**BISHOP STEPHEN FERRANDO: A MAN SENT BY GOD**

**EARLY CHILDHOOD ( 1895-1907 )**

1. **Rossiglione - the Land of Sunshine**

 *" Valle Stura, "* is a fertile valley sloping down the ridges of the snow clad Apennine Mountains , stretching towards the Ligurian region till Genova the commercial sea port , an ancient city comprising three important centers: Rossiglione,  Masone, and Campoligure.  Rossiglione is further divided into two hamlets Upper and Lower Rossiglione- having a total population of three .  thousand inhabitants.  It is a semi-medieval town situated.  on the border of Piemonte and Liguria in the Province of Genova, North Italy, in a valley surrounded by lofty mountain ranges on all sides.  The river Stura flows majestically through the middle of this little town, making the valley fertile and evergreen with varied vegetation.  The river has played havoc in the past, the last being in 1977 when the whole region was inundated by its surging waters.  What really impresses one in this little town is its unassuming appearance and quietness.  Dotting the length and breadth of its mountainous backdrop are houses small and big, ancient and modern, where life has woven its peaceful pattern for generations.

1. **Religious Background of Rossiglione**

Rossiglione has its own religious traditions which keep the people connected to their Creator and to one another.  Faith permeated every aspect of the life of the people, and they were constantly in symbolic touch with the divine. The cycle of seasons, the calloused hands of the elders reciting their beads, the muffled footsteps in procession to a holy shrine, uniforms of Confraternities and Associations- all were silent words that spoke of God and His ways, as He walked among His people.

Rossiglione comes under the diocese of Acqui.  The present parish church of Upper Rossiglione, dedicated to St. Catherine Virgin and Martyr, was built around 1609.  In the course of centuries this ancient church has been beautified with precious paintings, marble statues and altars which attract the attention of faithful from far and near.  At the right side of the main altar is the Niche "dedicated to Madonna degli Angeli (Our Lady of Angels). A certain Pizzorni family, brought the statue from Genova in 1811, carrying it on their shoulders all the way. The people believe that Our Lady of Angels protected their village from all dangers in the past, and that she still protects them under her blue mantle. In order to show their love and devotion to the Mother of God, the parishioners began to conduct a solemn annual procession beginning from 1812, on the first Sunday of August, carrying the magnificent statue of Madonna degli Angeli, reciting rosaries, accompanied by musical bands, songs and prayers. It is a belief that the devotees of Madonna degli Angeli receive many graces and favors on this day. It is an occasion for families and relatives to come together under the banner of Mother Mary to seek her protection and strengthen the bond of the families.  It also revitalizes the life of the faithful in the spirit of communion, collaboration and service.

  Having such religious and natural settings, no wonder Rossiglione has given some outstanding personages to the Church and to society, in the course of the past century.  It was in this little town that Stephen Ferrando an illustrious son of Don Bosco, a pioneer missionary to North East India and the Founder of a new religious family, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians ( MSMHC) , was born in 1895. Stephen Ferrando was proud of his native place and always kept in touch with his compatriots, whom he appreciated and esteemed very much.  In Rossiglione he was known as Our Bishop (il Nostro Vescovo).

1. **Family and Relatives**

Stephen Ferrando was born on 28 September 1895 at Rossiglione, in the Province of Genova, in the diocese of Acqui, Italy.  His parents belonged to a middle-class family who worked hard to make both ends meet, yet tried to give the best to their children.  Augustine Ferrando, Stephen's father, was a contractor at first and later worked in the local textile firm.  His mother Josephine Salvi was a humble housewife, who took pains to bring up her children in good faith and Christian tradition.  At the parish level, Augustine Ferrando was the prior of the Confraternity of St. Sebastian.  Every evening the family gathered together for prayer, especially the Rosary which they recited devotedly.  Stephen had an elder sister Maria, who was two years older than him and a brother John Baptist, who was three years younger to him.  The family also had adopted one of their cousins.  Rina Castella, who had lost both her parents from her at an early age.

 Josephine Salvi, mother of Stephen Ferrando, passed away in 1940, at the age of 73. In 1947 his father who was then 83 years old, followed her to the heavenly home.  The same year his brother who was 49 and a bachelor, also passed away.  His sister Maria was married in 1924 to Mr. Giuseppe Pizzorni, and had two sons Gianni and Stefano.  Maria died in the year 1971, at the age of 78, and her husband Giuseppe passed away in 1977 at the age of 86.  Stefano Pizzorni his nephew, passed away in 1984 at the age of 58, leaving behind his wife Marisa Pizzorni and two daughters Martha and Tiziana.  Stephen Ferrando had the privilege of blessing his other nephew Gianni Pizzorni's marriage with Angela Minetti, on 24 October 1949, during one of his visits to Italy.  Gianni Pizzorni died in 1991 at the age of 66, leaving behind his wife Angela and their two sons - Enrico and Stefano.  Mrs. Angela, Mrs. Marisa and their children and grandchildren are the surviving relatives of Stephen Ferrando today.  The devoted Ferrando family took great care to inculcate in their children the Christian spirit, true love of God and neighbour, love for hard work and sacrifices.  It was in the lap of his family that little Stephen acquainted himself with spiritual practices, prayer, mortification and austerity of life, which stood him in good stead in later years.  He grew up in an ambience where faith and life were intimately connected.  His parents of him were dignified, lovable and God-fearing.  People looked on them with esteem for their religiosity and exemplary life.  The Ferrandos were so deep in their Christian life that later as a mature Salesian, Stephen could say in all truth, “From my family I received a rich heritage: a great love for God and Madonna, spirit of sacrifice and a temperament inclined for joy." In later life, he reproduced the same home atmosphere of love, mutual trust and esteem for one another, mingled with the characteristic family spirit of Don Bosco in his dealings with all.

The source of his living devotion to the Mother of God is to be traced back to the traditional devotion to the Madonna degli Angeli that his compatriots nurtured.  He developed and fostered this tender love throughout his life.  It was a usual practice to see little Stephen on the frontlines of the procession, rapt in devotion.  These annual Marian processions had a tremendous impact on the life of Stephen Ferrando.  Later in life he would lead many Eucharistic processions through the dusty roads of the Assam Missions, holding the Lord close to his heart.  As the titular Archbishop of Troina, he used to lead the Marian Procession of his hometown with much nostalgic memories of the Assam Missions.

In his childhood days Stephen was just an ordinary boy.  He was not very intelligent or brilliant, yet he was smart, simple and serene.  He was extremely meek and humble, so much so, often he became the victim of the pranks of his companions who loved to make fun of him. Stephen was good-natured enough to enjoy the fun along with his friends. Even today people of Rossiglione speak of the jovial nature of Stephen.  I have made everyone happy in his company.  He was able to laugh at his own follies and never took offense when he was laughed at. This quality remained with him all through his life, even as a Bishop. Often his friends of him made fun of his large girth and slow steps. He would join them in the fun and never get angry. When it came to his duties he was very responsible. Often he sought to be alone and seemed to be reflective. He appeared to be an ordinary boy that no one speculated on what he would become in the future.

1. **Christian Formation of Stephen**

The Christian formation at home and in the Parish helped little Stephen to develop his gifts of nature and grace. Stephen was baptized on 30 September 1895, in his native Parish church of St. Catherine. He was privileged to become a Christian under the protective eyes of the Madonna degli Angeli, whose motherly gaze fondly hovered over the baptismal font. Indeed, the Mother of Jesus was there (cf. In 2:1), as he was christened and welcomed into the loving bosom of the Mother Church. From that moment the Madonna had become a true mother to him.  Little did he know the role that would be played by the Mother of God in his life and ministry in the vast Assam Missions.

 Stephen received First Communion in 1903 and the Sacrament of Confirmation on 8 August 1904 from Msgr.  Disma Marchese.  His godfather was Mr. Gerolomo Pizzorni.  He was anointed by the Spirit to be a soldier of Christ forever, even though Stephen understood little of its profound significance.  At his Confirmation he was determined to be a soldier of Christ; During the World War I he was a courageous defender of his motherland and later on God made him an "Apostle of Christ" for the people of North East India.

1. **School Life of Stephen**

Stephen had his early schooling till class III (scuola elementare) in his own village, Rossiglione.  He was industrious and soon manifested his desire to continue his studies.  On 9 October 1904 he was admitted to the Salesian boarding school at Fossano.  As he was welcomed and introduced, Stephen stood in awe at the sight of the large study hall, the spacious refectory and the beautiful chapel.  Stephen's first weeks were spent more in coping with the wonder and novelty of the place than with the necessity to study hard.  For the Middle School education, he was enrolled at Don Bosco's own Oratory, Valdocco, Turin.  Though not very outstanding in intelligence, I have manifested great diligence in his studies.  He was a person of great discipline and etiquette.  He was much sought after by his companions for fun and humour.  In Stephen's company everyone felt at ease and at home.  His teachers loved him for his calm and simple nature, particularly for his obedience and cheerful disposition.  At times he was mischievous and played tricks on his companions.  Yet they loved him for his simple, serene and humble nature.  From childhood days he showed a great spirit of piety, which kept on becoming deeper and stronger as he grew in age.

**SALESIAN MISSIONARY VOCATION (1907-1923)**

 Don Stefano Rizzo, the Chaplain at the Oratory of St. Catherine, Rossiglione, was a Salesian who had been admitted to Valdocco by Don Bosco himself.  Don Rizzo was the uncle of Stephen's close friend Ravera Giuseppe Ferdinando.  This priest was the primary inspiration behind Stephen Ferrando's Salesian missionary vocation, and it was he who advised his parents to admit little Stephen in the Salesian School at Fossano and later on at Valdocco.

1. **Valdocco, the Source of Inspiration**

Stephen Ferrando arrived at Valdocco on 24 October 1907 and remained there till 24 July 1909. During this time, he had the rare opportunity of knowing personally some of the outstanding Salesians such as Fr. Paul Albera, the second successor of Don Bosco as Rector Major of the Salesian Society from 1910 to1921, and Fr. Philip Rinaldi, Don Bosco's third successor from 1922 to 1931.  The atmosphere in Valdocco was inspiring and very homely.  He entered cheerfully and generously into the round of the various activities that bound him and his companions together.  His goodness, simplicity, sincerity and sense of humour blossomed into great enthusiasm, which endeared him to his fellow-students and teachers alike.  His close contact with him with the Salesians at Valdocco, most of whom personally knew Don Bosco, and where the warmth and love infused by Don Bosco was still very vibrant, inspired him soon to join their ranks.  Enthused by Don Bosco's challenging motto: ""Give me souls and take away the rest," he expressed to his superiors his. desire to be a Salesian priest; later when he went home he disclosed the matter to his parents too. It was a matter of great pride for his parents to know that their beloved son wanted to be a religious priest. They supported his decision and encouraged him to pursue his studies, though they had to put up with great sacrifices and financial strain. For his high school he was sent to Valsalice, Turin, where the true personality of Stephen Ferrando began to blossom.

In the Salesian boarding and formation houses it is customary to invite the missionaries who are on [holidays to](http://holidays.to/) share their missionary experiences with the boarders and students studies in the school. This was done particularly in the formation houses, with a view to inspire the youth to the Salesian way of life and more so, to instill the missionary spirit in them. Missionaries were considered as great heroes in their homeland. The missionaries would describe their life with their various adventures, their experiences, achievements and failures, their heroic activities and challenges and above all their joys and consolations in saving souls and caring for the poor and abandoned. This definitely enthused Stephen Ferrando and confirmed his desire for him to be a missionary priest.  In the course of his studies young Stephen manifested a clear and strong will to study.  He willingly took an active part in the life of the community, mingled well with all and made everyone happy with his jovial nature and by helping those in need.

1. **Entry into Novitiate and First Profession**

 On completion of his high school studies, Stephen Ferrando was admitted to the novitiate at Foglizzo, on 14 September 1911 and received the clerical habit on 19 14 October 1911 from Don Giulio Barberis, the novice master.  It was during the novitiate that his missionary vocation began to take deeper roots in him until it took hold of his whole being as if gripped by an irresistible power.  It was customary in the novice to invite outstanding missionaries from different parts of the world to speak to the novices about their missionary life and experiences, the challenges and demands faced by them.  This created a great passion for the missions in the young novices.  Their inspiring episodes and narrations awakened Stephen's imaginative powers of him and he intensely desired to be like them.  Fr. Louis Ulla, SDB, one of his novitiate companions and an intimate friend, testified that at the completion of his novitiate his superiors wrote: " He distinguished himself among the confreres for maturity in judgment, for strong spirit of piety, for balance and equanimity of character, for prudence and exactitude in obedience, humble and docile submission and spirit of sacrifice." He dedicated himself whole heartedly to his studies and religious formation.  Stephen Ferrando made his first profession in the Salesian Congregation on 15 September 1912, at the age of eighteen.

1. **Towards Actualizing a Great Dream**

In 1914 while doing his practical training (Regency) at Borgo San Martino as a cleric, an unexpected letter reached him from the Major Superiors in Turin.  They wanted to know what type of apostolate Stephen Ferrando would like to do as a priest.  He, who dreamt of becoming a missionary from the start, promptly filled in the form, entering a single word in bold letters: " MISSIONARY. "That was the dawn of a new beginning in Stephen's life.  He had made the choice forever and given his word.  The goal was clear, well focused and precise.  He simply wanted to be a missionary in any part of the world. Passion for Christ and for His Kingdom had already become a passion for humanity in him.  He was determined to give his best for this single purpose.  Young Stephen was familiar with the romantic missionary literature that flooded Europe during the early part of the twentieth century.  He dreamt of the adventures that awaited him, as he would leave for the far off lands.  He wanted to dedicate his whole life for the cause of Christ in the missions.

 The examples of St. Paul and St. Francis Xavier fired his soul.  But more personally the one who really set his soul ablaze with the missionary zeal was Fr. Louis Mathias, the leader of the first Salesian Missionary group to North East India.  He re-lived the memories of Valdocco from where missionaries were sent out every year to different parts of the world.  The spirit-filled missionaries who went forth without counting the cost and clinging only to God and to the Blessed Mother, whom the Salesians fondly called the "Madonna Help of Christians," kept on inspiring and challenging young Ferrando

1. **Life's Real Test: World War I**

As gold is tested in the fire, young Stephen's vocation was soon put to the test.  Mysterious and wondrous Indeed are the ways of God!  The Almighty had His designs set for Stephen and wanted the best in him to emerge in trying situations, in nothing less than a World War, which would change not only the course of history.  but also affect many persons' lives.  Stephen recalls, "the second unexpected letter came a year later when Italy joined the World War I. The summons to take up arms in the battlefield in defence of my country came like a bolt from the blue for me and my companions." Those hands that were accustomed to be joined in prayer and praise, were soon trained to hold the weapons of defence and destruction!  Trusting in Divine Providence young Stephen tried to do his best for the cause of his country.  For four years (1915-1918) he was kept in the frontlines of the battlefield.  I have entrusted his plans for his future into the hands of God.

