. After the meals administered 350 confirmations to the assembled Boros and Santhals. The Bishop was so exhausted that from time to time he had to lean towards the assisting catechist who would wipe away the sweat from his face, which came down in torrents!

After the Confirmation there was the Eucharistic procession. The sky was overcast; the sun was about to set. Suddenly there was a violent cyclonic wind. The storm blew with its fury and the rain poured down. The procession route turned into a rivulet. The darkness was total. I covered the Blessed Sacrament with humeral veil and proceeded forward, almost being carried along in the arms of two sturdy catechists.”

The satisfaction, which he derived from the simplicity and fervour of the faithful, recompensed abundantly from all the sacrifices.

**The Care of Vocations**

A Man of God, filled with the spirit of prayer, Mons. Ferrando had always special care for vocations. In the first place, that of his Priests; he gathered them every month in Shillong for the monthly retreat, on the previous day of the First Friday. It was followed by the meeting with the Bishop. This feature of permanent formation became a very dear tradition still strongly alive in the dioceses of North east India. It is a salutary expression of the deep life in Spirit of Mons. Ferrando which he inculcated in his clergy.

In order to give boost to local vocations Mons. Ferrando launched two initiatives: Seminary for the diocesan clergy and the Foundation of the Institute of Sisters.

In 1962 opened the St. Paul’s Seminary in Shillong, which within a short period produced number of priests who are already immersed in the field of mission and has around 170 seminarians.

His zeal enabled him to found the feminine religious Congregation of Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians. ‘The Decree of Praise’ of the Congregations says: “In order to carry out more effectively the apostolate of evangelization and charity among the rural people of the region, Rt. Rev. Stephen Ferrando, Bishop of Shillong formed in 1942 a Pious union of native women, which later on with the approval of the Apostolic See is elevated to a Religious Congregation with its name as Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians.”

The Holy Father on 21 March 1976 elevated it into a Congregation of Pontifical Right dependent on the congregation for Evangelization of Peoples. Today the Sisters are more than 220, Novices 40 and are present in 34 centers of mission in North east India.

**Tears of Joy**

I would like to conclude these few lines on the unforgettable figure of our dear Salesian Missionary and zealous Bishop Ferrando, quoting his own words from the last page of his memoirs Nell ‘India del Nord-Est. It is a very significant page which unites the cry for his death with a tear of thanksgiving for the beautiful life which he lived.

“In April 1973 the Holy father Pope Paul VI received in a private audience Mons. Hubert D’Rosario, Archbishop of Shillong and me his immediate predecessor. First Archbishop D’ Rosario was received and then I was called in. On the table of the Pope there was a big map of the world. The predecessor and the successor found themselves before the Pope. An epoch was ending and a new era was dawning. The Holy Father embraced me paternally and thanked me repeatedly. His embrace was the thanks extended by the Church through me to all the missionaries and benefactors of Assam. The Holy Father was very pleased with us and allowed a group photo to be taken with him.

Our faithful secretary, Fr. Mario Bianchi later told me: “Do you know what the Pope’s private secretary told me?” “What?” “That we made the Holy Father weep!”

I later questioned Archbishop Hubert about this and he replied: “It is true, the Pope was visibly moved.” On that map where North East India including Assam and the hills indicate, a tear fell from the eyes of the Holy Father. It was a tear from the eyes of Peter. This time it was a tear of joy for a land that has been faithful to the last dying wish of our founder Don Bosco: above all be faithful to the Holy Father.”

Dear Confreres, let our pain too at the passing away of our illustrious and dear Bishop be a tear of joy, an expression of gratitude and praise to the Lord who accomplished great marvels in him, and through him, to reward his simplicity, raise up his humility and the many apostolic sacrifices he made.

May Mary Help of Christians, whom Bishop Ferrando loved very much, make us understand and love the practical lessons of Salesianity which Mons. Ferrando bequeathed as a legacy for our Congregation. Let us join him in prayer. (Don Egidio Vigano Rector Major 16 July 1978)

**Bishop Ferrando- an aspiration to Rising Generations**

**Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil, SDB**

A few decades ago, everyone in the Northeast knew of a towering personality in our missions that stood tall and strong as a father-figure, ever serene and ever smiling, guiding the local Church on the path of its great destinies. That person was none other than Archbishop Stephen Ferrando, SDB, at that time, the bishop of Shillong. No one could predict that the diocese that he ruled would grow to be a full-fledged and mature Church with 15 dioceses and further possibilities in such a short time. The seeds he planted have sprouted and still keep producing abundant fruit.

I have a special relationship with Bishop Ferrando, because it was he who ordained me a priest in 1965. Three years earlier the Chinese attack on India had sent all the young people in formation down to various destinations in the South. Bishop Ferrando and the missionaries alone remained at their posts in the mission-field. The bishop was in the Ecumenical Council in Rome when the attack actually took place. He left the Council immediately to be with his people who seemed to be under threat at that time. The wonderful example of Bishops Ferrando and Marengo who were eager to be with the believing community in difficulty was a great source of edification for all. The Chinese withdrew, and gradually the persons in formation returned. I too returned from Kotagiri to Mawlai and completed my theology in Shillong.

Bishop Ferrando was essentially a man of formation. His talks to us theologians were always a source of inspiration. He would come at intervals for the spiritual animation of the brothers in training. He spoke with unction. He spoke with conviction. His words touched hearts. At the concluding mass of every retreat, it was bishop Ferrando who presided at the mass and gave the final message. He spoke like a prophet, but always in gentle tones and convincing eloquence. It was wonderful to attend a service at which he conferred the diaconate or minor orders. Even if the number of candidates was high, to each person he addressed the words of admonition, exhortation or ordination as though he were the only one. His voice was clear, and he retained a personal tone in his communication all through the service. He never seemed to get tired or bored about what he was doing. It was a pleasure to attend the services at which he was presiding.

I was too junior to follow or understand the extent of his missionary tours or apostolic reach out. But I am told that in the early days he would tour from end to end of Assam Valley halting at various missions. Many who are new to the region have forgotten that the whole of Brahmaputra Valley was looked after from Shillong until Dibrugarh was separated in 1951 and Tezpur in 1964. Bishop Ferrando had the care of Garo Hills and today’s Karbi Anglong. But he was equal to the task. It was precisely to help him in these mighty endeavours that he founded the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians. During World War II, sisters who came from other countries could not tour the villages, and there was need of a group of indigenous apostolic workers to reach out to new places, new communities and new people. Thus, this congregation was founded, which was the fruit of an overflow of bishop Ferrando’s missionary zeal. Over the years they have done a mighty work both in the plains and in the hills. Today their number has risen close to a thousand and they have reached out to every part of the country and even to different continents.