The young cleric approached the frontiers of War with an attitude of pride and loyalty towards his motherland Italy.  He accepted with resignation the changes caused by the War and saw the will of God in his call from him to be a soldier to defend his country.  He considered saving his motherland from the hands of enemies as something sacred, urgent and important.  He gave himself to the service of his country and fought valiantly.  He inspired enthusiasm and high morale among his companions.  The words of Winston Churchill could be applied to Stephen and his companions as they set out for the battle field: "Sure I am that this day we are masters of our fate, that the task which has been set before us is not above our strength, that its pangs and toils are not beyond our endurance. As long as we have faith in our own cause and an unconquerable will to win, victory will not be denied us. " And they walked the talk ... He wore the military uniform all of four harrowing years in defence of Italy and Macedonia.

 In the midst of fierce fighting, at the core of his heart, he longed for the end of the War and to be back in the seminary to pursue his studies for the priesthood.  He kept this flame alive and prayed fervently every day and looked forward eagerly to the end of the war.  He witnessed human carnage on a vast scale; the untold misery of the people greatly troubled him.  Only the end of the War would enable him to prepare himself to be Christ's soldier to alleviate the suffering poor and the illiterate and carry Christ's love to them.

 The following are the theaters where S. Ferrando and his companions experienced the rigors of war. The Southeast of Tronto, North of Verona and Padova, Monte Carla, Monte Grappa, the banks of the river Plave and the Alps.  Writing years later, on 12 August 1970, the Bishop recalled: "I am now near the Alps. Fifty-five years ago, I came here as a soldier. There is a mountain nearby with a War cemetery where more than 70,000 soldiers who were killed here await the Resurrection. The Lord spared me.

 In the battle-field, his immediate superiors soon noted the practical intelligence and ingenious spirit of bravery in Stephen Ferrando and he began to receive recognitions and promotions: from Sergeant to Lieutenant, from Commandatore to Cavaller and to Grand Official of the Italian Republic. He was decorated with a Silver Medal for his valor in 1919 and a number of certificates of merit were awarded to him'. He was honored with awards and medals for his valor and courage. He received the following recognitions from various dignitaries for the great services he rendered in defense of his homeland:

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.
3. On 14 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 the title of " Grande Official Italian Republic 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 Archeological Academy of Italy, bestowed upon Bishop Ferrando the " Diploma Accademico Onorario “, by which he became a member (Honoris Causa) of this Archeological Academy.

These records show how the Italian Government recognized the selfless services of Stephen Ferrando for the valor he exhibited while serving his country as a soldier.

*One of the favorite War stories, which he was fond of narrating, is interesting, On one occasion I was guarding a strategic position near a tunnel where the enemy soldiers were suspected to be hiding. Suddenly I noticed a movement at the entrance of the tunnel and suspected danger. There was no time for a second thought, Immediately I called out "Hands up and come out!  "Three sturdy German soldiers came out. Fear gripped me as I saw the hefty fellows. I plucked up all my courage and called on God and all the saints whomever I could remember I managed to put up a good front and led them to the commander in chief. O God, never did I pray so fervently as this day. "*

Another incident shows his courage and daring spirit**.**

 *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 back when we saw bullets flying in our direction.  In our frantic attempt to escape the bullets and save ourselves, one of our companions was shot at on both his legs. Being a bit slow in nature, I was the last in the line behold my wounded friend lying bathed in blood and pain.  There was no time to spare.  I lifted him up and placed on my shoulders and began to march, entrusting both of us to the protection of my Madonna. I could have been easily caught as I move slowly with my dying friend. God saved me.  I managed to carry him for miles on my back.  In the camp we nursed him and God saved his life.  I was sheer providence of God.  Later on, was awarded for this act of bravery!  But only God knows how terribly afraid I was.*

 It is clear from these incidents that the titles and laurels conferred on him were well deserved.  He had to pay the price.  "Always better and always more" became his watchword later in life.  S. Ferrando maintained contact with his superiors, parents and friends during the War.  A few post cards to this effect are found in the Central Archives of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Pisana, Rome.

1. **Perseverance in Pursuing the Goal.**

The end of the War seemed to be a dream too good to be true.  The War opened before S. Ferrando new avenues and views for a promising future, with all the laurels and titles attached to his name.  His own family had enormous expectations from him.  He was now brilliant, handsome, fearless and dreamt of greatness.  He had seen new horizons and had to admit that he would never be at peace again within the narrow confines of a small village.  His inner voice kept on whispering that there was more in life than wars and battles, laurels and honors.  The goal before Stephen was very clear, and it beckoned to him to leave everything behind and follow that voice which spoke deep within him.  In 1918 aged twenty-five, Stephen enthusiastically returned to the seminary to continue his priestly formation, a mature and renowned ex-military man. The discipline and hardship of the military life had served to deepen his quest for God.  The civil honors and glory did not seem to satiate his inner yearnings.  The horrors and misery of the war and the suffering humanity had not made him rough and t tough, instead, it motivated him all the more to dedicate his life for the cause of peace and charity in some mission land.  In fact, the War ignited further his desire for him to be a missionary priest, to manifest the compassionate face of God to the suffering section of humanity.  The Superiors gave him yet another year to discern his vocation, while he taught at the Istituto Tecnico-Commerciale Liceo Ginnassio in Costantinopoli, from 15 March to 15 December 1919.

 **6. Perpetual Profession and Theological Studies**.

 In 1920 Stephen came to Collegio San Carlo at Borgo San Martino, Alessandria, the Salesian Major seminary to do his theological studies, he made his perpetual profession on 26 December 1920. While pursuing his theological studies he assisted the boys and taught in the school as well, from 1920 to 1923. He was also engaged in organizing the festive oratory.  His military experience of him stood him in good stead, for he was able to discipline his boys and instill in them human and Christian values.  His pleasant nature and good humor endeared him to the boys.  The boys greatly enjoyed listening to the heroic exploits as well as the starting experiences of their ex-military teacher.  They had great respect for this valiant hero!

  In 1921 Cleric Ferrando was sent to Valdocco to replace cleric Emilio de Marchi for some time.  His students took an immediate liking to him, as his lessons from him were very interesting and he knew how to present the material pleasantly.  The students particularly liked his physical training classes for they knew he was an ex-military officer decorated with a Silver Medal.  At that time.  Orestes Marengo, then a young boy, was doing his Latin Course at Valdocco .  Marengo later recalled his first encounter with Ferrando and how Ferrando had struck a chord within him at that time.  After two years Ferrando was chosen to lead the first group of novices from Italy to Shillong and Marengo who was one of the novices in the group, felt doubly privileged for having known Ferrando at Valdocco.  Later on Ferrando was Marengo's novice master.  They influenced each other tremendously and both were equally passionate lovers of the Assam Mission and soul friends.  Stephen received the sub diaconate on 23 September 1922 at Casale, from the hands of Mgr.  Albino Pella.

1. **Ordination and Summons to the Missions**

On 18 March 1923, His Eminence Mgr.  Albino Pella, Cardinal of Alessandria ordained Stephen Ferrando a priest at Collegio San Carlo, Borgo San Martino.  His parents, relatives and people of Rossiglione looked forward to this day with much eagerness.  They gave him a great welcome and the First Holy Mass was celebrated with great solemnity.  They were proud of this great son of Rossiglione Another surprise awaited Fr. Stephen immediately after his ordination.  Again, it was a letter from the then Rector Major, Fr. Philip Rinaldi, with these words:

“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 Ferrando was overjoyed, yet he suddenly felt unprepared for such a call.  He had no idea of ​​the Assam Missions, no knowledge of English or any of the Indian languages.  But by now he was used to obeying orders unquestioningly, thanks to the military discipline and service!  After the initial shock, the brave soldier in him rose to the occasion and Fr. Stephen was all prepared to give himself whole-heartedly to his mission and responded generously.  And so he obeyed willingly and sent a message to the Rector Major expressing his readiness to depart at any time.

 He recalled how he witnessed the send-off for Assam of the first group of Salesian missionaries, under the leadership of Fr. Louis Mathias, on 23 October 1921, at the Basilica of Valdocco.  The ceremony was presided over by Bishop Castrale.  In that touching scene, after receiving the crucifix, the missionaries received the parting embrace from superiors, confreres, relatives and friends.  Fr. L. Mathias was asked to say a few words on behalf of the missionaries leaving for Assam and Latin America.  He referred to Assam as the " incomparable " land, " the new Patagonia. "He spoke of the many languages of Assam " 167 of them! When they heard of so many languages, the faithful in the audience was wonder - struck! Little did Stephen know that two years later he would receive a similar send-off for Assam in the very same place!!

The adventures that awaited him in the mission land kept him pondering and excited: souls to be saved languages ​​to be mastered, climates to be accustomed to, wild animals and sickness to be encountered, savages in feathered headdresses, rivers to ford, wild beasts and poisoned arrows... new cultures and peoples to be befriended! He wanted to know more about Assam and looked for all the available atlases and geography books concerning India and particularly Assam. From then on Assam and its peoples were imprinted in his heart and mind. He dreamt of the Assam missions and was ready to stake his life for the and sake of winning people to God.  Tested and tried in the furnace of World War I as an "iron soldier," he was prepared to face the difficulties of the mission field.  He left the battlefields of Italy to fight great wars in India to win souls and gather merits for heaven!

Stephen went home to bid farewell to his parents, brother sister, relatives and friends.  Since no one had any idea of ​​the mission land to which Stephen was heading there was uncertainty and fear as to whether they would see him again.  Amidst tears and sobs, he was given a moving farewell in his family of him and at the parish church.  His parents of him though sorrowful, was proud of their son of him, blessed him and assured him of their prayerful support always.  When his mother asked him " Son, when will you return , " His single - word response was : " Never . " He left for Turin to meet the Superiors and to get the required instructions, since he was to take the novices along with him.  From Turin, after meeting the superiors, he proceeded to Venice to board the ship along with his companions.  He inspired confidence in his companions, quoting the words of the Apostle Thomas "Let us also go and die with Him."(In 11:16).  When God's call was revealed to him through the Superiors, he joyfully accepted it and set out trusting in the Divine Promise of Jesus: "I will be with you till the end of time." (Mt 28: 20)

**FROM THE ALPS TO THE HIMALAYAS (2-22 December 1923)**

 In 1922 Fr. Louis Mathias and his companions had started with great enthusiasm their Salesian missionary work in Assam. They wanted to established the church and the Salesian Congregation on a sound footing in Assam, and for this Mathias had a plan, which was different from the usual custom of those days. He wanted to start a novitiate in Assam itself and the young novices from Europe were to be formed there, together with their Indian counterparts. Philip Rinaldi, the Rector Major agreed to this idea and the formation program in loco began with ardour and intensity.

On 2 December 1923, Fr. Stephen Ferrando, along with cleric Joseph Foglia and eight novices, GiuseppeBarccchirello, Eligio Cinato, Alvaro Duranti, Giuseppe Farassino, Orestes Marengo, Paolo Prando, Giacomo Rosetti and Antonio Rodolfo Toigo left Venice for the Assam missions.  "All of them were traveling for the first time by ship, and proved to be good travelers. The following extract is found in the chronicles of the Salesian Province of Guwahati: "We left Turin on the 30 of 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 was 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.  "There was a group of Black Shirts (members of the former Fascist party) in the same ship with them, who were engaged for some work by the government of Afghanistan. Though the triumphant Fascists party was causing a lot of trouble in Italy, the militant Fascists were quite friendly and well-disposed to the Salesian group. One evening, they expected Fr. Ferrando's party to join in their informal concert, and Fr. Ferrando did oblige them and saw that his company did them some good. They held him, as a priest and an ex- military officer of World War I. In great esteem. All along the seventeen days of voyage, Fr. Ferrando was often seen contemplating the deep blue waters beyond the horizon, the mission lands across the ocean.

The group arrived in Bombay on 18 December 1923, and Fr. Eugene Mederlet, the Superior of the Salesians in South India welcomed them. He accompanied them to Calcutta. In Calcutta Fr. Gil, A Spanish Salesian missionary awaited they arrival there, met the group.  He took them by bus through the Howrah Bridge to Sealdah, to board the train for Guwahati.  When they reached Amingaon on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra on the following day, a ferry took them across Brahmaputra to Pandu, the ferry landing stage near Guwahati.  From the ferry Fr. Ferrando had already seen Mgr.  Mathias on the shore and they waved to each other.  As the ferry touched the bank, the thrill of arriving at their destination lift up the faces of everyone.  Fr. Ferrando introduced the new comers one by one, not only by giving merely their names and places of birth but also by describing some of their qualities.  They surrounded Mgr.  Mathias, asking him a thousand questions.  Msgr.  Mathias had arranged two vehicles to take them to the mission centre at Guwahati.  After their lunch, the group joyfully proceeded to Shillong.  The thought that soon they would see Shillong kept them awake and alert.  All along the winding road to Shillong they sang hymns and praises to God and the Madonna.  The zigzagging pathways and detours seemed to foretell the arduous future missionary journeys which would be undertaken very soon.

On Saturday, 22 December 1923, Fr. Ferrando and the novices reached Shillong.  As he landed in the unfamiliar world of his future home.  Fr. Ferrando had feelings of gratitude, great hope and immense joy that his desire of being a missionary is finally being fulfilled.  The feelings, expectations and dreams were mingled with excitement and contentment.  The arrival of Fr. Ferrando on the eve of Christmas was significant.  Paul Vadakumpadan writes:

He arrived in Assam on the eve of Christmas in 1923.  This fact was not without significance.  Even as that first Christmas in India was most extraordinary for him, his 46 years of service in the North East was one long Christmas, celebration of the birth of Christ in the hearts of so many people.  When he was nominated, Bishop there were 40,000 Catholics in the region.  At the end of his long missionary day, that number had grown nearly ten times.  Moreover, if on completion of his Episcopal service in 1969, Shillong could be raised to the status of an archdiocese, it was in good measure, thanks to his indefatigable zeal for him and that of his collaborators.

“They were surprised to see that practically the whole Catholic community was present there to welcome them.” There were Salesian Fathers and Brothers, the Sisters of Notre Dame des Missions and the Loreto Sisters along with their boarding children.  The boarders of St. Anthony's Orphanage led the group to the church with the help of torches made of bamboo, for it was already dark.  In the church the Te Deum was sung, and benediction with the Blessed Sacrament was imparted.  When the crowd dispersed, the new group was taken to the dining room where the missionaries who were hungry like wolves relished whatever was placed before them.  The Salesian community welcomed them with songs and other gestures of hearty welcome.  As Fr. Ferrando looked around, he saw countless souls waiting for him.

  After the night prayers, Fr. Mathias told them how the first group of Salesians on their arrival in Shillong were surprised to find the statue of Mary Help of Christians, who had preceded them in their mission work.  Fr. Ferrando and the others were visibly moved on hearing this touching incident and pledged to be faithful to Don Bosco's advice given to the first Salesian missionaries to South America: to spread devotion to the Mother of God under the title of Mary Help of Christians, wherever they are.

This is how Fr.  Ferrando articulated the sentiments on his arrival in Shillong after three weeks of journey by ship:

 *I still remember my arrival in 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 of the group was the sixteen-year-old Orestes Marengo, who was in the paradox of the Gospels (the last shall be the first) became the first.  On that steamer " Tevere " of Llyod Trieste, which was bound for Bombay, there were three future bishops: Orestes Marengo, Maria Selvam and the author of these memoirs.*

 *At that time, I was a new priest, twenty - eight years old, after having served for four years in the army, during World War I as an Official of Health and decorated with a Silver Medal: I was happy to have given up that office.  to be the Soldier of Christ, as the leader of a missionary group Now I was leading a spiritual army*.

 Fr. Ferrando took keen interest in the study of the history and geography of India, and the North East in particular.  He dreamt of going to the different tribes and races of the North East, to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to them.  In a short time, he acquired a working knowledge of Khasi, the local language.  He put his heart and soul into becoming all things to all people in the mission.  He who proved to be an 'iron soldier' ​​in World War 1. He emerged as a strong and mature missionary, filled with faith in God and hope in his people.

Fr. Ferrando arrived in India towards the end of 1923, just one year after the beginning of the Salesian presence in North East India.  Hence, he was also one of the pioneers, as well as part and parcel of a nascent Church.  In spite of the deprivations, poverty, sufferings, dangers and challenges of the pioneering period, the priestly vocation of Fr. Ferrando soon blossomed and matured, nourished and strengthened by his apostolic enthusiasm, which permeated that privileged ecclesial situation in the region.  It was an era of the growth of faith for him personally, as he and the pioneer missionaries witnessed and underwent the birth pangs and growth of the Christian communities in the Assam Mission.  It was a sacred experience that remained imprinted in his life forever, it was something similar to the experience of the disciples of the first Christian communities where one was willing to stake everything, life itself, for the sake of Christ.  With this unique experience there came an eruption of God into Stephen Ferrando's life, which eliminated all his psychological insecurities and doubts about his priestly vocation, enabling him to sublimate his innate human yearnings into passion for Christ and passion for humanity.  In that missionary ambience filled with enthusiasm and a daring spirit, there was neither time nor place for faith-crisis or vocation-crisis; there remained just one concern to commit oneself totally and wholeheartedly to the cause of Christ, in selfless service of His people, especially the poor and helpless people of the villages.

**FORMATOR OF FUTURE MISSIONARIES (1924-1934)**

The first Salesian novitiate in India started on 20 January 1924 at Shillong, with Fr. John De Ponti as the first Novice Master, Fr. Ferrando as the Socius and Bro, Joseph Foglia as the Assistant.  There were thirteen novices: eight from Italy, four from South India and one from Assam-Wollaston Douglas.  Fr. De Ponti was suffering from a very painful aliment and so he was master of novices only for ten months.  He went to Calcutta for treatment and later to Italy where he died a year later.

1. **Novice Master and Rector**

 Fr. Stephen was appointed the new master of novices.  Though he dreamt of being a 'front-line' missionary, he accepted the new responsibility with a smile and said: "I have not yet learned anything and yet I have to teach others already. The Lord continues to surprise me..." He joyfully welcomed what obedience asked of him and sacrificed his longing for missionary apostolate for a greater cause, for the formation of future missionaries.  In a spirit of obedience, trusting in the unfailing assistance of God and with a filial love for Mother Mary he undertook the responsibility.  Moreover, he knew that his superiors trusted him and that they would always support and assist him with their advice and all possible helps that he would require to carry out Ferrando his mission as the novice master and Rector of Our Lady's House.

Fr. Ferrando served as the catechist of Our Lady's House, the master of novices and the Rector of Our Lady's House, and from 1929 as a council member of the Provincial Council of the Salesian Congregation in North East India.

The novices were accommodated in an Assam-type building close to the present Cathedral parish house.  It also contained the old Don Bosco press.  The adjacent building served as the dormitory, the study hall and the refectory of the novices.

1. **Fr. Ferrando and St. Therese of Child Jesus**

 On 1 May 1925 there was the inauguration of the first half of the new building named 'Our Lady's House'.  That day the clerics (novices and first year brothers) left the old building in a solemn procession, singing the Magnificat and entered their new premises.  Provisionally a classroom was turned into a chapel.  Due to lack of personnel, Msgr.  Mathias himself took over as the rector for the time being.  The financial situation was causing him acute worry and the construction had come to a standstill.  One day while walking in front of the new building Fr. Ferrando said to Msgr.  Mathias:

 "Monsignor, why don't you entrust the completion of this work to the Patroness of the Missions, St. Therese of the Child Jesus? You are a Frenchman, but you don't seem to have much confidence in the Little Flower!"

Surprised, Monsignor answered:

But we have Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco. It is to them we have to entrust all our sorrows and our needs."

An animated discussion followed between them.  At a certain moment, almost to cut the discussion short, Fr. Ferrando said:

 " Monsignor, try and you will see that St. Therese will come to our help. "

" Well, " answered Monsignor.  "I will throw a challenge to St. Therese. It is now almost the end of September. If by the time of her feast (in those days on 3 October) she will send us some concrete help, it will prove that she has accepted the challenge and we will resume the work."

"And I will ask the novices to pray," concluded Fr. Ferrando.

 The feast of St. Therese arrived and Monsignor Mathias had forgotten all about the challenge to the Patroness of the Missions.  On that day he received a bundle of letters.  On opening the first one he found a check of Rs.  15,000.00.  He could not believe his eyes.  He opened the second letter and there was another check for Rs.  5,000.00.  Rupees 20,000.00 were exactly what he needed to resume and go ahead with the work.  The calendar on his desk indicated 3 October, feast of St. Therese of the Child Jesus.  Deeply moved he rushed to Fr. Ferrando who was in class with the novices and showed him the two checks. “

St. Therese has worked the miracle, he said.  "She has accepted the challenge! Now we can resume the building of the Studentate."

Overcome with gratitude and joy. Fr. Ferrando said to the novices: "Let us go to the church to sing Te Deum and thank St. Therese, our Patrons."

All through his life S. Ferrando had a special devotion to St. Therese of Child Jesus.  Eventually when the Congregation of Mary Help of Christians was founded, he wanted its members to emulate the childlike simplicity and zeal for the missions of St. Therese.  Their Constitutions uphold her as one of their Patronesses.

 The whole structure of Our Lady's House was completed in 1928 and served as the fathers' house, the theologate, philosophate and the novitiate, until this magnificent edifice along with the Cathedral was reduced to ashes on Good Friday 1936, in a devastating fire.

1. **Missionary Zeal and Formation in Context**

 Fr.  Ferrando, the new novice master, was full of spirit and zeal for missionary work and the novices emulated the same.  He lived what he taught them and this had a great impact on the novices.  "He trained the novices to be zealous and sacrificing missionaries. Besides their spiritual formation and secular studies, he sent them forth on Sundays, to the different villages to run the festive oratory, to teach catechism, to conduct the *jingiaseng*" and to make the youth sing and dance.  Their motto was to *serve the Lord in gladness.*

  The creativity of the young novice master found new ways and means to acquaint the novices with the challenges of the missions.  He took them right into the field.  On every weekend, the novice master and the novices walked miles to the villages.  On reaching the villages the novices would lead the people to sing and pray, while their master heard confessions and celebrated the Holy Mass.  They would start early in the morning and come back late in the evening, often fasting.  He felt that the presence of the Brothers would be an encouragement for the Christians in the practice of their faith and religious duties.  This was a marvellous training for the novices, which would stand them in good stead in their future life of sacrifice, and enable them to joyfully accept every hardship in their apostolate.  According to the novices, these occasions were very profitable too, for, on their tours, they would ask their Master to teach them a few words and sentences in Khasi, learn the customs of the people, how to solve a problem or two, the use of correct etiquette on different occasions and the like.  The novices learned a lot during these tours and experiences.  Fr. Ferrando had a great love for each one of them.  During the missionary journeys the novices had to undergo great difficulties and face many hardships.  But it served as a preparation for their future mission.

  Fr. Luigi Jellici, the only surviving novice of Bishop Ferrando, belonged to the last batch of the novices who were directed by him.  Fr. L. Jellici has the following to say about his novice experience:

*I came to India in 1932. Immediately we felt at home with Don Ferrando.  We were eight of us together.  We all felt that he was a holy person.  I had the same impression of him as that of Blessed Don Rinaldi whom I had known personally and who inspired me to opt for the Assam Missions.  The very next day of our arrival was a Sunday and he took all of us to Marbisu.  On the way to the village, he would speak about the people, their customs and beliefs, etc.  When we reached the village, he would tell us to sing or to guide the people in prayer, while he heard the confessions.  In the evening he would ask each of us about our experience of the day and what we learned from the people and from each other.  Though I did not know the language, I simply loved to be with the people and looked forward to the week-end experiences with eagerness*.

 Fr. L. Jellici continues

*Those of us who came from Italy made efforts to learn the Khasi language from the grammar book.  But Don Fernando would tell us that there was a better method, and he would take us to the midst of the children and people and we were forced to talk to them in a whatever way possible.  In fact, we threw the grammar books to the winds and learned from our people how to speak. Don Ferrando was a practical man.  He had a special charism to maintain the family spirit both inside and outside the community*.

Fr. Giuseppe Dal Brol, another of Ferrando's novices narrates the following incident:

"It was in 1927... Those days of the beginnings of the Assam Missions were times of great difficulty because of the lack of personnel and finance. This demanded from the existing members superhuman efforts to reach out to the villages Don Constantine Vendrame was the Parish Priest of Shillong, which extended more than sixty kilometers on all sides - south and north, east and west Once a message was brought to the parish:

*“The cholera is fast spreading in one of the catholic villages.”*

 *The parish priest was away in one of the distant villages, and there was no means to inform him. Fr. Stephen Ferrando understood the critical situation and flyered to go at once with the messenger. He came in the study hall of the novices and announced: "My dear novices, there is an urgent need in the village.  I have to leave at once.  Please help me to get ready with some medicines and food.  Keep me and our people in your prayers.  "He did it with such fervor and enthusiasm that we were all touched to the core. With great eagerness we awaited our master's return. After a week he returned hale and hearty, but his color and appearance had remarkably changed. We warmly welcomed him with the following song which we composed on the spot. He too joined in the song and increased the joy and family spirit of the community.*

 Bro. Paul Sebastian was a novice under Fr. Ferrando. He shared one of his experiences during his novitiate:

Once some of us went with the master to Mawpdang. He told us novices to receive communion and take breakfast before leaving. But he went with us without taking anything. We reached the village about 10.00 a.m. He heard the confessions, celebrated the Mass and had a meal only around 2.00 p.m. He never complained of fatigue or difficulties. His life was always an inspiration for us. While returning we were tired of the long distance. But he encouraged us and cheered us by interesting conversations so that we may forget the long way we had to cover.  But it was a good training for us.

All those who had been formed under Fr. Ferrando during his ten years as novice master and Rector would " unanimously agree that they experienced in the house a great spirit of family.  Fr. Ferrando was the master of Salesian life and spirituality and transmitted this spirit to the novices.  He worked conscientiously with a true Salesian spirit, cheerfulness and a spirit of sacrifice that his long ten year - term as novice master and Rector of the theologate and philosophate had endeared him not only to the community of Our Lady's House but also to the people in the villages.  msg.  Louis Mathias remarked once about Fr. Stephen Ferrando: "I am the head in the community, Fr. Stephen Ferrando is the heart." Being the Prefect Apostolic, he sometimes 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 . " Such was the tenderness of Fr. Ferrando towards the members of his community.

 On one occasion Fr. Orestes Marengo was traveling with Msgr.  Mathias to Guwahati.  The latter said to the former: " I wish all of you could be as humble and obedient as your Rector. Fr. Ferrando. " It is said of him that because of their extreme poverty he was often hard with cash but lavish in love and attention, for those who were entrusted to his care.  Each one felt that he was loved and cared for personally.

Though Fr. Ferrando was the novice master, he not only found time and opportunity to be with the people in the villages, but also regularly sent write-ups about the Assam Missions to the superiors in Rome.  In 1932 the Salesians celebrated the decennial of their arrival in Assam.  Fr. Ferrando had just returned after a two-month tour of some parts of the vast Prefecture Apostolic of Assam.  Fresh with experiences of his visits through the length and breadth of the region, Fr. Ferrando summed up his reminiscences in a letter to Rev. Fr. Peter Ricaldone, the Rector Major.  An extract from that letter written on 18 March 1932 reads thus: "Perhaps no other region in the world like Assam presents such a variety of races and one can well define it as the paradise for ethnologists, for the study of hundreds of different groups which form most interesting mosaic of aboriginal tribes... And what a joy I experience in my heart to feel praising and blessing the Good Lord in so many languages: it's a real Pentecost."

After a visit to Cherrapunji, about 50 kilometers south-east of Shillong, a place known the world over for its heaviest rainfall, Fr. Ferrando recollected his ardent sentiments: " At Cherrapunji in Khasi Hills, one sees yet another magnificent show of faith and enthusiasm. This centre has a world - fame: it is the " king of rain." But another water of Spirit and grace now flourish in that countryside, fragrant with the sweet scent of oranges. " Beyond the thoughts of enchanting flora and fauna, Fr. Ferrando raised his thoughts to the author of beauty from whom all life and goodness come.