Many people have jokes about the abstract-mindedness of bishop Ferrando in his later years and similar things. For me, they are trifling things. I have always looked at him as a man of faith with extraordinary spiritual unction about everything he said or did. His smile never failed him. He kept his inner serenity even in the most trying circumstances. The Khasi people loved him very specially. The whole of Northeast remembers him with gratitude. He remained a pillar of missionary sturdiness even to the very end. Due to the change of political circumstances in India when he handed over his charge to Archbishop Hubert D’Rosario, SDB, and retired to Italy, he remained close to the people he served, to the society he founded, and to the ideals he cherished. His memories will continue to inspire rising generations with spiritual ardour and missionary zeal. May many such valiant men arise among us! (Archbishop’s house, Guwahati 20-10-2010)

**Bishop Ferrando – a unique instrument of Spiritual Animation**

Fr. Luciano Colussi SDB

The first time I heard the name of Stephen Ferrando was during my aspirantate days in Ivrea when famous missionaries used to come to visit our Cardinal Cagliero Institute to animate us by sharing about their enthusiastic missionary life. Among them was Mons Ferrando, the newly consecrated Bishop of Krishnagar, who, a year later, became the Bishop of Shillong. I do not remember specifically what he had shared with us then but certainly I can never forget the enthusiasm he instilled in us when speaking about the missions and about the people who were ‘waiting for us in India.

During the years of our novitiate and the study of philosophy in Sonada, we did not have the privilege of having him in our midst because of the Second World War that was in progress. But at the same time we ‘were kept informed by our superiors of the great missionary work that was going on under the able leadership of Bishop Ferrando in Assam, a region then comprising of the entire Northeast India now divided into seven States. It was a source of great joy and encouragement for us to prepare ourselves well for our future apostolate as missionaries in the region. When we were shifted to the concentration camps during the War and then again to South India, we missed the chance to be with him in Assam but his occasional visits helped us to keep our missionary spirit alive though we were not yet in the active mission field. For young clerics like me his presence and his encouraging words, helped us immensely in our preparation as future missionaries.

After the War when we were allowed to return to our mission fields. I was not privileged to go to Assam or to the Khasi and Garo Hills, but to Bengal where I was assigned to work in the diocese of Krishnagar. During my visits to Shillong for retreats, seminars, meetings or even for some rest, it was a real privilege to meet Bishop Ferrando either at the Bishop’s House or he would come to meet us, his young Salesian brothers.

We always looked forward to listen to him either at the end or during the retreats. The superiors realized how important it was for us to listen to his spiritual advice and he could enlighten us on a variety of topics related to spirituality, Salesian and missionary life. The many years he spent as master of novices and rector of the students of philosophy and theology made him a unique instrument of spiritual animation for the young and the old, priests and nuns and he received a lot of invitations to speak. Even uninvited he could walk into any place and share his rich wealth of spiritual knowledge.

What impressed me most and even many others like me too was not only the depth of knowledge he manifested about what he shared, but the unction with which he spoke. We could see that he lived the truth he was preaching and he wanted his listeners to imbibe the same spirit that animated his life, and even in some sense, his listeners were compelled to put into practice what they were listening.

Bishop Ferrando had a simple yet endearing style of speaking whether addressing priests and nuns or simple village folk in the parishes at Mass or at liturgical and non-liturgical functions. On many occasions I was fortunate to be present at his Mass both on great feasts and on ordinary days. At every Mass, all those who participated could feel the sanctity of the celebrant. According to the teaching of St. Gregory the Great, he lived the realities he was celebrating.

With great ease he could speak wonderfully on any aspect of our Christian faith with tremendous conviction. But in expounding certain teachings, he excelled because of his Salesian background. The Holy Eucharist was the centre of his thinking and living. He could speak about the Eucharist for hours on end touching upon all aspects of it like the Mass, the Communion, and the presence of Jesus in the tabernacle etc. I can recall seeing him on many occasions after visiting the playground and other areas of the campus he would spontaneously go into the church and with his usual devoted demeanour kneel and pray with his eyes fixed on the tabernacle.

His devotion to Our Lady Help of Christians knew no bounds. He would attribute his perseverance in his vocation, even in times of extreme difficulties, to his firm devotion to Our Lady. This made him even more convinced of the special maternal protection he enjoyed as he spent almost the whole of his life first at Our Lady’s House in Shillong and then at the Cathedral of Mary help of Christians in Shillong. Speaking about Our Lady on many occasions, he was moved to tears.

Bishop Ferrando was a true ambassador of the Pope and of the Church. He was deeply acquainted with the history of the Popes and of the Church. He would manifest his attachment to the Pope and to the Church by the way he spoke about both. The erudition and the interest he showed in the history of the Popes and of the Church left a lasting impression on us. The Pope’s day was celebrated in a solemn manner every year in Shillong at the time of Bishop Ferrando.

Bishop Ferrando was convinced that the example of his life, especially at religious functions, was the best sermon he could give to the people. He manifested great devotion in carrying the Blessed Sacrament at Eucharistic processions and peoples gaze was more often fixed on the bishop rather than on the Sacred Host. Similarly in processions of our blessed Mother, he would walk in front of the statue singing and praying and in the process setting an example for all those taking part in the procession.

His happiness knew no bounds when he saw vast crowds attending his Mass and other religious ceremonies with great faith and devotion, He would remark: “Yes, Jesus must be happy with us. Mary must be blessing us for the love we manifest to her.” He was very generous with his praises on such occasions and it had an electrifying effect on his listeners.

The brightest aspect of Bishop Ferrando’s life was certainly his great missionary zeal, which was unmatched except in the case of saints who had been missionaries, He longed to go to the villages and speak directly about Jesus to the people and he found great happiness in doing so. In speaking about Jesus to people who had never heard about him before, he would go directly to the heart of his proclamation about the great fortune of knowing and accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Anyone who would go to meet him, no matter for what reason, would be asked by him about God, religious duties and would tell him about the happiness of becoming a catholic, always with the intention of inviting him to accept the catholic faith. He would inspire and even exhort his missionaries and catechists to do the same in dealing with people. The large scale conversions to the Catholic faith that took place in Northeast India can be attributed to the zeal and apostolic efforts of Bishop Ferrando and other great missionaries like him.

This is all what I could recall from the brief encounters I have had with Bishop Ferrando. Everything is still vivid in my mind and I continue to draw inspiration from him in my daily life. I could have tried also to recall the sayings and reminiscences of many persons who were very closely associated with him but since at this moment I would not be able to confirm their sayings. I prefer to stop now, asking the good Bishop himself to help you in what you would like to write about him. Thank you. May God and Mary Help of Christians help you in your ministry and apostolate. (bishop’s house, Krishnagar, West Bengal 24-07-2009)

**Bishop Ferrando's Hospitality and Love for Theologians**

**Fr. Mathew Pulingathil sdb**

Fr. Mathew had contact with Bishop Stephen Ferrando since 1958. Fr. Mathew, the then Bro.  Mathew, left Sonada for Shillong via Guwahati to resume his theological studies at Shillong. When he arrived at Guwahati, to his good fortune Bishop Ferrando was in Guwahati with his car and he willingly offered him a lift to Mawlai, Shillong. From that year onwards it was Bishop Ferrando who gave all minor orders to the Brothers and Fr. Mathew received the same up to his diaconate. After the ordination Fr. Mathew who belonged to the southern province sought permission to change over to the Northeast India for mission experience. Fr. Modesto Bellido, the then Mission Superior granted him the permission. In 1963 Fr. Mathew became a Councilor at the Theologate Mawlai.