1. **Fr. Ferrando: Filled with the Zeal of Francis Xavier**

 Even before assuming the responsibility for the region, Fr. Ferrando realized the first and foremost need of the Assam Mission: more missionary personnel.  He kept on repeating the request to superiors for more missionaries and always reminded them that the harvest is great, but the laborers are few. The area was vast. The ethnic and linguistic differences made the missionary task very difficult.  The rugged mountains, the zigzagging rivers, the non-existence of motorable roads and the non-availability of vehicles increased the difficulties. The youthful Fr. Ferrando was filled with the zeal of Francis Xavier Francis Xavier strongly felt the need and urgency for more missionaries in India.  In many of his letters, Xavier made constant appeals, especially to those studying in the universities, to think seriously about spending their lives in the missions. Similarly, Fr. Ferrando expressed the urgency of the situation in Assam, in the concluding words of a letter written on 18 March 1932 to the Rector Major: " St. Francis Xavier made the emotional appeal to the studious youth of his times. From the same wonderful land of India, I renew his appeal, so that many may come to work in Assam ... The harvest is rich ... the laborers are few (Lk 10: 2) " As Francis Xavier wanted to conquer the whole world for Christ, Fr. Ferrando was consumed with passion for souls, to proclaim Christ to the whole of North East India, always inspired by Don Bosco's motto: "Give me souls and take away the rest." He was filled with the fiery spirit of Francis Xavier and the urgency of St. Paul who said: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel." (1 Cor 9:36) The mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando were brought to Shillong on s3 December 1987, a day consecrated to the incomparable missionary saint, Francis Xavier, the patron of the missions, as if to indicate that the two hearts of Ferrando and Xavier were equally afire with love for Christ and his Gospel.

The occasion of the priestly ordination of the first group of Salesians in Shillong on 29 April 1933 formed a "glorious page for the Assam Mission and for the Salesian activities for the whole of India. Almost nine years earlier the first group of young missionary aspirants from Italy had arrived to prepare themselves for priesthood in the same field of their future apostolate. Fr. Ferrando had not only led that missionary expedition, but also accompanied them as their novice master and Rector during the years of their formation. Referring to their formation in loco he writes: "It was a courageous step if one considers that our Assam Mission was just beginning, financial means scarce, and the necessary amenities still lacking." The joy experienced at the ordination exploded in these 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 with the passage of time!  "His vision of him was not limited to Assam only. He saw the vast country of India and wrote to Fr. Ricaldone:" Dear Father, the harvest is great!  In India, the Archdiocese of Madras, the diocese of Krishnagar and the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam, have been entrusted to the Salesian Congregation.  We have works at Sehrampur, Mumbai, Calcutta and Bandel. In general, all work with enthusiasm and sacrifice; but the workers are few, far too few for this immense field.

**5: An Appraisal of S. Ferrando as a Formator**

Fr. Stephen Ferrando's ten years as a formator in Our Lady's House paved the way for some noble practices that would later become the basis for missionary activity in North East India

1. **Motivating the Young in the Spirit of Don Bosco**

Stephen Ferrando was a true lover of Don Bosco his father. He was always proud of the fact that he belonged to the Salesian Congregation.  He owed his missionary enthusiasm, his love for the young, his spirit and pedagogy of action to his Salesian upbringing. He had imbibed the spirit of Don Bosco so profoundly that he was able to transmit it to his forms of him by his very life. The motto of Don Bosco: "Give me souls and take away the rest" captured the young minds of the formees in such a way that they were able to forego anything and make any number of sacrifices for the sake of saving souls. Those whom he formed became very outstanding missionaries of the region.

1. **Inculcating True Religious Spirit**

For Bishop Ferrando to follow Jesus in religious life was to follow Jesus on his way to Calvary, focusing the attention on the Eternal Easter. He said: "Those who desire to follow Jesus in religious life are crucified with Him on the Cross and the three nails are the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. " "His spirit of sacrifice, obedience, complete dependence on God, love for one another, especially for the poor and needy influenced the formees greatly. For the novices, their master was a living example of what he taught them. They saw in his life what it means to empty one's own self in order to be filled with the oil of divine love. As a formator Fr. Ferrando not only inculcated in his formees a personal love for Jesus in the Eucharist and a living devotion to Mary Help of Christians, but also imparted true religious spirit, that they proved to be committed priests and missionaries. They learned from their master especially love and respect for superiors. Fr. Ferrando manifested great esteem and deference for the superiors, both in Italy as well as in the mission. The Pope's Day celebration was an annual occasion wherein, not only love and respect for the supreme authority of the Church was manifested, but also allegiance to the Pope and his wishes as Don Bosco would have desired was visibly expressed.  His constant correspondence with the Rector Major, intimating them about the Salesian works in Assam and seeking their advice, help and blessings touched the young clerics and they in turn imbibed the same spirit from their master.

1. **Sustaining a Vibrant Family Spirit**

Fr. Ferrando, as the novice master and the Rector of the house, created a profound community-spirit within the formation house where everyone felt at home, happy, serene and accepted. His sense of humor, unassuming attitude, concern, loving care and simplicity of him made him a father and friend to his students and collaborators. Speaking of the family spirit, Stephen Ferrando writes in his memoirs: The family spirit brought along with it an atmosphere of serenity, joy and warmth, making the house indeed worthy of its name "Our Lady's House." After supper, Mons. Mathias would call everyone around him, as a father would surround himself by his children; there we would sing in choirs, comment on the events of the day, exchange jokes, mimicries and laugh heartily. When our eyes would become heavy with sleep, night prayers would be said, and the most welcome 'good night thought would follow. Initiated by Mgr Mathias and propagated by S. Ferrando, family spirit became a hallmark of the Salesians of North East India. The same he bequeathed to his spiritual daughters, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians.

1. **Inspiring Passionate Zeal for the Mission**

Fr. Ferrando exhibited an extraordinary missionary zeal, even though he was confined to the four walls of a formation house. Besides going out to the villages with the novices on every weekend, every year during the winter-months he would spend at least two months consecutively in the far-flung villages. "The youthful Fr Ferrando was filled with the zeal of St. Francis Xavier", says Fr. G. Maliekal.  "His articles and reports regularly published in Gloventu Missionaria and Bollettino Salesiano speak of some of his missionary hazards in the remote villages and the concern for more personnel for the mission. The need to reach out to more villages and new areas, the need of being with the people, learning their languages, culture and customs and making sacrifices for the mission, were some of the prime concerns of the formation programme. Thus he inspired the young missionaries with great zeal and love for missionary work.

1. **Initiating a new Formation Strategy**

As a formator, perhaps the most important contribution of S. Ferrando was to initiate a new formation strategy, which synthesized theory and practice. The novices imbibed the missionary zeal, love for the villages and they learned to mingled with the people and get accustomed to their cultures, customs and languages ​​not in the classroom or in a library, but in the actual field of work. The week end programs in the villages, where the master and the novices wholeheartedly participated, became the hallmark of the novitiate. While he would sit for confessions for hours, his clerics would instruct the people and entertain the children. The daily and festive oratories, preparation for the reception of the sacraments, catechesis of the children, youth and adults, were all part and parcel of the novitiate programme. What they learned in the classroom they were able to put into practice in the mission field. In this way he brought the young Salesians into direct contact with the concrete missionary reality.  Besides, the young clerics brought much vibrancy and enthusiasm to the celebrations which attracted the people. Today we speak about the necessity of exposure programs and formation in the context (in situ) for the formees, which were already in vogue among the pioneer missionaries.  Many Congregations bring their young members in formation to the North East India for such exposures.

1. **Projecting the Icon of Touring Missionary**

Fr. Ferrando impressed the novices by his constant visit to the villages and presented before them the true icon of a touring missionary. The clerics who came from Europe and from other parts of India were unfamiliar with the type of missionary work being carried out in North East India. The touring missionaries were regularly invited to the novitiate to share their adventurous experiences, the fatigue and pain involved in seeking souls. The touring missionaries were the most important persons in the mission center and they were exalted as pioneers and leaders of the mission.  The young clerics were inspired to become like Fr. Vendrame, Fr. Ferrando, Fr. Ravalico, Fr. Mlekus and Fr. Tome". In fact, they were to become like Don Bosco and Francis Xavier. The ideal presented before them was that of a missionary who tours, often on foot, for miles, climbing hills and crossing rivers, facing wild animals and sleeping in huts or under the trees, all for the sake of souls. The figure of the touring missionary and the missionary work in the villages became a unique feature and a legacy for the mission of North East India over the years. Thus, everyone began to tour the villages: Bishops, Priests, Sisters.  Catechists and even the ordinary Christians.

1. **Instilling Love for the Cultures, Customs and Languages**

Long before the teaching of Vatican II on inculturation, Fr. Ferrando had already understood the need for inculturation. The first step towards inculturation is to have a deep respect and love for the culture of people. He had a very positive attitude towards the cultures of the various people of the region: Khasis, Jaintias, Garos, Nagas, Adivasis, etc. He had special love for the region and it was love at first sight. In his writings he often referred to Assam as "loving and beautiful, rich with immense rivers, virgin forests of gigantic trees and with mountains and hills." He learned the Khasi language within three months. He had a working knowledge of Sadri.  Hindi and Assamese. In his numerous articles he spoke about the customs, traditions and practices of the people.  His love for the culture, language and customs of the place inspired the formees under him and they too followed his example of him. The pioneer missionaries not only learned the languages ​​of the region, but also introduced the Roman script to many of the local languages ​​and translated the Bible, prayer books and catechism books into the vernacular languages.

When we look at Stephen Ferrando as a Formator we see him as a zealous missionary, an apostle deeply attached to his Master, a diligent formator and a humble leader who took keen interest in the formation of clergy and religious, a pioneer missionary dedicated to the total development of people, an evangelizer deeply committed to sharing the faith and a loving father who made everyone feel at home. S. Ferrando believed that the nearer we come to Christ, the more missionary we become. Without neglecting his duties as novice master, he became an outstanding missionary by his constant concern for the mission and by his adherence to Don Bosco's motto: "Give me souls and take away the rest."  " With single - minded devotion for the spread of the Gospel and love for the poor and the needy, he lived the missionary mandate of Christ to the full, " Go, proclaim the Good News ... make disciples of all nations (Mk 16 :15) He formed more than a hundred missionary personnel for North East India, who became trailblazers in the region.  His sense of God, sense of mission, sense of gratitude, large heartedness, spontaneous availability, understanding heart, self sacrifice and forgiving spirit made him the "beloved' of all. He created in the novitiate an atmosphere of prayer, apostolic zeal, serene joy and family spirit which gradually left behind a legacy of love.

**BISHOP OF KRISHNAGAR (24 November 1934-25 November 1935**)

Fr. Stephen Ferrando was the Rector of Our Lady's. House, the formation house of the Salesians, at Shillong when he was chosen by Rome on 9 July 1934 to be the Bishop of Krishnagar, in West Bengal. The appointment letter came from Pope Pious XI.  " Fr. Stephen Ferrando was consecrated bishop along with Mgr. Louis Mathias, who was appointed the bishop of the new diocese of Shillong, in the midst of a very solemn celebration at Shillong on 10 November 1934. These celebrations coincided with the celebrations of Don Bosco's canonization in the same year.

1. **Episcopal Ordination at Shillong**

It was decided to have both the Episcopal consecrations to be held together in Shillong. The dates were fixed for 8-11 November 1934. The entire town of Shillong wore a festive look with numerous flags, banners, posters and arches spanning the roads all over the town. The novices and clerics of Our Lady's House planned out every detail of the celebrations and carried out all the preparations. A big dais and altar were raised at the amphitheater below the Cathedral for the consecration Mass and for the start and finish of the great Eucharistic Procession. The coat of arms of both the bishops - elect were displayed: Aude et Spera- (Dare and Hope) of Bishop Mathias, and Apostolus Christi –(Apostle of Christ) of Bishop Ferrando. On the eve of the festivities some 15,000 Catholics arrived in Shillong, group after group, with banners and flags, from all the mission stations of the North East, led by their parish priests. Some had walked for hours, while others walked even for days. A group of Garos travelled eight days through forests and across rivers. They arrived exhausted, but happy. Some three hundred arrived from Tezpur with their huge drums.  There were people representing the various tribes and groups such as Khasis, Jaintias, Orangs, Mundas, Assamese, Bengalis, Garos and Syntengs. The mission compound looked like a camp where a dozen languages ​​were spoken. Huts and kitchens were put up everywhere. For the first time powerful loudspeakers were used in Shillong. Clerics and young men supervised the people in the vast camp.  A group of Christians also arrived from Krishnagar to attend the ordination of their new bishop, Mgr.  Ferrando.

In the twilight of 8 November, both the bishops-elect arrived from Guwahati. There were many guests and dignitaries. Among them were Mgr. Eugene Mederlet, the Archbishop of Madras and Mgr. Francis Perier, the Archbishop of Calcutta. The bishops present were the bishops of Ranchi, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Chittagong, Patna and the Prefect Apostolic of Sikkim. The reception was spectacular: the people flocked to the G.S. Road at the entry point to Shillong city, and formed a procession towards the Cathedral with three brass bands in attendance. The Cathedral bells pealed in joyous welcome. There was a phantasmagoria of lights and colours, and the joyous shouts of people, coupled with the fireworks at the oval of the Cathedral completed the scene. It was the biggest gathering of people that Shillong had witnessed till that date and they were mesmerized by what they saw and heard.

The first event was the unlocking by Mgr. Perier on 8 November of the life-size Calvary, a bronze monument erected to commemorate the 19 centenary of the Redemption.  On the following day, 9 November 1934, thousands gathered in Don Bosco square, singing hymns in honor of Don Bosco, each in his or her own language, but to the same tune.  At 10.00 a.m.  in an impressive  ceremony, the Governor of Assam, Sir Michael Keane, unveiled the statue of Don Bosco in the public square.  An exhibition of the arts and crafts by the Don Bosco Technical School students and the inauguration of the newly constructed Don Bosco Hall were the other. important functions of the day.

On 10 November, at the foot of the Cathedral hill, on the dais erected for the purpose, Archbishop Francis Perier, assisted by the bishops of Chittagong and Dinajpur, consecrated the two new bishops of Shillong and Krishnagar, amidst a cheering crowd who were wonder-struck at all that took place there.

I n the afternoon all converged on the Cricket Ground for the gymnastics and athletic display by Don Bosco boys.  A much-appreciated item was the drill display with flags by 500 children led by Fr. Constantine Vendrame.  It was an unforgettable afternoon.  As the early darkness of the winter evening descended over the town, a procession of 10,000 people wound its way towards Don Bosco Square, followed by the statue of Don Bosco in a flower-bedecked car and surrounded by a thousand youths with flaming torches in their hands.

On Sunday 11 November, there was the Solemn Pontifical Mass, the music of which was composed by Mgr.  Mathias himself.

In the afternoon, at 3.00 p.m.  there was the Eucharistic Procession. It wound its way along the low 50 Road and halted for the first Benediction at the Maidan Jewrynghep.  Then it proceeded along the Laitumkhrah Road which was festooned with arches, flowers, banners and flags, and little altars before Catholic homes, back to the oval which was flood-lit by 500 bulbs where the final Benediction was given.

"On 14 November, the Salesian Community of Our Lady's House organized a feast in honor of their outgoing Rector and novice master, Mgr. Ferrando. He said his first Pontifical Mass in the Chapel of Our Lady's House. In the evening there was a theatrical performance in his honor. The Salesian Provincial Superior, Fr Vincent Scuderi, recalled the great amount of good Mgr. Ferrando did to the province in his ten years as Rector of the Studentate and as the novice master.

The Salesian Bullettin reported the great event of the Episcopal Ordinations in Shillong, in the following words "Assam has witnessed the most beautiful and most precious days in its life, days filled with enthusiasm and fervour, which imprinted in the hearts of the Christians and non-Christians an unforgettable record of joy.

1. **Solemn Reception by the Diocese of Krishnagar**

On 21 November 1934 Mgr.  Ferrando left Shillong for Krishnagar. The new Bishop made his solemn entry into Krishnagar and took possession of his diocese on 24 November 1934. The Archbishop of Calcutta and the bishops of Dinajpur and Shillong accompanied him.  A representation of the priests, catechists and people welcomed them at the station of Ranaghat.  The presence of the brass band of the Catholic Youth Association of Shillong, gave an extra festive tone to the reception.  After a first welcome at the station, they were conducted in cars, lent by the municipality, to the municipal office. The Chairman and all the members of the Municipal Board waited for the bishop at the foot of the steps leading to the municipal hall.  The Chairman spoke in the name of the people of Krishnagar and declared that in the bishop they recognized the highest authority in the town.  I have expressed his thanks for all the humanitarian work done by the missionaries in the town and in the mission. He said that he was proud of having such illustrious persons in his town and promised help.  Archbishop Perier thanked the Chairman for his words of homage to Bishop Ferrando and the missionaries. The new bishop was then conducted to the mission in a triumphal procession. The papal bull was read in Latin and Bengali in the square in front of the Cathedral.  The bishop then entered the cathedral church and received the obedience of the priests of the diocese and the embrace of the bishops.  The Te Deum and Eucharistic benediction concluded the functions of that day.

"On Sunday, 25 November, the new Bishop celebrated the Solemn Mass sung by all the people, except for the variable parts, which were sung by the Salesian clerics from Shillong, who came especially for this purpose. After the Gospel reading, Bishop Ferrando preached the homily in Bengali. In the afternoon there was a solemn Eucharistic procession, in which the bishops and all the institutions took part. Archbishop Perier carried the Blessed Sacrament. A theatrical performance in honor of the new bishop concluded the day.

On Monday, 26 November, celebrations in honor of St. John Bosco were held. Archbishop Perier celebrated the " Archbishop celebrated the Pontifical High Mass. In the evening the most important people of the town took part in a tea party.  After that there was a cultural program, in which the beneficent work of Don Bosco and of his sons of him was extolled.  Bishop Anslem of Dinajpur spoke beautifully on Don Bosco in Bengali.  Thirty-six priests and clerics and more than 2000 Christians took part in the whole function.

1. **Pastor of the Flock of Krishnagar**

The situation of Krishnagar was totally new to Bishop Ferrando: new language, new people, new culture, unfamiliar roads and pathways, climate and unexpected problems and possibilities! The bishop had to make great sacrifices in leaving Shillong, where he worked for eleven years. Yet , true to the motto ' Apostle of Christ ' he set out to work , putting all his trust in Divine Providence and Mary Help of Christians. When Bishop Ferrando began his administration of the diocese of Krishnagar , there were only three mission stations with resident priests: Krishnagar, Bhoborpara and Shimulia. There were 9 priests, 5 clerics, the Sisters of Charity, and the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate. In his first letter to Fr. Berutti, the Catechist General of the Salesian Society, after his episcopal ordination and even before he took possession of his diocese, Bishop Ferrando was speaking of his desire to open a fourth mission station in the diocese.  Soon after his official installation of him at Krishnagar, I requested Fr. Scuderi the Provincial, to take up the orphanage of Krishnagar as a Salesian Institution and to organize there a model Salesian school. The bishop hoped that the Salesian work would be "the leaven which would make the whole dough to rise."

Within three months after his arrival in Krishnagar, Mgr. Ferrando toured the whole of his diocese and had formulated a clear plan of action.  He wanted to open a mission station with two priests at Khulna, and another one with two priests at Berhampur to work among the Santhals.  To carry out the plan he would need three more priests.  He also reported that he had placed the boy’s orphanage completely in the hands of the Salesians and in three months' time "gigantic strides had been made there."

The works of the mission, the celebrations for welcoming the bishop, and especially the house for the native Sisters had eaten up into the funds of the mission.  So Fr. Scuderi, in agreement with Bishop Ferrando, sent Fr. Righetto to Italy at the beginning of 1935, to make appeals for the mission. In his place, Fr. Joseph Farassino was appointed parish priest of Krishnagar.

Bishop Ferrando was not spared of trials and sorrows, during his short-term he as the bishop of Krishnagar. One of them was the acute scarcity of food in the villages owing to the failure of crops, which was caused, strangely enough, by drought in certain areas and by floods in others!  In 1935 floodwaters reached up to the Don Bosco School building. Another event which saddened the bishop was the untimely death of the exemplary cleric.  Aloysius Cesarin, in June 1935. The boys of the school of Krishnagar were having holidays at Phulbari and cleric Cesarin was sent there to substitute another cleric.  He got into a small boat, which overturned, and he disappeared under the water. The tragedy was so fast and so unexpected that nothing could be done to save his life.  His body of him lies buried in the cemetery of Bhoborpara. The Bishop was saddened by the unfortunate incident.

Mgr Ferrando's administration of the diocese of Krishnagar as its bishop turned out to be very short indeed, because of his transfer to the diocese of Shillong towards the end of November 1935. The See of Shillong had become vacant after the departure of Bishop Mathias who was elevated as Archbishop and transferred to Madras by the Holy See in July 1935. It was Mgr. Mathias himself who had suggested the transfer of Mgr. Ferrando to the diocese of Shillong to Fr. Ricaldone, the Rector Major of the Salesian Society. In a letter of 29 August 1935, he wrote: "Mgr.  Ferrando could be the bishop of Shillong, as the majority of the Salesians expected it.  He had formed all the personnel and they liked him.

Before leaving Krishnagar Mgr. Ferrando sent a report about the diocese to the Rector Major which contained the following numerical data as well: 6,117 Catholics: 766 baptisms in the previous year, of whom 110 were adults; 4 dispensaries caring for 85,700 sick people; 39 schools with 1,384 pupils; and three trade schools. The missionary personnel consisted of 10 priests, 6 clerics, 40 Sisters, and 7 members of the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate.

During the short stay of Bishop Ferrando as the shepherd of the Christian flock of Krishnagar a strong foundation for the Catholic Church as well as Salesian. Congregation was laid there. Stephen Ferrando firmly believed that with Christ, in Christ, and for Christ whose love impelled him, and with the maternal assistance of Mary Help of Christians, the spread of God's Kingdom would succeed in that region too. Bishop Ferrando had very cordial relation with everyone at Krishnagar and in a way represented Don Bosco in the eyes of civil authorities, Christians and non-Christians. The seed that was sown in faith grew in trying situations and continue to produce abundant fruit.

**BISHOP OF SHILLONG (1936-1969)**

On 26 November 1935, Pope Pius XI transferred Bishop Stephen Ferrando from the See of Krishnagar to that of Shillong. The Diocese of Shillong then comprised the whole of North East India.  Mgr.  Ferrando was no stranger to Shillong.  As a young priest he had reached there on the 23 December 1923, leading the first batch of novices from Italy.  Since then, he had spent most of his time in the formation house at Shillong.  During those years he had learned the Khasi language, known the people and their customs, loved them and won their esteem.  His frequent visits to the various parts of the region and the interaction with the missionaries and the local people had enabled him to understand the tremendous missionary prospects of the region. Fr. Orestes Paviotti remarks: "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, close to the people he loved and was concerned about the welfare. He was known by all and loved by all." Several times when Mgr Mathias was away in Europe, Fr. Ferrando had taken his place as acting Prefect Apostolic.  The people of Shillong greeted with delight the news of Bishop Ferrando's transfer back to Shillong and welcomed him whole heartedly as their shepherd.  He knew that humanly speaking it was not easy to step into the shoes of an exceptional leader and visionary like Mgr. Mathias. But his innate goodness of heart, indefatigable dedication, personal and intimate knowledge of his missionaries, most of whom were his students, made this change-over almost miraculous and amazing.  Yet his sentiments were one of humility and trust. He entrusted the whole project to God and his beloved Madonna.  He prayed: " Give your servant an understanding mind to lead your people; ability to discern between good and evil, for who can govern this great and numerous people of diverse tribes and tongues." (cf. 1 Kings 3:19)

1. **Solemn Re - entry into Shillong**

Bishop Ferrando left Krishnagar on 14 January 1936 and went to Calcutta to prepare for his return to Assam and Shillong. On the morning of 23 January 1936, he was welcomed at Guwahati as the new bishop of the region. That evening there was a cultural program with items by Garos, Boros, Uraons, Mundas and Santhals.  Frs.  Marengo, Pianazzi and Ravalico were also present for the welcome programme.  On the following day Bishop Ferrando went to Shillong and privately took possession of the diocese. The solemn entry into Shillong as the new bishop of the See took place on 14 March 1936. When he reached the outskirts of Shillong, he found his flock waiting for him.  He knelt down and kissed the earth of his new diocese as an expression of sincere love, joy and dedication for the cause of Christ. He knew intuitively that the entry into the new diocese was but the beginning of a long 'Way of the Cross.' Therefore, renewing his priestly motto: "On the Cross is salvation," the new Pastor offered the new diocese at the feet of Jesus crucified and prayed to accept the offering of the immolation of his life for the salvation of souls entrusted to his care. However, he did not foresee in what manner and how soon his offering of him would have its telling effect on his diocese and his missionaries. We read in Bishop Ferrando's memoirs the following description of his arrival in Shillong

I took charge as the Bishop of Shillong diocese on 14 March 1936. My first act was to bless the fourteen Stations of the Way of Cross, which my predecessor had started to erect, like a beautiful amphitheater, in front of the Cathedral. It was a memorial of the 19 centenary of the year of the Redemption.... 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.

A solemn thanksgiving and re-dedication service followed.  At the service the new Pastor spoke of the great 'vision' he had in his heart for the diocese and the whole of North East India. As he blessed the vast gathering, he asked them to pray and collaborate in whatever way they could to push ahead the common mission for the spread of God's Kingdom. Mgr. Emmanuel Bars, the Vicar General, was the one who organized the grand reception in Shillong

1. **Bishop Ferrando's Vision for North East India**

A genuine missionary is essentially a person with a vision.  When Bishop Ferrando took up the leadership of the vast diocese of Shillong, he had a vision for the whole region: To lead the whole of North East India to Christ. To achieve this goal he made use of all the means that could be harnessed. The vast diocese called for a number of initiatives and it involved a large amount of finance and more personnel. Bishop Ferrando realized the need to keep up the impetus given by his predecessor in pooling together all the efforts of the missionaries and to keep their morale high, despite the insurmountable problems and difficulties. Two major problems harassed him in the new diocese: shortage of personnel and lack of funds. To add to these there were a number of trying situations, which made the whole region and all the missionaries go through pressing times. The greatness of Bishop Ferrando lies in the fact that in the midst of difficult situations he was able to keep up the missionary enthusiasm of all who were with him, and he managed to maintain the focus on the mission throughout his episcopate. He echoed the missionary call of St. Paul who said, " Woe to me if I do not preach the Good News, " (1 Cor 9:16) ... and forgetting the past strained forward to the goal ... (cf Phil 3: 13-14).

1. **Storm Tossed Days: The Good Friday Disaster**

As Bishop Ferrando took over the new diocese, in less than a month's time a terrible disaster struck the central mission enterprise.  On Good Friday, 10 April 1936, a 'destroying angel visited Shillong in the form of a devastating fire that burnt down to ashes and cinders the entire building complex known as Our Lady's House which was the residence and formation house of the Salesians and the adjacent cathedral-building! Bishop Ferrando himself narrates the tragedy:

Tragic disaster struck that house of peace, where 80 brothers lived, as sudden as a lightning strikes on a calm serene sky. It was Good Friday, 10 April 1936, the day of the Passion of Christ. It was also the day of Passion for the young Church in Assam. The evening sky was limpid and a strong dry wind was blowing. The monsoon was still far away. After the Way of the Cross, the clerics were descending to their house below the Cathedral.... When the first clerics reached the place, they were shocked at the sight of a dense pillar of smoke escaping from the windows. Some of the clerics tried to enter inside, but could not for fear of suffocation. In no time, sheets of flames burst out of the building, as if from a blazing furnace.  It was the beginning of the end… the grand wooden building burnt like matches. The wind fanned the flames further. The Cathedral bells pealed loudly; the entire town of Shillong ran towards the conflagration, trying to put out the raging fire; but in that dry April weather water was scarce and fire engines failed… we stood there helplessly watching the devouring fire. It continued to advance and reached higher and higher attacking the Cathedral. It was the end of all our works! ... The evening shadows once again fell on that dome of flame, which gradually turned into an ash heap! The bell tower was the last to cave in, and as the bells fell to the ground with their sad notes, our hearts were indeed broken. However, Divine Providence did not fail us in that sorrowful night of tragedy. Among the ashes and the debris that still blazed, we saw the blooming of the flowers of human solidarity and Christian charity.