It is said that Bishop Ferrando was very fond of the theologians and he would invite them for all festivities at the Cathedral.  At the end of it all he made sure that they were served good lunch and all made to sit in full honor with cutleries, serviettes, etc. The day did not end with lunch, they were also served tea before they left for the Theologate.

When Fr. Guitierez was the Rector he would send the theologians for a walk every week. But they were forbidden to go to the Bishop's House or Don Bosco. Yet they would go and have tea especially in Bishop's House. Fr. Guitierez would follow them. But once he reaches the Bishop's House he would send word through someone that the Rector was around. Then the Brothers would leave the Bishop's House hurriedly. Bishop Ferrando was very fatherly to the theologians. He had special love and concern for the theologians and also to the lay people. Bishop Ferrando's hospitality was remarkable.

There were Hindi speaking people and Bishop Ferrando allowed the Fathers to celebrate Mass for them and preach the sermon in Hindi. He was true to his motto “Apostle of Christ.” Because of the simplicity of life, anybody could approach Bishop Ferrando at any time and he would attend to his/her need.

When he was invited to a concert he would inquire first whether the play was a tragedy or comedy. If it happened to be a tragedy he would say, “I do not want to break my heart watching a tragedy.” He had no resentment when he was asked to leave India for good. It took a lot of courage for him to leave India but he did it gracefully. This speaks of the great quality of his detachment from the people, power and position. If he were allowed to stay in India he would have been an invaluable help for the Congregation he founded. The Congregation was flourishing and he could have been kept as the Chaplain in any of the Convents.  All feared his interference in the work of the diocese as people would have approached him as he knew the language. The people also loved Bishop Ferrando very much.

Bishop Ferrando appointed Fr. N. J. Kenny as the spiritual director of the Congregation. The total affairs of guiding the Congregation were entrusted to Fr. Kenny. He trusted Fr Kenny very much and never interfered in the affairs of the Congregation. He never tried to possess the Congregation he founded such was his detachment. In this way one can see his nobility and virtues of him were always hidden: “Distressed virtues and successful vice.” The people and most of the priests have very good impression about Bishop Ferrando. He was so forgetful of self and centred on others. This was very evident in his dealings with others (Savio School. Tinsukia, Assam, 06.21.2008)

**Bishop Ferrando – A Cheerful and Zealous Missionary**

**Fr. Thomas Panakhezam sdb**

I knew Bishop Ferrando while I was doing my theological studies in Sacred Heart College, Mawlai, Shillong (1956-1960). In fact it was he who conferred on me the minor orders and the diaconate.

The first quality as a young student of theology that struck me was his cheerful spirit. He was always happy and serene as I saw him. He was very generous with us young students of theology. When he met us in the bishop’s house he felt so buoyant that he would give us what was in the fridge to make us happier than usual. (I think he would tell the brother in charge to fill the fridge with things).He took pleasure to be with the students of theology whether in the bishop’s house or in the Theologate. He used to visit us in the college after a long missionary journey. As a bishop he might have had his inevitable difficulties but they never dissuaded him from not being cheerful. In this he imitated his Father and Founder Don Bosco.

I have been with him for missionary tours twice during the holidays. He was a very zealous missionary bishop. He did not mind the inconveniences of the missionary journeys in the Assam plains, the sweltering heat, the lack of proper accommodation, and the interminable meetings. All these things seemed to him natural. Even when he was with high malarial fever he never took rest but was available for confessions. Probably he was taking some tablets for malaria that enabled him to carry on his spiritual duties for the simple people. I used to wonder how he was able to resist such high fever! For confessions there were often only the parish priest and he. He used to sit at the confessional for long hours! Jokingly he would say to a deacon “you can hear confessions of venial sins”!

He was satisfied with what the people gave him for his meals. He took real delight in the long “sabbhas” which were conducted also for his welcome. His presence in the villages was really a feast for the people. I am not mistaken if I say that the people really loved him.

It was so consoling to see his affability towards the simple folk when they came to wish him with gifts of various kinds. He had a word of encouragement for every one of them.

Another important characteristic of his was his deep faith in God. During the annual Eucharistic Procession in Shillong he never hesitated to conduct the procession through the streets of Shillong even when clouds threatened the participants with rain. He used to brave the inclement weather and carried on the procession. At times, his faith was strong enough to stop the rain and then also to withstand the rain.

His absorption in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament exposed was really a virtue that should by imitated by all. (Fr. Thomas Panakhezam sdb, Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore, 20-12-2009)

**The Ardent Apostolic Spirit of Bishop Ferrando**

**Fr. T.J. Joseph sdb**

It is only now that I find some time to reply to your letter. I see that you are more interested in getting my impressions about Bp. Ferrando than to see what other people have said about him. Besides, you can find in my book of the History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India some of the things which other people have said or written about him. I shall mention the pages of the book, to make consultation easier for you.

It was during my novitiate at Dibrugarh in 1944 that I met Bp. Ferrando for the first time. Later, there were many occasions to come in contact with him during the time that I was a student of B.A. (Hons.) at St. Anthony’s College, Shillong (1948-49), during the time of my theological studies at Mawlai (1952-55), and perhaps even more when I was a professor at Mawlai (1959-62).

One thing which struck me straight away was his great humility and simplicity. There was no question of his standing on his dignity or the high position that he was holding in the Church. He made himself easily available to everyone. His ardent apostolic spirit was seen in his eagerness to be present and to officiate at Eucharistic processions, even in the lesser places of the diocese.

A very clear and striking instance of his humility was his letter to Fr. Berruti (Prefect General of the Salesians) in April 1947, in which he asked the superiors to see if they could find another bishop to be put in his place. He said that only the good of souls and the honour of the Congregation induced him to make the request. He then enumerated the difficulties which moved him to make the request.

There are very positive things said about the work of Fr. Ferrando as novice-master and rector at Our Lady’s House in the early years of the Assam Mission. It is only later on, i.e. chiefly after the World War II that serious criticisms started about the government of the diocese of Shillong by Mgr. Ferrando. Two things are to be noted about these criticisms First, that Mgr. Ferrando was excellent as a man and as a Salesian. There criticism was only about his government. The second thing to be noted is that the critics had all being accustomed to the efficiency of Mons. Mathias who was an exceptionally capable organizer and leader of men. They were naturally inclined to compare Mons. Ferrando with Mons Mathias, his predecessor, and in any comparison regarding efficiency Mons. Ferrando stood to lose! (Fr. T.J. Joseph, Bangalore, 20.12.2009)

**BISHOP FERRANDO – A Missionary Patrimony for Future Generations**

**Fr.** **S.Karotemprel, SDB**

**Introduction**

The spiritual, social or political patrimony which great men and women have left behind and which needs to be preserved and developed deserves our admiration and study. Such persons enrich the lives of others and change the course of history.

There is no doubt that Archbishop Stephen Ferrando belongs to such a category of people who have illumined the lives of many others, and whose spiritual patrimony still continues to inspire and to motivate certain persons to carry forward in the present times all these values.

The spiritual patrimony of Archbishop Stephen Ferrando cannot be found written on paper or on tablets of stone, but in the hearts of persons for whom he worked and in those who have chosen a life of dedication to keep alive the same spiritual and missionary patrimony for future generations. Thus St. Paul writes to the faithful at Corinth: “You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts, to be known and read by all men; and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (2 Cor. 3:2-3)

**Archbishop Stephen Ferrando: Fruit of the Italian Church**

Archbishop Stephen Ferrando was born in 1895 at Rossiglione and arrived in India in 1923 at the age of 28. He lived 83 years, 46 of which he spent in India, mainly among the tribes of Northeast India, in Shillong.

In order to understand well Ferrando’s personality, we have to go back to the last century. The well known mission historian La Tourette called the last century ‘the Great Missionary Century”. Archbishop Stephen Ferrando, fruit of the Salesian family, nourished by the great missionary dreams of Don Bosco himself, has been inspired by the missionary spirit of Don Bosco.

Today we cannot imagine the missionary fervour which reigned among the young people in the Salesian institutions in Italy of his time. Truly, many boys wanted to volunteer for the missions and dreamt of distant lands in order to realize the missionary dreams of Don Bosco. Stephen Ferrando was one such brave and courageous youngster.

**Stephen Ferrando: True Man of God and true Missionary**

It is difficult to encapsulate and to define a person in a few words. But if I were to attempt a definition of Stephen Ferrando as I knew him and as the others who knew say, I would define him as follows: “a man of God and a man of the people”.

**Man of God**

For Stephen Ferrando, God was not an abstract name, a distant reality, an occasional presence. He lived in God and with God. He felt the presence of God everywhere. He had inherited this quality from his native church, from his family and parish community, where, unlike today’s secular mentality, God was a real and living presence.

Such presence of God had created in Stephen Ferrando a profound and lively faith. When there is no human foundation, it is difficult to believe and trust. We find a similarity between Abraham, the father in faith, and Stephen Ferrando. When the disastrous fire destroyed everything, the church, the residence of the bishop, the novitiate, and the residence of the seminarians, Stephen Ferrando remained unshakeable and strong in the faith, believing that everything works for the good of those who love God. The Good Friday of 1936 was a black Friday for all in Shillong. All the seminarians had to leave Shillong and find accommodation with the Jesuits of North Bengal. Ferrando gathered together everyone around him on Holy Saturday and said to them with sadness: “We have absolutely nothing today. Everything has gone up in smoke. We have only God. With Him we shall build a cathedral, not of wood, but of very strong material, which will never be consumed by fire”.

During World War II, the missionaries from the other missions were not able to give a helping hand to India. The foreign missionaries were interned by the British government. There were no local vocations at that time. Thus, the future of the Church in Northeast India lay heavy on the shoulders of Ferrando. And moreover, the protestant brethren did everything possible to obstruct the presence and growth of the Catholic Church in many villages of Northeast India.

In spite of all these problems which he had to face, Stephen Ferrando never lost his faith and serenity. It seemed that he had an inexhaustible source within himself which gave him a certainty that the future would be better.

**Man of the People**

Stephen Ferrando was simply, as the Italians say, “simpatico,” friendly and compassionate. He literally felt with the people. He indeed loved his people very much. He was always available; his office was always open for all: priests, religious, brothers, faithful, and especially the poor.

I remember, as a student of theology I was going every now and then to borrow a book or two from his small library or to ask a little help for the village oratory. He was always available and ready to give a helping hand. When someone visited him, he came out of his office and walked about with him. He did same with his priests, exchanging information. All felt at home and went to him for any need. His availability and ready ear really made him a man of the people and for the people.

**A Great Missionary**

The apostle of Christ

At his priestly ordination Ferrando chose the following motto for his priestly life: “In the cross is salvation.” At his Episcopal ordination he chose another motto to guide his life as a bishop: “An apostle of Christ.” This was no mere decorative title for him — a motto taken at the consecration and then forgotten. Instead, Bishop Ferrando considered himself an apostle of Christ all his life, as one sent by Christ, sent with a specific mission towards a distant people. Thus, he continued the great tradition of the great Italian missionaries like Matteo Ricci, Constanzo Giuseppe Beschi, John de Britto (Portuguese), Roberto de Nobili, Rudolf Acquaviva, Vincenzo Cimati, Constantine Vendrame and many others. He harboured in heart the extraordinary missionary zeal of his epoch. He knew that he was not an innovative missionary like many others, but he was no less in the spirit of sacrifice, love for his people and total dedication towards them.

Northeast India is the home of many ethnic tribes, an inaccessible part of India even today. The distant villages are even today without the proper means of communication. There are places which we can reach only on foot. Until 1950, the missionaries were visiting the villages of the hills and the rain-swept valleys of Northeast India on foot or on ponies.

Every now and then Ferrando used to go to some distant villages like Jowai, Raliang and Dawki, 70 to 100 kms from Shillong. There is practically no village in the Khasi Jàintia hills which Ferrando has not reached, all on foot.

When he reached a village, he did not think of himself as a bishop. He was first and last a missionary. He heard the confession of the people, taught them catechism, and visited the sick in their little huts. He always had something with him for the poor.

**An Apostle like Christ**

Bishop Ferrando was an apostle of Christ in a double sense. He felt that he was sent by Christ himself to proclaim the Gospel to the people of Northeast India. He was also like Christ, an apostle of the Father. He was a sign of the love of the Father for his people. He seemed to be Christ in the midst of the people. He was compassionate, generous with all that he had. He would forget himself and give to the others all that he possessed.

**A Missionary for All**

Sometimes, Bishop Ferrando has been accused by some priests that he neglected or ignored the Adivasi Christians of the Assam plains and the Garos of the Garo Hills. It is true that he had a special love for the Khasis, but every now and then he used to visit the villages of Assam and even learned Hindi in order to be able to preach during the annual “Sobha.”

**A Missionary Heart**

Stephen Ferrando was not a great missionary organizer like Alessandro Valignano in the Japan and China, a creative missionary like De Nobili or a learned missionary like Ricci. He was essentially a missionary with a large heart.

He was not an organizer, administrator or a fund-raiser. But he knew how to give freedom of action to his missionaries, allowing them to take the necessary initiatives, giving them the possibility of doing all that they could for the missions. Thus, he encouraged Fr. A. Pianazzi in the evangelization of the Garos, Fr. Vendrame in the evangelization of the Khasis, Fr, L. Piasecki in the evangelization of the Adivasis, and Fr. L. Ravalico in the evangelization of the tribes of Manipur. Knowing well his limitations and weaknesses as a missionary, and the possibility of giving opportunity to others, he produced some great missionaries in Northeast India.