The fire started in the attic of Our Lady's House that evening, when the whole community was away at the nearby Cathedral for the Good Friday afternoon services. The clerics started to come out of the Cathedral at about 6.30 p.m. The first one who noticed the dense smoke issuing from the skylight of the attic and raised an alarm was the cleric Dal Brol. He entered the attic and tried to put out the fire. Fr. Farassino joined him. But the smoke soon forced them to get out. Other clerics went up to the inside veranda and tried to douse the fire with buckets of water. Bro. Priolo ran to ring the bells of the Cathedral The people, who had assembled for the Stations of the Cross, then came out of the church. The confreres and boys of Don Bosco School rushed to render help. Since the flames were advancing rapidly, they thought of saving what could be saved: books, tables and other small furniture were taken out.  Soon not only the Khasis, but also all the people from the neighborhood were in the mission compound to help.  It was estimated that some ten thousand people had assembled, ready for any sacrifice. Pianos and harmoniums, statues and other objects of the chapel were brought out.  The fire brigade cut a very sorry figure.  First of all, they were late in arriving, and then their pumps were in a wretched condition and could not be activated. Fr. Bacchiarello and Cleric Balocco rushed to the army barracks to ask for help and soon about 300 soldiers arrived on the scene.  But by that time Our Lady's House was beyond help. Even the furniture, which had been brought out and heaped in front of the house, could not resist the terrific heat onslaught and gave way to the fire. Fanned by the strong winds, the high flames attacked the adjacent Cathedral building. The soldiers and others made valiant efforts to save the church as also the adjacent buildings, but nothing could stop the fury of the devouring flames. Within two hours the Cathedral, the bishop's house and the presbytery were reduced to ashes. The archives of the Bishop's house, some valuable vestments, the statue of Mary Help of Christians and a few of the bishop's personal belongings were among the few items that could be salvaged. That no human life was lost in that tragedy of apocalyptic magnitude was nothing short of a real miracle of Divine Providence. The heroic sacrifices of the people of the area, irrespective of tribe and religion, were indeed praiseworthy. Their timely intervention saved the adjacent Loreto Convent and the Don Bosco Technical School structures

* 1. **Immediate Response and Provisional Arrangements**

The terribly tragic event required immediate response and quick remedial action about 10.30 p.m. of the same day. Bishop Ferrando held a meeting with all the fathers in the rector's office at Don Bosco school. It was decided to conduct the functions of Holy Saturday as usual, but in the open space in front of the Stations of the Cross, Easter Solemnity would be held in the newly built hall of St. Anthony's school. Bishop Ferrando poignantly recalls in his memoirs:

We gathered from 8.00 a.m. of 11 April in the natural amphitheater of the Calvary, with the open sky for our roof for the functions of Holy Saturday. On the opposite hillock the ashes still smouldered and the scene resembled the devastation of a battlefield... exactly a month ago, in the same place, I had placed the Diocese at the foot of the Cross.

The Bishop tried to conceal his own feelings and his comforting words from him infused courage and hope in the hearts of his children who were disheartened and dejected by the disaster: "Don't be afraid. Easter is preceded by Good Friday: Christ has risen indeed; the Cathedral and the studentate shall be rebuilt. Paradoxically the following night, as the Bishop conducted the blessing of the new fire (Easter Vigil ) in the open, he was heard to mutter : still I must bless you!

The disaster generated a wave of sympathy, solidarity and charity all over India, Europe and America. Expressions of concern from various quarters, both civil and ecclesiastical, reached Mgr. Ferrando and the Salesian community. Mgr. Mathias sent the following telegram: "The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away.  Blessed be the name of the Lord.  Yes! The hand that struck us down would also raise us up!  He left Madras for Shillong on Easter Sunday itself. Pope Pius XI. Fr. Racaldone the Rector Major of the Salesians and the Apostolic Delegate from Bangalore sent messages of condolence and expressed their solidarity. Sir Michael Keane, the Governor of Assam, was at the site on Saturday morning to offer his condolences to the Bishop.

One of the primary concerns that needed immediate attention was to find a suitable accommodation for the 80 novices and clerics who were rendered homeless by the fire. Fr. Vincent Scuderi, the Salesian Provincial of North India who was at Krishnagar, discussed the matter with the Archbishop Perier SJ of Calcutta. The Jesuits offered their vacant retreat house "Woodcot at Toong, near Kurseong in the Darjeeling Hills, to accommodate the novices and clerics of Shillong. On Easter Monday 13 April, the clerics of Our Lady's House left for Kurseong in the afternoon. Bishop Ferrando reminisces:

The eighty clerics were like fledglings without a nest. The Jesuits, with great fraternal solidarity, placed at our disposal their retreat house in Darjeeling, situated in the Himalayas, three hundred km away from Shillong. Fr Scuderi accepted the offer gratefully and sent a telegram to Shillong giving precise departure orders. It was an occasion of sadness for Shillong, which remained like a house without children, like a nest without birds, like a garden without flowers. The clerics resembled refugees dispersed and scattered, like shipwrecked mariners... It was a hard blow for Shillong!  The Superiors in Turin assured us of a speedy return from Darjeeling. And it was indeed so. From the first refugee camp in Darjeeling the students were moved to the Shrine of Our Lady of Bandel near Calcutta, and finally back again to Shillong in 1938.

For about a month after the fire the bishop and his secretary stayed at one of the cottages of St. Mary's convent.  After that, the bishop took up his residence with the Salesians at Don Bosco Orphanage.

On 19 April there was a meeting of the European Catholic community, presided over by Archbishop Mathias, Bishop Ferrando and Mgr. Scuderi. They held discussions regarding the reconstruction of the mission-quarters and the formation houses. The conclusion arrived at was that there should be a monthly collection for the "rebuilding fund".  The Catholic publications, New Leader of Madras and Catholic Herald of Calcutta published details of the tragedy and launched a fund-raising campaign for the reconstruction of the mission headquarters. The benefactors and relatives of the missionaries in Assam organized special collections abroad. The Salesian Rector Major showed great concern by granting substantial financial assistance in the re-building of the mission.

* 1. **Bishop Ferrando's Optimism**

Despite the setback caused by the fire, the work of the mission continued. This trial did not adversely affect Bishop Ferando's undaunted spirit of optimism, for his determination and dynamism only grew stronger and his trust in Divine Providence even firmer.  Bishop Ferrando was optimistic that Mary Help of Christians who had preceded the Salesians to the Assam Missions would take care of everything.  Now when all hope had been razed to the ground, he found consolation and hope in the assurance of the presence of the Madonn : " And the Mother of Jesus was there."( Cf. In 2 : 1) . He promised to dedicate the new Cathedral to Mary Help of Christians. And his characteristic Salesian optimism came to the fore once again.  Looking into the rubble of burnt out ashes, Bishop Ferrando expressed his optimism in the following words: Shillong, the heart of the diocese... without Cathedral, without seminary, without bishop's residence and also without a house of rest for the missionaries when they are exhausted with their hard work; how can one raise up all these works? These are formidable problems under which one can be oppressed, if not sustained by trust in Mary Help of Christians. But still the thought that preoccupies most is to have at the earliest the house of formation and the seminary for the indigenous clergy on whom depend the entire future of the mission. The new plans for the diocese involved two major issues: the immediate reconstruction of the infrastructure destroyed by the fire and continuing the work of evangelization with definite programs. On 8 May the foundations for the new Cathedral began to be dug.  On 20 May Mgr.  Ferrando received the information from Mgr.  L. Mathias that the plans, drawings and specifications for the new Cathedral were ready and the work could begin soon.  Mr. Gogerly, an architect of Calcutta, prepared the plans, Bro.  Santi Mantarro SDB, who would be known as the architect of the Madonna, was entrusted with the task of executing the design. The foundation stone was blessed on 25 October 1936, just before the start of the annual Eucharistic procession. It was the feast of Christ the King. Although most of the missionary works and educational activities in the region came to a halt during World War II (1939-45), the construction of the Cathedral continued almost uninterrupted.

Though the fire caused much anxiety and enormous financial strain, it did not cause any major set back for the missionary activity. Bishop Ferrando sent the following data to the Holy See in July 1936: Baptisms 7,259 and Catechumens 4,754. The number of baptisms that year touched a figure never reached before. The number became all the more significant when one took into account the fact that about half of the newly baptized were adults. The bishop also stated that there were at that time nine mission districts in the diocese: four in the plains (Barpeta, Guwahati, Tezpur and Dibrugarh) and five in the hills (Shillong, Cherrapunji. Jowai, Raliang and Tura).

1. **Acute Shortage of Personnel**

As the number of missionaries increased and the centers multiplied and diversified, the need for coordination and central leadership was keenly felt. The missionaries spared no effort and counted no sacrifice too great in preaching the Word and establishing Mission centers. The vastness of the area and the scarcity of the personnel scattered in centers far from one another, presented peculiar difficulties. One of the repeated complaints of Bishop Ferrando to the superiors in Turin was that there were too few missionaries in Assam to cope with the immense amount of work that had to be done. He wrote to Fr. Ricaldone, the Rector Major, at the end of June 1936, that in Dibrugarh which had 20,000 Catholics, there were only three priests, of whom one could not tour. At Tezpur there were only two priests for 12,000 Catholics. He went on to say that half of the missionaries were exhausted and sick due to excessive work.

Bishop Ferrando gave great importance to the personnel factor in the Mission.  He made constant efforts to increase the number of personnel and always tried to infuse enthusiasm in them.  He himself traversed immense distances, walking along dusty footpaths in the thick forests, crossing through swollen rivers, scaling the hills and going down the slopes. He experienced the hardships of his missionaries in Assam, their poor living conditions, endured hunger and thirst and suffered the aches and shivers of malaria fever. While the annual statistics of the Assam Mission made everyone bask in the glory of its success, Bishop Ferrando was fully aware that it was achieved at the cost of great sacrifices on the part of the missionaries. After the solemn celebration of the decennial anniversary of the Salesian presence in Assam, he concluded the mission success story of ten years, in a letter written to the Rector Major: Reading this report, one sees that there is no mention of difficulties; but the sorrow of failures is part of it... especially in these times, so difficult for the Missions, but the faith in Mary Help of Christians sustains and comforts us... If someone sees the faces of the Salesian missionaries in Shillong so happy and joyful, he cannot certainly imagine the difficulties and privations, which they face in their daily life. It is only when he who appears having an age of 60 years says instead that he is actually 40 years old, that one grasps and understands well the condition of the Salesian missionary and the rigorous work done by him amidst all kinds of difficulties. In the beginning of 1937 Bishop Ferrando spent several weeks visiting the far-flung villages of his diocese. During those pastoral visits he baptized hundreds of catechumens and administered the sacrament of Confirmation to more than two hundred. When he returned to Shillong he wrote to Fr. Peter Ricaldone, I feel the need to raise a hymn of thanksgiving to God, who favors such an abundant harvest, and also to express my admiration for the dear and indefatigable missionaries who, with so much zeal dedicate themselves in this flourishing apostolic field. Bishop Ferrando always appreciated the hard work of the missionaries in all his reports of him. In the same year (1937) after a long tour of the villages in the Brahmaputra valley of the Assam plains he wrote to the Rector Major: "The most impelling need which one feels each day, is that of greater number of priests. Yes, dear Father, we are few, too few in front of such a movement; we should not lose thousands of Catholics due to lack of missionaries.

By the end of 1938 Bishop Ferrando was feeling rather discouraged due to many reasons, some of which he mentions in a letter to the Rector Major.  Fr. Marengo, his best missionary and the only one who knew the language of the district where he had been working, was taken away to be the novice master. Then came the news about Fr. Maschio's transfer to Bombay.  He was working in the very promising mission - district of Cherrapunjee, where many works were going on.  Bishop Ferrando felt that the best personnel were taken away from Assam, and we go backward!

In 1937-38 there was a strong proposal to start the theologate in Poonamalle, Madras .  Ever since the formation house left Shillong after the fire, Mgr.  Ferrando had been restless at the thought that it might perhaps not return to Shillong. This worry of his is seen in almost every letter, which he wrote to Fr. Ricaldone after the fire disaster. When the decision was made to have the theologate in Bandel, the missionaries in the North, rejoiced, as they hoped that soon it would come back to Shillong. Finally, the students of theology returned to Shillong (Mawlai) on 28 April 1938, not without controversy and acrimony, to the great joy of the missionaries of Assam, and above all of Bishop Ferrando. The students of theology would be a great help in the mission stations during weekends, especially in running the oratories in the neighborhood.

He went on asking for more missionaries insistently and with a sense of urgency. Assam presented immense opportunities to the missionaries. Not only the Khasis needed missionaries; there were the Adivasis, the Garos, the Nagas, the Karbis, the Boros and other tribal groups of the region; all of them pleaded for priests and sisters or at least a catechist. Eager to do the maximum good at the opportune time, Bishop Ferrando wrote in his annual report of 1945-46: "This makes me very anxious, because if once a favorable occasion is lost, it is difficult to regain it..."

1. **Efforts to Establish the Local Church**

The process of 'Planting the Church in a new mission territory is complex.  For a new community of the baptized to become a 'true local Church, it needs to search for its own men and means. In a meeting, held on 10 October 1939, of all the missionaries working in the Shillong region together with the bishop of Shillong it was pointed out that while it would take more time for a well - formed local clergy , the local Catholic community should search for ways and means to contribute towards the financial needs of the missionary activities. The meeting discussed ways of organizing periodical contributions from the Catholics. The responsibility for organizing the Church fund was entrusted to each village community, under the care of a committee comprising of the catechist and a few elders. People could contribute in cash or kind. Thus began the well - maintained and effective system of contributing to the Church known as Khaw Kham ('a hand-full of rice). In an annual report Bishop Ferrando summed up the struggles involved in establishing the local Church on a solid foundation:

In an annual report one always tries to project what is most remarkable; but no pen can describe the work done by the missionaries. How can one translate into numbers the kilometers traversed on mountains, in valleys, under scorching sun, across rivers, on foot, on horseback, on elephant, by boat, by train, etc.?  And how many soldiers fight in this holy battle to propagate the Good News! The numerous chapels blessed this year are fruits of so much sacrifice of the poor, humble neophytes, who contribute their savings to have a church.

In 1939 the Assam Missions celebrated the golden jubilee of Assam becoming a Prefecture Apostolic in 1899. On 24 January Bishop Ferrando issued a pastoral letter for that occasion to remind everyone about it. To commemorate this, he proposed to bless three important institutions in Assam: the theologate of Mawlai, the church of the Sacred Heart at Dibrugarh and the new residence of the fathers at Barpeta Road, with the chapel in honour of St. Joseph alongside it. Two Eucharistic congresses would also be held in Shillong and Dibrugarh. Through all these the Bishop and the missionaries tried to establish the church on a solid foundation.

1. **Second Disaster: Outbreak of World War II**

As the Church in North East India was recovering from the first shock, there occurred the next test. The World War II started with the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany on 1 September 1939, and the consequent declaration of war on Germany by Great Britain and France two days later. Though allied to Germany, Italy refrained from entering the war until June 1940, when France had been nearly over-run by the German armies. Consequently, the missionaries of German nationality working in the Assam Missions were the first ones to be interned in a temporary camp in Shillong itself. They were Fr. Andrew Killerman, Fr. George Stadler and Fr. Schmidt. On 25 May 1940 Bishop Ferrando wrote to all the foreign missionaries working in the region, to submit a written oath of allegiance to the British authorities in India and promise to avoid any political involvement.

* 1. **The Internment of the Missionaries**

On 10 June 1940 Italy declared war on France and England. The Assam Government was considerate towards the Italian missionaries. On 13 November 1940. Bishop Ferrando communicated to his flock that as per the wish of the Pope, the Feast of Christ the King that year (24 November) should be celebrated as a day of prayer for the end of the war and restoration of peace. On 11 February 1942, all those who had been in India for less than 16 years, (60 in all), were interned temporarily in the theologate at Mawlai. When the Japanese threatened Assam, those interned at Mawlai were sent to the concentration camps in Deoli and later to Dehra Dun. There were thousands of foreigners interned in these camps. However, the Salesians were assigned a place of their own. There they met again Fr. Vincent Scuderi, the Salesian Provincial Superior of North India, Fr. Eligius Cinato the Salesian Provincial superior of South India, Fr.  Aloysius Ravalico and others. They were like "St. Peter in Chains" till 1945.

The mission centres acutely felt the consequence of the internment of the missionaries. Mission work was carried on, though at a slower pace, with a skeleton staff. A set-back that the war brought about was the requisitioning of most Catholic Institutions and some mission centers as well for war purposes and military use: the two Don Bosco schools of Shillong and Guwahati became training centers to prepare para-military mechanics; St. Edmund's School and Loretto Convent became military hospitals; St. Anthony's College, the mission buildings at Dibrugarh and Tezpur were taken over for army use. That year too the solemn Eucharistic procession was held in Shillong, but the participation was very poor, with only some 2000 people being able to attend it.

The fresh hardships for missionaries were not only caused by the shortage of personnel, but also by the soaring prices, the disappearance of essential commodities from the markets, the attraction of a better pay in government and military service for the catechists, the lack of funds to meet mission expenses and so on. In all these trying situations Bishop Ferrando stood firmly on the Rock of Christ, led by his Madonna, Mary Help of Christians, convinced that everything will turn into good for those who love God and seek His will.

* 1. **Bishop Ferrando in Contact with Rome**

As the German and Austrian Salesians were few, the beginning of the war did not affect the mission works much.  But the financial resources of the missions were seriously affected since foreign financial help could not be sent anymore and communication with the Superiors was difficult.  Fr. Ricaldone was surprised when Bishop Ferrando wrote to him towards the end of November, that he had borrowed some money and was building a small house for himself, as everyone had been telling him that the bishop should not any longer remain in a room of the Don Bosco orphanage. Fr. Ricaldone scribbled his immediate reaction on the letter of Ferrando itself "What are you doing? You are putting God to the test!" The building was completed in March 1940 and the bishop began to occupy it on 15 March. It was a clean, beautiful house, built at a cost of Rs. 12,000.

Even after the entry of Italy into the War, Bishop Ferrando managed to keep in touch with the Salesian Superiors in Italy, by sending the letters from India to the Salesians in some neutral country and requesting them to forward the letters to the superiors in Turin, Italy. In one of his letters, he mentions the visit of Mgr.  Louis Mathias to Shillong in December 1940. Three months later another letter informed the Superiors that the Bishop was able to tour almost every day. He blessed two new chapels and one small church.

In July 1941 Mgr. Ferrando was able to report to the superiors that in spite of the difficulties of the War, the number of baptisms was above 5000 that year. The letter also mentioned the catechetical competition to be held on 7 December, in order to commemorate the beginning of Don Bosco's work in Turin in 1841. The bishop also reported that Don Bosco Shillong was going on well because it was receiving a substantial help from the Government. But the school in Guwahati was in serious difficulty because the Government did not give any help.

On 6 June 1942 Bishop Ferrando wrote to the Rector Major: "In each mission centre now we have personnel just the indispensable ones only; just sufficient to continue our apostolate at least in its essential nature." On 24 March 1945 the Bishop described the situation of the Assam Mission in these words: there were difficult moments especially when the Japanese entered Assam. In general, the authorities look on our works with sympathy ... there were restrictions. I myself could not move about without permissions, especially in the operational zones ... many of our houses are still under requisition. We are in the Mission not more than 30 priests and 20 clerics. The major part of our confreres is still far and that explains our difficulty.  Each one of us must work for two or even three.

* 1. **Post - War Scenario**

During the years of the War, there was not much progress in the missionary activities in the region. Bishop Ferrando wrote: The mission suffered much during these five years of war, because most of the missionaries were interned. Assam became a zone of War with all the inevitable disadvantages of restrictions, obstacles and dislocation of people.... These were five years of standstill, we must confess, of regression, because the storm engulfed Assam the promising garden, and destroyed the flowers of an abundance collection.  It is useless to think of the past: with renewed ardour and realistic optimism one must aim at the work of reconstruction”.

 After the War, every possible effort was made to re-launch the mission activity. The need to open new mission centres in the region was dire, as there was a great move among the people towards the Catholic Church. Though the War ended, the number of missionaries was in no way sufficient to meet the demands. During the years of the War, Shillong and its neighborhood were deprived of the youthful presence of the clerics. Soon after the War a number of clerics reached Shillong in different groups. In course of time, they were ordained priests at Sacred Heart College.

The War also brought untold sufferings to people in North East India. Being a frontier region, it was subject to even greater hardships. Poverty and disease, accompanied by fear of displacement reigned supreme everywhere. Economic privation coupled with the shortage of food and essential commodities claimed by many lives, especially from the more vulnerable segments of society, namely, women and children.  and innumerable villages that made up the vast diocese demanded great pastoral care.  The shortage of personnel coupled with financial constraints compelled the Bishop to think of ways and means to get out of this predicament for the sake of his people.

  New constructions and expansions were carried out to house the boarding children from the far-flung villages. The American chaplains and soldiers were generous in their offerings, both in cash and kind. They gave a substantial donation to purchase a big plot of land with a bungalow in it in Golaghat, town of Upper Assam 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 the loss during the War. Thus, the expansion and consolidation came about very quickly through the cooperation and zealous work of the priests, sisters and catechists who gave full support to all the undertakings and initiatives of the Bishop.

**6.3.1.Indigenous Vocations: A Post-War Realization**

Bishop Ferrando realized that the future of the mission in the region depended on local vocations.  He dreamt of nurturing missionary vocations from the sons and daughters of India itself.  His missionary tours of him while being the master of the novices and his contact with the people in the villages had already made him aware of the situation of the people in remote villages.  Now the scarcity of priests and sisters in the mission stations convinced him all the more of the urgency of forming indigenous missionary personnel.  He conveyed his conviction in these words: "This terrible War has shown us once again the need for indigenous clergy and to this purpose all our attention should be directed."

 As an aftermath of the War, the number of vocations dwindled in Europe and new entrants to religious life and priesthood were few. The attitude of the Indian Government during the post-independence years was not one of welcome towards foreign missionaries. In this context recruiting vocations from India was urgent. The first group of Salesian recruits from Kerala in South India, reached Shillong in 1948 and began their initial formation at Sacred Heart College.

  Another initiative taken by Bishop Ferrando to increase missionary personnel in the North East was to invite volunteers from the Diocesan Seminary of Poonamallee, Madras, to work in North East India.  In 1953 Bishop Ferrando asked Archbishop L. Mathias of Madras to send some of his young priests from the diocese to work in the North East.  The first group of diocesan priests arrived in 1955. In subsequent years small groups of volunteers from Poonamallee continued to join the Assam Mission.

 Only in 1962 Bishop Ferrando established St. Paul's Minor Seminary in Shillong for the initial formation of candidates to join the diocesan clergy, whereas there was already a seminary for the initial formation of the Salesians in Bandel as early as 1948. There was some criticism about the fact that the formation of the diocesan clergy was neglected.  However, St. Paul's Seminary was a landmark step for the promotion of the local clergy.

**6.3.2.  The Foundation of the MSMHC**

Bishop Ferrando's vision for the nurturing of local vocations found its most concrete expression in the founding of a religious Congregation for women: Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC).  In 1942 the first indigenous Congregation in North East India began to take its initial steps along its path of destiny.  Bishop Ferrando, the Founder, explains the reasons for a new Congregation: In the hundreds and thousands of villages of Assam there were so many women and children who had to be instructed.  The immediate consequences of the War, like the displacement of peoples, the influx of the refugees especially from Burma, the uncared or little cared for victims of War, poverty and misery, made the life of the people in the region pathetic.  The massive ignorance and squalid hygienic conditions of the rural womenfolk called for genuine care and concern.  The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) were few, other sisters had more work than they could cope with.  So the idea arose that a Congregation of sisters who would visit villages, enter homes and huts and take care of the sick, gather children and stay in village, not for a few hours, but for weeks continuously.

 At that time there were eight girls in St. Mary's Convent Guwahati, keen to offer themselves as apostles in the mission field.  On 24 October 1942, Bishop Ferrando started the new Congregation with these eight girls as the first postulants who entered the novitiate that day.

Some details of the early days of this Congregation can be gleaned from the chronicles of the Archdiocese of Shillong.  We read in the chronicles that on 12 November 1941 Mgr.  Ferrando, after seeing off Mgr.  Mathias at Pandu, remained at Guwahati to settle the construction of a small house for the Native Sisters ... On Easter Sunday (5 April) 1942 Fr. Provincial (Uget) gave the medal to eight postulants of the Native Sisters in their new house. Some months later, on 24 October Bishop Ferrando admitted those eight girls to the novitiate. He blessed their habits. The novices were accompanied to their new house. The novice mistress was Sr. Severina Schiapparelli FMA. On 8 December 1943 Bishop Ferrando admitted seven novices to the novitiate. Exactly one year later he presided over the ceremony of the religious profession of the first seven Sisters of the MSMHC. They made their vows for one year.  Four of them remained at Guwahati and the other three went to Tezpur.  The bishop also accepted two new novices.

 Bishop Ferrando was convinced that local women who knew the languages ​​and dialects of the people in the villages and who were full of zeal for the spread of the Gospel would, not only be a great force in the missions, but also be a boon to According to Fr. Orestes Paviotti... the most important and Spirit-filled event of the War-years was the foundation of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians.

**6.3.3. Post - Independence Religious Policy of India**

The political negotiations between the Indian I national leaders and the British Government intensified immediately after the War. The struggle for the Independence of India ended with the declaration of India's independence on 15 August 1947. The fears of religious fanaticism were apparently put to rest when the new Constitutions of India guaranteed religious freedom to every citizen as a fundamental right. However, the attitude of the new Government towards Christian foreign missionaries was one of suspicion and unwelcome. While the services of a purely humanitarian nature done by the missionaries were appreciated, evangelization activities were gradually frowned upon and opposed. The new regulations demanded that all the missionaries be registered with the relevant government agencies and the residential permit for foreigners had to be renewed annually. North East India being considered a disturbed area, additional restrictions were imposed.  A special permit was required for foreigners to enter and stay in the region. Even missionaries who had stayed in the region for several years were not exempted. The Government refused to grant permission for any new foreign missionary to come and stay in the country. The media published some defamatory reports blaming the missionaries for the social and political unrest in the region. In 1954 more restrictions were imposed and even the opening of new mission centers and schools required permission from the government authorities. In such a situation local clergy and local vocations were the only solution to the problems.

1. **A Third Disaster: The Earthquake of 1950**

The third disaster, which Bishop Ferrando had to face, was the devastating earthquake of 1950, which hit the region causing catastrophic destruction especially in the region of Upper Assam.  It was Sunday, 15 August 1950. At about 7.30 p.m. the earth began to rumble and the ground began to shake violently; the quake lasted for more than five terrible minutes, causing cataclysmic destruction in the affected areas.  Bishop Ferrando narrates the incident in his memoirs of him:

*Buildings crumbled, bridges and railways were bent over themselves as if they were made of plastic.  In some places the water sources dried up and the rivers changed their course.  Our missionaries in Dibrugarh narrate thus: "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 cerie 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.*

*When the dawn finally appeared, the sky towards the east was overcast; the light made everyone realize the gravity of the tragedy, the huts of the villagers were totally destroyed.  We have not exaggerated and these are not flights of fancy. Dibrugarh remained isolated from the rest of Assam for many days. The mighty Brahmaputra was full of fallen trees and dead animals.  For many days the usual rapidly flowing river slowly dragged itself towards the Bay of Bengal, because the mountains that had fallen into the river due to the quake blocked the natural flow and caused the waters to flow in the opposite direction. At that time, I was America and I read in the newspapers the descriptions of the terrible and cataclysmic event.*

*Communications with Dibrugarh were nil.  After a week my secretary Fr Mario Bianchi, with the help of a government officer managed to get a place in a helicopter and visited the place.  The joy of Fr Bill, the other fathers and sisters on seeing him was beyond imagination or description.  Fr Cerato was on the other bank of the river and was totally isolated.*

 *The Catholic mission paid a heavy toll to the devastating fury of nature.  The beautiful church of the Sacred Heart remained disfigured with wide cracks in the walls.  The roof was all broken and water poured in all over. The residence of the missionaries was made totally uninhabitable*.

 *The new concrete building of Fr Cerato at Lakhimpur sank three feet on one side.  However, the courage of the missionaries was admirable. They looked serene and inspired courage in their flock.  Don Bosco used to say: "The Oratory is born under difficult situations," that is, persecutions and difficulties of every kind.  Each mission station is born and has grown in the same way.*

 When the earthquake struck North East India, Bishop Ferrando was in USA. Towards of end of September 1950 he returned to India and visited the mission-stations that were so badly affected by the disaster, to comfort and console. Later, in presenting the report on the state of the Assam Mission (1950-51), Bishop Ferrando wrote to Rev Fr. Renato Ziggiotti, the new Rector Major of the Salesians: "The past year was an exceptional year of fatigue and illness for our dear missionaries;  the great load of work, the adverse climatic conditions, the disastrous earthquake, the insufficiency of food during the long and exhausting missionary journeys, the passage of years, all make their weight felt even on the more robust of them.  The numerous languages spoken ​​make the transfer of personnel difficult because one cannot learn a new language in one or two years.  A missionary in Assam must speak at least three more languages ​​other than his mother tongue.  "The Church had to pay a heavy toll to the devastating destructive power of nature. It took a very long time to rebuild all that was destroyed in a few minutes by the earthquake.

1. **Creation of a New Diocese -1951**

Disasters did not in any way dampen the missionary spirit or diminish the activities. The growth of the Church in the region and the need to reach out to areas still un reached, made it imperative to think in terms of creating to new diocese.  In 1947 Bishop Ferrando submitted to the Rector Major the plan to bifurcate the diocese of Shillong.  The matter was proposed to the Propaganda Fide and, on 23 July 1951, the Holy See announced the establishment of the new diocese of Dibrugarh, bifurcating the vast diocese of Shillong.  The territory of the new diocese included the civil districts of Dibrugarh and Sibsagar in Assam, the districts of Lohit and Tirap of the North East Frontier Agency or NEFA as the present Arunachal Pradesh was then called, and the then Union Territories of Nagaland and Manipur. Fr. Orestes Marengo, who was a great missionary in the region for several years, was elected the first bishop of the new diocese.  The Episcopal ordination took place on 27 December 1951, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, in Turin, Italy.  Under the guidance of Bishop Ferrando, the Church in Shillong witnessed a resurgence of Christian life and missionary activities.  In 1952 Nongpoh mission was opened with Fr. Mario Botto as its Founder.  The opening of the Nongpoh mission helped the Bhois, the Wars, the Marams, the Marngars, the Tiwas, the Karbis, the Garos and other groups of the region to come in close contact with the Church.  In 1958 Fr. Michael Balavione joined the mission.  I have rendered dedicated service to the people of the region in the fields of evangelization and education.  He has made a substantial contribution for the development of the languages ​​of the Tiwa and Karbi tribes.