**A Missionary intuition**

Authentic missionaries develop a capacity to discern the needs of their people. Contact with the people of the villages and the knowledge of their suffering, the lack of nutrition, the illiteracy of the majority of the population, and high infant mortality, made him understand that these problems could not be resolved with the existing missionary methods, personnel or institutions.

It is this intuition which inspired Ferrando to gather together a few girls at Jowai in 1937 and put them under the care of Fr. Vendrame, but the outbreak of World War 11 interrupted this initiative of founding a religious congregation of women. Ferrando visualized his Sisters as missionaries to the people of the villages, to evangelize, teach, prepare the catechumens for baptism and the other sacraments, to instruct them to a hygienic way of life, and to give them the benefits of literacy and of education.

The second effort towards the foundation of the congregation was in 1942. With the help of Fr. Attilio Colussi, eight girls were trained and formed at Guwahati under the care of the Salesian Sisters to become sisters and missionaries. They were then transferred to Tezpur in 1949 under the care of Fr. J. Dal Broi and then to Barpeta Road in 1954. They were finally brought to Shillong in 1963 under the care of Fr. Noel Joseph Kenny. The new congregation of sisters was called Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians.

Stephen Ferrando was very fortunate in having certain saintly Salesian Sisters like Mother Avio, Luigina Saletta, Teresa Villa and Nellie Nunes for the formation of the young Missionary Sisters. The same could be said of the priests responsible for the missionary and religious formation of the new congregation. Priests such as 0restes Marengo, J.Dal Broi, A. Colussi, and N.Kenny made an immense contribution to the growth of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians with their exemplary life and teaching. Thus was born the congregation of the Missionary Sisters.

The missionary genius of Stephen Ferrando consisted in his transparent simplicity. He was not possessive of his congregation. He left it to the diverse missionary influences of the Salesian Fathers and Sisters to develop the spiritual and missionary physiognomy of the new congregation, leaving them free to impart to them the spiritual, apostolic and missionary formation needed.

**The Missionary Spirituality**

Archbishop Stephen Ferrando did not have a special spirituality. His spirituality was that of Jesus of the gospels, a spirituality of simple piety which made him capable of accepting the will of God in all things and situations and the joyous service of his people. His spirituality was simply that of Don Bosco, with a strong accent on being missionary.

In fact, Bishop Ferrando passed on to his Sisters the Salesian spirituality of joy, indefatigable work and simplicity, and loving service of the people. He had a missionary and Salesian spirituality. So too the spirituality of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC) is obviously a Salesian spirituality. It is clear that the missionary dynamism of the Salesians is still found alive in the congregation of the Missionary sisters.

The congregation of the MSMHC is a living monument to Stephen Ferrando and a gift to the Church of Northeast India, to India itself and to the world. The heart of Ferrando beats still in the congregation in all its vitality and energy as is seen in the numerous novices, about a hundred or so each year. Where the heart is wholesome, the body is alive and active. Stephen Ferrando continues to live in the Ferrandine Sisters (the name given by some priests as a moniker) which has now become a program of life. They are called to be missionaries with the heart of Ferrando. They are to keep alive the missionary spirit of Ferrando by being always missionaries among the people, and everywhere in the spirit of Don Bosco and of Bishop Ferrando.

**A Great Diocesan Bishop**

Stephen Ferrando was totally dedicated to the growth and development of the local church. In doing so he relied on the Salesian Society, perhaps even too much. When he left Northeast India, there were already two dioceses, a large number of parishes, parish schools, religious communities, educational institutions, healthcare centers such as the Nazareth Hospital at Shillong and about half a million Catholics.

We cannot overlook the fact that the diocesan minor seminary came rather late in his stewardship of the diocese. It happened not through lack of good will, but on account of his over dependence on the Salesian congregation.

On the other hand, Stephen Ferrando called seminarians from Poonamallee Seminary of Madras to work in his diocese and paid for their formation to the priesthood. Thus, he had, so to speak, begun the formation of the diocesan clergy. This initiative was supplemented with the establishment of the new St. Paul’s Seminary.

If we think of the reasons why he did not call other religious congregations to carry forward the work of evangelization, we have to remember the tradition of ius commissionis which was interpreted rather strictly in those days.

We cannot think of Stephen Ferrando except as a Salesian. Like Don Bosco, Ferrando had a heart full of tenderness towards all, the spirit of joy, and family spirit. Wherever he went, he was able to create a true family around himself

He had a genuine love for the confreres. He loved to be with his Salesian confreres. To be alone, without confreres, was a cause of sorrow for him. After the fire of 1936, when the students had to go to Kurseong in Darjeeling to live with the Jesuits, Ferrando said tearfully: “I prefer to see another cathedral destroyed by fire than to be distant from you”.

When we were students of theology (1958-62), Bishop Ferrando would visit us every now and then and used to talk to us of his missionary vision and aspirations. We were full of zeal and joy to become missionaries like him. We used to go to the cathedral happily for the annual Eucharistic procession, the Marian procession, the day of the Holy Father, walking for an hour because Bishop Ferrando used to celebrate all those functions with due solemnity. On such occasions, he himself would ensure that we did not lack good and substantial refreshment.

Stephen Ferrando loved all the Indian confreres. He did not make any distinctions between nationalities and cultures. In his presence, all felt as in a family. He was a person who forgave generously and freely. He had no rancour towards anyone, even towards those who used to speak against him, and criticized his plans and ideas.

On the occasion of jubilees, feast days, provincial Chapters and spiritual retreats, he came willingly to participate in all the meetings and the activities of his confreres. At times, he used to come even when not invited. He knew well how to supplement his’ limitations and to obtain the help of his confreres. Occasionally he used to consult other competent and prudent confreres. Thus he depended much on the advice of Mons. Bars, Frs. Joseph Arokiaswamy, R. Dal Zovo, E. Gutierrez, Noel Kenny and others.

**A Genuine Disciple of Christ**

The authenticity of a person is seen very clearly when divested of one’s office, authority and ecclesiastical powers. If this principle is used to measure the humanness and spirituality of Bishop Ferrando, he emerges as a true and authentic disciple of Christ.

During the second half of the 20 century, there took place many changes in India and in the Church due to political and ecclesiastical compulsions. The end of World War II, the Indian independence, the process of indigenization of the Church, and the choice of local leaders for the Church, Vatican II, the extraordinary growth of the Church in Northeast India - all these had an impact on every one.

At this point Stephen Ferrando had to undergo many sacrifices: he had to lay down his Episcopal office and to leave India, the land of his dreams. He had to leave his beloved people and the mission field of his dreams. Only a few who have exercised such a great office for 35 years as a bishop knows what it means to give up everything and return to his country of origin. Ferrando accepted all the inevitable ecclesiastical and political changes, without making any resistance. Even though he had not reached the mandatory age of retirement, he accepted it with a magnanimous heart. This reveals the humility and detachment of Ferrando.

The second great sacrifice or perhaps the most painful in his life was to be taken away by obedience from the people whom he loved as a true father. He had to leave all that he considered dear: the Christian communities, his friends and collaborators, and the congregation he himself had founded. He had to give up and sacrifice even his last wish of dying and of being buried in the midst of his people whom he had loved till the end. Thus, he had to leave Shillong with tears in 1969. The phenomenal growth of the Church in Northeast India and the growth of the congregation of the MSMHC can be attributed to the many sacrifices which Ferrando had to make.

**Missionary Animation**

At his return to Italy, Paul VI made him the titular Archbishop of Troina. The last nine years of his life were spent in missionary animation, in various parts of Italy. Wherever he went, he spoke of the missions, requesting financial assistance for the missions of Northeast India, creating missionary zeal in the people, and forming prayer groups for the support of the missions. He had a circle of benefactors to carry forward the works which he had begun.

From 1935 Stephen Ferrando used to write articles on the missions of Northeast India in the international reviews of the Salesians. These writings made a lasting impression on the Salesian congregation. He highlighted the missions, the missionaries, and inspired many young men to welcome the missionary vocation; and he moved many others to pray for and support the missions. Such missionary animation renewed the Christian life of his compatriots.

**Conclusion**

When we look at Archbishop Ferrando objectively from a distance of 17 years since his death, he appears to us as a true man of God and a great missionary. All the great missionaries continue to live on in their people. This is true also of Archbishop Stephen Ferrando. He lives on in the Church in Northeast India, and in the religious congregation of the MSMHC founded by him. He lives on in the Salesian congregation, especially among the Salesians in India, as an inspiration for all. (S. Karotemprel, Talk delivered in Rossiglione on the occasion of the Birth Centenary of Bishop Ferrando, 1995)

**Bishop. Stephen Ferrando**

O God, you raised up Stephen Ferrando,

As our Father and founder and model,

On our way to holiness and mission.

Stephen Ferrando, a tender sapling

Planted in the rich Christian soil of Liguria.

But destined to grow, blossom and ripen

Into fruits of holiness, mission and service,

In the hills and valleys of Northeast India.

Youthful Stephen set out from Ligurian port,

Whence sailed forth Columbus on a fragile bark,

Not for conquests and treasures of gold,

Or fragrant spices and aromatic perfumes,

But for souls in verdant hills and valleys,

A land of rare symphony of tribes and peoples,

To peoples longing to see the visible face

Of invisible God, Word made incarnate,

To touch and taste Your love and compassion,

Peoples yearning for knowledge and skills,

The land of the seven glorious sisters.

Into this blessed land Ferrando brought

A new charism of loving service that flowered

On the Salesian arbour in Don Bosco’s family

Of love for souls of the young and the needy,

His never fading cheerfulness, spirit of family.

On this day of remembrance and gratitude

To souls who drank at the fount of your charism,

We dare to walk with them and Mary our Help.

We their successors entreat you, 0 Lord,

Grant us the favour to see the dawn of the day,

When the Church will honour him on the altars,

As our model of holiness and mission. Amen.

*(Fr. S. Karotemprel sdb, 24.10.2009)*

**My Recollections and Moments of Refreshments**

**Dr. George Kallingal**

I had the privilege of knowing Bishop Ferrando for a little more than 4 years, when I was in the Salesian Novitiate in Sunnyside, Shillong, from April 1961to April, 1962 and from December 1964 to April 1968, when I worked as a teacher at St. Anthony’s School and at Don Bosco Technical School, Shillong. During these years, I had interacted with him on several occasions and I had many opportunities to get to know him on a personal basis. In this report, I shall highlight what I consider the dominant attributes and features of this very special and unique man of God. I have been touched and impressed by the humanity, sociability, spirituality and religiosity of this loving and caring man. May I touch on each of these personality attributes. These are my recollections and reflections and I am not making any claim about the validity and objectivity of the statements made and they are not testimonies to provide any objective evidence to claims others may make.

His Humanity:

Ferrando was a Bishop and yet he was a down-to- earth man, who could relate to people of all walks, I do have vivid memories of his genuine smile. Whenever I met with him, he displayed that attractive and appealing smile of a person who showed genuine interest in getting to know people. He had all the attributes of a fully functioning individual. He showed keen interest in getting to know people. He would take time to ask questions and to understand the background of people he talked to. He always showed much interest in getting to know people on an individual basis. He would interact with people not as a Bishop, but as a concerned and caring human being.

He enjoyed what all human beings enjoyed doing. He listened actively to what people had to say and he would empathize with them, feeling their pain when they were in pain and feeling their happiness when they were happy. He seemed to enjoy the innocent, natural pleasures of life and he would willingly accept invitations to participate in celebrative activities.

When we were Novices, we used to ask our Administrator to invite Bishop Ferrando, either for lunch or for dinner. Whenever he came, he would make special Italian meal for him and we all would relish it. We always looked forward to his coming for lunch or dinner. Whenever he came, he brought us much cheer and laughter. He fully understood the meaning and value of human life.

My recollections of him are those of a simple, humble man who enjoyed talking and interacting with ordinary people. He did not project his position or status in his dealings with people. His basic human elements stood out in anything and everything he did. He would listen to people’s problems and empathize with them; he would also participate in people’s joys when they had pleasant experiences to report to him. He would console and comfort people when they experienced tragedies in their life. He understood the plight of ordinary people and he willingly participated in their joys and sorrows.

He was not only eager to get to know people, but also eager to relate to people with warmth and affection. He was a very affectionate individual. Beyond his warm smile, people could see in him a loving and caring father to one and all. I recall that we, the Novices from Sunnyside, had gone to his office on several occasions and he always made sure that we were given tea and something to bite and he would join us to share a light moment with every one of us. We always looked forward to going to the Bishop’s House, not only for the tea but also to meet him and spend few moments with this man. He was truly a source of joy for all of us as we spent time talking to him and with him.

Bishop Ferrando had all the pleasant personality traits of an outgoing person. I had never seen him angry or upset. He was always outgoing and eager to meet with people. He seemed to enjoy our company every time we met with him. During the time he spent with us, there were no dull moments. He always cracked jokes and always had something positive to talk about.

He exhibited very exemplary behaviours. His behaviours reflected his inner calm and peace. Nothing seemed to bother him; he always had that smile on his face, even when the weather conditions were not always the best. On wet, rainy days and on cold wintry days as well on bright, sunny days, his smile always radiated warmth and pleasantness. Moments spent with him were indeed moments of refreshment.

**His Sociability**:

Bishop Ferrando gave free access to one and all. He did not differentiate people, based on color, creed, religion or gender. His doors were always open to people. Even on special days, he would take time to say something good to every one he met. I recall, on several occasions, he would make comments about my playing the electric organ in the Cathedral. I used to play the electric organ on some important occasions and he always made it a point to say something positive about my playing. 1 used to look forward to playing the organ in the Cathedral because I knew that Bishop Ferrando liked my playing.

I have vivid memories of his spending time in St. Anthony’s play-ground on every December 26, the feast day of his patron Saint. On that day, he would go from group to group and spend time chatting and enjoying the company of people from the different villages. He would have tea with different people. On those special days, he did not act as a Bishop, but as a simple priest, enjoying the company of his people. He was truly the shepherd, spending time with and guiding his sheep.

I always looked forward to the processions in May and November. They were memorable days, not only because of their religious significance but also because of his ability to interact with people and enjoy their company. He made it a point of meeting with as many people as he could and welcome them for the occasion.

**His Spirituality:**

Bishop Ferrando was indeed a man of faith, hope, love, charity and prayer. His spirituality was built on solid and strong pillars. He had strong faith in God and in His people. This faith seems to have helped him to build up adequate faith in himself I have never heard him express the “can’t attitude.” He seemed to believe that, with God’s help, everything was possible and he spread that note of optimism among every one who surrounded him, His optimism was a clear evidence of his faith in God. He believed in his people and he evidenced it by the way he interacted with his people. Nothing seemed to shake him up; even when things did not go as expected he would make comments that suggested that he was truly a man of faith.

Bishop Ferrando maintained an optimistic outlook on life even life conditions fluctuated. His faith seemed to give him a strong sense of trust in God and in His people. Nothing seemed to bother him. He would often talk about his trust in God’s Divine Providence and his belief that God would take care of His people. For him, everyone was a child of God, irrespective of color, creed, religion and gender. It was quite clear that he lived his life consistent with this belief.

His spirituality was shown in his love for people and in his acts of charity toward everyone. His love for his people was truly genuine and he always made efforts to do something to make people feel good when they were in his presence.

He prayed very often. I have seen him pray in the Cathedral as well as outside the Cathedral. He seemed to get much peace and tranquility from prayer. He would close his eyes during prayer, rest his head on his palms and engage in intense communication with God. After prayer, he would always have that smile on his face, indicating that he received some positive messages from God while he was praying.

**His Religiosity:**

Bishop Ferrando was indeed a religious person. He understood the true meaning of religion. His religion brought him very close to God and to His people. He did not differentiate people based on religion. He interacted freely and willingly with people of all religious backgrounds. He was a very spiritual person and as such he was able to see in every one the wonder of God’s creation. He saw every human being as a child of God. I must say that I always admired his ability to get along with all people despite their differences in culture.

His departure from Shillong for the last time was very tearful for every one present and it was a clear testimony to the strong and tender feelings that all the people of Shillong had for him. Thousands of people lined up along the road as he bade farewell to his loving people. He was sad and the people openly cried as he drove past throngs of people.

These are the recollections I have of this unique and special man of God. He was indeed a model for all of us and it is my hope that we all will find something to emulate in this very special individual who spent many years of his life helping the people of north east0 India. May God inspire us to imitate this man and live a life of devotion and dedication to serve the people of God as he did during the many years he spent his life in India. May his life be a source of inspiration for all of us! (Professor emeritus, University of Guam, USA, 28.05.2010)

**North East India’s First Apostle of Christ**

Fr. Joseph Puthenpurakal SDB

During 1958-1959 I was in Upper Shillong for my novitiate. Several times we used come to the Cathedral in Laitumkhrah for solemn services. And every time I met Bishop Ferrando I was struck by his fatherly goodness and smile with childlike simplicity. I came to know more about him and his passion for making Jesus known everywhere when I wrote Bishop Orestes Marengo SDB: North East India’s Unparalleled Missionary. If Marengo is a great missionary, then Ferrando is still greater, I concluded — the former being only a “novice” of the latter. The influence of Ferrando on Marengo is clear from the missionary ardour of Marengo.

**Some Reminiscenes**

Great preparations were made both in Guwahati and in Shillong to receive Bishop Ferrando when he was transferred from Krishnagar back to Shillong in 1935. The Salesians who had experienced his loving kindness as Rector of Our Lady’s House were overjoyed. The Bishop himself was more than happy, because he was returning to his “beloved” Khasis. On Good Friday 13 April 1936 the conflagration that destroyed the Cathedral and Our Lady’s House was equal to destroying what the entire fledgling new Diocese possessed. Bishop Ferrando was heart broken. But when the Brothers and Fathers had to leave to find shelter elsewhere, Bishop Ferrando declared, “The burning down of the Cathedral and of Our Lady’s House had caused me great sorrow! Yet, to see all the Fathers and Brothers leave Shillong, caused me more sorrow than that of the conflagration! God’s will be done!” Indeed he was a saintly Bishop whose heart was linked both to his God, the Provider of all what he needed, and to his dear Salesians.

In May 1944 Bishop Ferrando journeyed to Sonada to preach the retreat for the aspirants who replaced the Fathers and Brothers who were sent to the Concentration camp at Dehra-Dun. Bro. Paul Sebastian accompanied the Bishop. Before leaving Shillong Bro. Paul went to the Camp of the US soldiers in furlough in Shillong, and got some ration food for his journey with Bishop Ferrando to Sonada. Bro. Paul managed to get some six boxes of food. He brought them to Bishop’s House. Bishop Ferrando who saw those boxes told Bro. Paul to leave them for “the poor missionaries”, and that he and Bro. Paul could find some food in the buffet car in the train. So Bro. Paul left the boxes at the Bishop’s House in Shillong and went with the Bishop for Guwahati on their way to Sonada.

The journey from Shillong to Guwahati was adventurous. Bro. Cassagrande who was an expert driver and a good conservationist drove the Bishop’s car. They left Shillong in the afternoon to catch the train at Amingaon the same evening. The first puncture just before Barapani gave them an undesired rest. The spare tyre came handy. They continued their journey. But before reaching Nongpoh, there was a second puncture. And Nongpoh the only place where the tyres could be repaired was 4 kms away. Lucky for them, a jeep with some American soldiers on their way to Guwahati gave a lift to Bishop Ferrando and Bro. Paul. Bishop’s punctured car, Bro. Cassagrande and Bah Kherubin who accompanied them were left behind. They were told to get the tyres repaired in Nongpoh and wait there.

In the meantime Bishop reached Guwahati. He made a telephone call to Shillong (imagine those days without a mobile!) to arrange with someone to pick up the car from Nongpoh, while Bro. Paul was dropped at Pandu Ghat by the US soldiers. He crossed over to Amingaon and left for Sonada by himself with the parcels of electrical things he was carrying for Sonada house. He reached Siliguri next morning. He then travelled by the Darjeeling Mail and reached Sonada.

The next day Bishop Ferrando arrived in Sonada and started the retreat for the aspirants.

After the retreat Bishop Ferrando and Bro. Paul left for Calcutta to do shopping including procuring Homeo medicines and window pane for the Church at Mawlai. In the rush of the marketing Bro. Paul was pick pocketed Rs. 25/- a big sum in those days! Next day they together got into the Assam Mail at Sealdah and left for Parbatipore (the place where they had to change the train). Here it is important to remember that of all the things Bro. Paul bought in Calcutta the most important one was the stained glass which he got packed carefully and which he himself was carrying everywhere. When the train reached Parbatipore he entrusted the stained glass to the Bishop in the First Class compartment, and went out to look for a nice place for Bishop in the next train. Bro. Paul found a comfortable seat for the Bishop and was rushing back to the first train when he saw the Bishop along with the porters (who had rushed into the compartment in the meantime) walking to the connecting train everyone carrying something or the other! In the whole process, the Bishop had forgotten to take the stained glass which Bro. Paul had entrusted with the Bishop in the First Class compartment. It took a good bit of time to arrange everything in the new train. When Bro. Paul rushed back to the first train to look for the stained glass, it was no more there. One can imagine his disappointment. He asked the guard who told him to look for it at Lalmanirhat. The train reached Lalmanirhat at 2.00 a.m. Bro. Paul went in search of his precious stained glass. But he was told that he should enquire for it at Amingaon. The train reached Amingaon early morning. He arranged for the porter to carry the luggage to the ferry for crossing to Pandu Ghat. By the time everything was ready, it was too late for Bro. Paul to enquire further at Amingaon. He jumped into the ferry and along with the Bishop and the luggage reached Pandu Ghat. At Guwahati he told the whole story of the stained glass to Fr. Ernest Zanon SDB and begged him to see if he could find it in the parcel godown at Amingaon. To make the story short, after a few months Fr. Zanon wrote to Bro. Paul that he had found a heap of stained glass pieces in the corner of the parcel godown at Amingaon.

There ended the story of the stained glass for the Church at Mawlai.

One cannot, certainly, blame the forgetfulness of Bishop Ferrando; one can only admire his willingness to take care of that famous stained glass; and praise the love with which Bro. Paul carried it all the way from Calcutta.

These tidbits highlight the simplicity, the goodness and the holiness of Bishop Ferrando, North East India’s first “Apostle of Christ.”(DBCIC, Mawlai, Shillong, 19.10.2011)

**My Indelible Impressions of Bishop Ferrando**

**Fr. Paul Vadakumpadan SDB**

**Editor, Mission Today**

I was a young aspirant in Savio Juniorate when I saw Bishop Ferrando for the first time.  We used to see him at several functions like the annual Eucharistic procession.  Sometimes he came for Mass to Savio Juniorate.  More than once, we went to see him in the Bishop's House.  All those meetings would have considerably influenced a young lad.  Indeed, they have left indelible impressions on me.  I was touched by his affectionate ways and smiling face.  The fact that he used to shake his head often seemed to say he was always available, welcoming, and glad that we were there.

When we were still new to Shillong in 1966, we went to visit the Bishop.  He welcomed us like a loving father and gave us sweets, the type of which we had not seen earlier. It was the first time we were getting sweets from a Bishop.

I can still remember him standing in front of the Shillong Cathedral while we took part in a huge procession to protest the expulsion of missionaries from India.  We, boys from Savio Juniorate, were also present in the Cathedral grounds, as a large number of people assembled to wish Bishop Ferrando goodbye.  Later we also went to the GS Road, Mawlai to wave our hands to him in a final affectionate farewell as he left the city for the last time.

Looking back at those events of over four decades ago, I feel it was the remarkable pioneering missionary service of such men as Bishop Ferrando that created the flourishing mission field of Northeast India.  As we celebrate the memory of this remarkable man of God, may we also continue the glorious legacy he has left behind, by bringing Jesus our Savior to the people around us, by word and deed, always and everywhere.  ( Savio Center , Mawlai , 15-12-2011)

**CONCLUSION**

The book presents the different facets in the life of Bishop Ferrando.  It also highlights the various virtues that he practiced during his life which enabled him to resemble his Master in whose footsteps he walked and carried out his apostle for 46 years in various capacities. "He was a zealous missionary, an apostle deeply attached to the Master, a pastor who appreciated the culture of the people he served, a Church leader who took keen interest in the formation of clergy and religious, a pioneer dedicated to the total development of people, a founder with a great vision, an evangelizer deeply committed to sharing the faith and a loving father who made everyone feel at home.

Bishop Ferrando took great pride in appreciating his missionary priests who worked with tenacity for the cause of Christ expanding the Church in Northeast India. In his last Pastoral Letter dated 1 September 1969, he wrote: "I must not forget to mention here the many soldiers of Christ who, sacrificing themselves for souls, fell victims of their heroism and work.  The gap they left was very hard indeed to fill.

The humility and obedience of Bishop Ferrando paved the way for his holiness of life.  During the years that he spent in Italy after his retirement from, he never spoke about the various responsibilities that he held in Northeast India.  He never boasted about the enormous achievements that he accomplished during these periods. In fact, Fr. Fabian Vitto admitted: "I was impressed by his spirit of humility. He was a great man an Archbishop and a Founder. He had great rapport with important persons in the world. Yet his last days were spent in silent humility." without lamenting his past glory.....This was the sign of a great man who did not want to manifest his greatness, because he wanted the figure of Christ to emerge through him. His sense of obedience was phenomenal. During his last visit to Shillong in 1972-1973, Bishop Ferrando spoke to the sisters at Malki: "We have many defects and many shortcomings.  Yet throughout my life, at least in obedience, I try to do my best to follow the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Throughout his life, Bishop Ferrando had only one aim in life, namely, to live a holy life.  He kept on recommending his sisters in his talks and letters to become great saints.  Giulio Barchielli sdb , the then Rector of the Salesian community at Genova - Quarto , where Bishop Ferrando spent his last years, wrote : " He was an authentic religious and a holy person . He was truly a man of God . I hope to see him raised to the honors of the altar before the Lord calls me to eternity. Let us hope and believe that it will take place. I am convinced that it will be so.

Speaking about Bishop Ferrando, Fr. Noel Kenny comments: "What is important is not what he did but what he was. His simplicity, his spirit of discernment, his humility, his apostolic zeal shown by his preaching the Word of God, by his visits to every corner of his diocese, by his readiness to spend time in the confessional, his love for the sacrament of reconciliation (every Saturday afternoon that he was in Shillong he would make his confession in the Cathedral to Fr. Fontana, who was once his novice), his availability to the poor and humble who knocked at the door of his office, his love for the poor Oratory children.

Bishop Ferrando made his Episcopal motto" Apostle of Christ 'a program of life like his Father and Founder Don Bosco's motto' Give me Souls and take away the rest.  He lived it with determination and tenacity leaving a legacy for his spiritual daughters and for all those who wish to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.  Bishop Ferrando lived an exemplary life loving God and neighbour.

“His fancy was the word of God which he loved to preach to everyone he met. His passion was to be with the poor in the remotest villages of his diocese. As a Bishop and a Shepherd. Christ was his model whom he emulated so well. He was truly a good shepherd who knew his sheep and gave his life for them."

Hence, it is our fervent desire that the process of beatification and canonization of Bishop Ferrando that is initiated may come to fruition soon.  Let us pray earnestly live a holy life and work hard to get this dream realized for the greater glory of God.  May Bishop Ferrando's saintly life spurs us to emulate the virtues that he lived!  May his sanctity of life bring forth the glory of God by raising him to the honors of the Altar.