 In 1952 the foundation stone of Nazareth Hospital in Shillong, was laid.  It was a great initiative and a boon to the health services of the region.  The Sisters of Christ Jesus with their dedicated service and commitment to the cause of poor and downtrodden made the Nazareth hospital a shinang example of the compassionate love of Jesus.

 The educational network of boarding schools and day schools, spread across towns and villages, as an essential part of the missionary work in the diocese.  The numerical statistics of 1957 counted 370 schools in the diocese of Shillong, with 526 teachers.

1. **Mission in Progress - Cathedral Dedicated to MHC**

On 15 August 1954 the new Cathedral was dedicated to Mary Help of Christians, even though the construction was not yet completed. Bishop Ferrando wanted the Cathedral to be dedicated to Mary Help of Christians and intended it to be a little token of gratitude to the Blessed Virgin for the miraculous growth of the Assam Mission. During the dedication the beautiful statue of Mary Help of Christians was crowned with a golden crown. The people of Shillong generously donated the gold for the crown On that occasion, the solemn prayer of pledge consecrating the Assam Mission to Mary Help of Christians was renewed publicly. The following is the complete text of the act of entrustment which the first group of the Salesian missionaries composed in 1922.

 *Oh Most holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary, our  enderest Mother and powerful Help of Christians, behold us prostrate at thy feet today.  On this day dedicated to your honor, we want to entrust you with this new Mission, which you have deigned to give to us, and in which you have preceded us.*

*We promise you, Oh our dear Mother and our Help, above all to work with all our strength and with all our soul for the conversion of the peoples scattered in this region: to work with all our powers to spread their devotion and to make you known, loved and praised together with the Fruit of your womb, Jesus.*

*We pray you Mother, accept us under your maternal mantle and deliver us from all the insidious attacks of the evil one, our enemy: the Satan.*

 *Be thou our Mother always, be always our help, our comfort and our support.  Please look after this mission and take special care of it because our Assam Mission (Missione Assam) derives in name and abbreviation from your own name (Missione Anam Maria Ausiliatrice MA).  We wish that this land be yours, entirely yours, only yours always. Here prostrated at thy feet we consecrate to you this land, its mountains, its rivers, its people and all its inhabitants, all those who already know you and love you, and all those who are still far away from your love, and your light.  From today onwards, may you be the Help and Succor for all our people; May you be a Mother and Queen for all, even of those who do not know you, that one day by your grace.  they may become your privileged children and receive the light of faith and your love.*

 *O Mother, Help of Christians, smoothen our difficulties, increase the number of our missionaries and faithful, make it possible that in the near future we may be able to lead the different peoples of this vast mission unto your feet, to sing with them eternally the hymn of glory in Paradise, under the secure protection of your maternal mantle Amen.*

 From then on Mary has taken special care of the Assam Mission, protecting the missionaries from all calamities and dangers.  On 24 April 1973, during the Golden Jubilee of the arrival of the Salesians in North East India, the completely finished Cathedral was consecrated.  The beautiful Cathedral will stand as a witness to the greatness of Bishop Ferrando.  Its size and magnificence 86 reveal the untold sacrifices that had been gone through to realize such a project with the limited financial resources and other constraints of the time.  In 1956 the Salesian Novitiate House was re -established in Shillong, in a new site at Sunnyside, in Upper Shillong.

In 1962 Assam was declared a sensitive area by the Central Government at New Delhi and there was the danger that the missionaries from foreign countries would have to leave Assam definitively.  The Catholic community itself organized a protest rally in defence of their pastors.  The danger passed and Shillong was raised to the status of an Archdiocese in due course of time.

1. **The Chinese Invasion**

In 1962 there was the invasion of India by the Chinese army that came down through the Himalayas.  The Chinese troops advanced as far as the military post of Bomdila in the present state of Arunachal Pradesh, and threatened the town of Tezpur in the Brahmaputra valley.

At that time the bishops were in Rome for the Vatican Council II.  During the general assembly Cardinal Valerian Gracias of Bombay announced: "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.

 Mons. Ferrando and Mons. Marengo soon reached Shillong and Dibrugarh respectively. In Shillong the Catholics had gathered in the Cathedral grounds for the annual feast. The atmosphere was one of gloom and uncertainty about the future reigned supreme.

The Salesian Provincial Superior, Fr. Anthony Alessi, was already in Shillong and Pr. Archimedes Planazzi from the Salesian Generalate in Turin also reached Shillong.  All types of rumors were rife, including an announcement by the Government of its inability to protect the lives of the citizens.  This inevitably led to a veritable exodus, on foot, by boats, motor vehicles, airplanes- there was a flow of people towards West Bengal.

Sr. Philomena Dahanga.  MSMHC, narrates the following: "In 1962 when the Chinese war broke out, all the religious houses and institutions were closed down. Schools were given holidays. Our Sisters from Naharkatia, Dibrugarh and Barpeta were sent to Bandel for safety. From Shillong, Salesian sisters from Nongthymmai and Mawlai to left the place.Fr. Giacomello, our Chaplain in Malki, called for me and reminded me to go and ask Bishop what to do, since all other Sisters have left the place. So, I went to the Bishop's house and told the Bishop that we too would like to leave the place for safety. The Bishop told me sternly;” you woman of little faith, where you want go? Have faith, and all will remain where you are.  Shillong diocese is under the protection of Mary Help of Christians; she will protect us.  The Chinese will not come here.  Go back and tell the Sisters' no need to go anywhere.  Then he added: I will be coming for the closing of the school prepare the items for the prize distribution, just like any other years.  Trusting his words. I did as I was told. As he had predicted, the Chinese never reached Shillong instead, before Christmas we got the happy news of the end of the war. Such was his faith and trust.

 The Government was kind and helped the sisters and their hostel girls at Terpur to cross the river Brahmaputra in a boat. Only two priests, Fr. Louis Kerketta and Fr Joseph Arminana stayed back at Tezpur. They were calm and serene. That day a journalist from Italy, Gino Nebiolo, arrived in Guwahati and was surprised to see the calm and composure of the Salesians. Fr. Guido Colussi stayed on at Tangla, while Fr. Hermangild Boscardin held the fort at Dekhiajuli. Sr. Rina Colussi remained at Shillong with great courage and serene calmness.

Fr. John Topno has the following to say: "In 1962 the Chinese army was swooping down on Assam from the north side.  Explosions and cannons could be heard from Sonitpur district.  Bishop Ferrando knew that the situation was serious.  He was also doubly sure that the " Protectoress " and " Patroness " of North East India was Mary Help of Christians.  He told the Christians to go for a rally reciting the holy Rosary and to seek the intervention of the Mother of God to save the people from the enemy.  After the procession and fervent prayer, the Chinese army drew mysteriously from their camp.

  On 21 November 1962 the Chinese announced their unilateral withdrawal from the Indian territory, a decision that remains quite mysterious even today. We can only thank the Madonna for such a mysterious and miraculous solution.

Prior to the Chinese invasion, North East India was the most peaceful region of India, having the Himalayas as its natural boundary and defense from external aggression. This afforded a sense of natural security, very false and fragile as events later proved, and a sense of complacency on the part of the civil administration. a result the work of developing road and rail links and other communication infrastructure was rather tardy. The construction of modern bridges over the huge rivers was an immense challenge. Travel was indeed tiresome and annoying.  The Chinese invasion worsened the situation. The military now into the vacuum of the civil administration to undertake the task of developing the required infrastructure, since national security was given the top most priority after the military debacle of 1962.  As a result new roads, railways and new bridges began.  to be constructed all-over North-East India.  And this came as a great blessing for missionary work as well.  Far flung mission centres were soon made more accessible by roads and railways.  The Chinese aggression of 1962 therefore came as a blessing in disguise for the entire north eastern region of the country, since the much needed, and till then the much neglected, infra-structural requirements for all round development such as roads, railways and telecommunication systems began to be set in place on a war footing.

1. **The International Eucharistic Congress**

The International Eucharistic Congress at Bombay in 1966 was one of the most extraordinary religious events of our country India.  This event was made so very extraordinary by the presence of the then Holy Father.  Pope Paul VI.  He came as the Pilgrim Pope to India, to pay his obeisance of his Lord and Master at the Eucharistic Congress, held in the ancient land of India for the first time in history.  This visit of Pope Paul VI to India was also historical in more ways than one it was the first ever visit of a Pope to India, and it was also the first travel of a Pope outside the bounds of Rome since Napoleon Bonaparte took Pope Pius VII as a prisoner to France, the latter came back to Rome to remain as the Prisoner of the Vatican': and his successors continued the practice, till Paul VI established a new paradigm in papal functioning by his visit to India for the International Eucharistic Congress and his travel to New York, USA, to address the United Nations General Assembly.

 **Bishop Ferrando narrates the details**:

*The five Salesian Bishops of India were present at the airport at Santa Cruz in Bombay when the Air India plane "Nanga Parbat landed there and the white figure of the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI. appeared at its doorway, with arms wide open as if to clasp in an embrace the whole India. I thought of the little vessel that brought St. Peter towards the court of Rome. Now his successor, after 1900 years, was traveling towards the East and to what a welcome "We come to you, said the Pope, a pilgrim of joy, serenity and peace.  "You can imagine how the hearts of the Catholics in Assam beat in unison with the rest of the country.*

*Bombay, then a city of six million people, which has seen many kings, many maharajas, and many heroic people like Gandhi and Nehru, had never before witnessed a similar scene of triumphal welcome, as was accorded to Pope Paul VI. One thousand two hundred pilgrims from Assam reached there after five days of exhausting journey by train. Most of them were seeing a train for the first time and they represented the picturesque variety of our hill tribe. The Salesian fathers from Assam were the guides and leaders of the pilgrims.*

 *Mons.Hubert D'Rosario, the Bishop of Dibrugarh, had arranged for a big troupe of Naga warriors in their traditional attire to reach Bombay for the occasion.They had the honor of getting a special audience with the Holy Father soon after the President of India paid his respects to the Pope. Many cultural performances, depicting the folklore and traditions of India and the North East were given at the Oval, right in the heart of the metropolis, which was the venue of the Congress.  The war dances of the Nagas and the graceful movements of the Manipuri dancers aroused an extraordinary interest about the North Eastern region in the huge audience.  The Khasis, Garos Boros and many others saw the sea for the first time, they were allowed on board the large Italian liner, the "F Costa" of Genova, and they were given a royal treatment in the liner.*

*The homage of the youth of India to the Pope took place in the grounds of the Don Bosco School at Matunga under the auspices of the beautiful Shrine of Mary Help of Christians.  Our pilgrims were present en - masse ' and they could see the Pope passing by as he blessed them, though in that vast sea of ​​humanity our group of one thousand two hundred was a mere drop!  Don Bosco School, Bombay is the result of the love of Fr Maschio for the Madonna and who had left so many memories at Chermapunji.  He was very happy to see our group and shouted: "Next time in Rome The Holy Year could give us a chance to be even in Rome, may be a similar surprise by air, since it is only nine hours by air from Bombay to Rome, while it takes five days of tedious train journey to return to Assam.*

This great religious manifestation left a deep and lasting impression in the hearts of our Catholics, who now understood better the meaning of the holiness and universality of the Catholic Church. Now in Assam they strive to maintain that living enthusiasm and faith with solemn Eucharistic and Marian processions in the various parishes.

 With deep faith in God and strengthened by prayer, the good shepherd stood up to the difficulties. Bishop Ferrando continued to guide the destiny of the diocese of Shillong till 1969.

Bishop Ferrando was a simple person, frank and transparent in his dealing with the missionaries and people at large. What made him extraordinary are his deep faith and living hope in God whom he felt very close, even in times of darkness and doubts.  The disasters that are mentioned above helped to bring out the best in him.  making him a man of God and a man of the people.  Despite all these problems that confronted him, Stephen Ferrando never lost hope or joy. He always seemed to have some assurance from above that the future would be bright.  In all circumstances, Stephen Ferrando was a man of God.

 He was able to establish the Church on a firm foundation. Through his pastoral vision and zeal he was able to fulfill the needs of his flock. During his episcopacy we see a tremendous growth of the Catholic Church. According to the census provided by him in 1950, the Catholic population had already reached 80,445 with 2,987 catechumens. There were already 15 parishes, 43 big churches, 15 dispensaries, 3 colleges and 305 elementary schools. Due to his, missionary spirit and far sighted vision there was great expansion of the church in North East India. Many Catholic presences were started in Garo Hills, in the Assam Plains, in Nagaland and in Manipur.

The life of Stephen Ferrando is a testimony and proof of the divine origin of peace.  He appears to us as a person with an inner serenity in the midst of the most painful trials.  Something, or rather Someone is present and at work in him and in similar people, to protect them not only from the shifting tides of external events, but from their own weaknesses and fears as well.  It is the Holy Spirit who is the author of the Inner Peace, which is the fruit of the love, which He pours out, into human hearts.

**A FRONTLINE MISSIONARY (1924-1969)**

Bishop Ferrando was not gifted with extraordinary qualities that distinguished him as a great missionary.  But he became a great missionary by the simple life style which he adopted, by his capacity for hard work, selfless service, availability at all times and by his immense love for the people in villages.  True to his motto "Apostle of Christ, he was an Apostle till the end of his life. He was convinced that he was sent by Christ to proclaim the Gospel to the people of North East India. As Jesus felt compassion for the people, Bishop Ferrando was compassionate to all ( cf. Mk 6:34 ) Forgetting his own comforts , he served the people and endeared himself to all, especially the poor and abandoned .In these chapter we shall look as Bishop Ferrando as a frontline missionary and the qualities that made him an intrepid and unparalleled missionary.

 Though very simple and unassuming in his demeanour, Bishop Ferrando had a dynamic and passionate missionary spirit and used it to the full to build up the local church with total dedication, Bishop Ferrando shepherded the vast diocese of Shillong for 34 years and gave the initial impetus for the fast growth of the Church in North East India. Today he is remembered as a pioneer Bishop, as the Founder of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, and above all as a fatherly shepherd of his flock.

 Bishop Ferrando loved his flock and was at home in their midst.  His office was always open to all priests, religious sisters, brothers, catechists and the faithful, especially the poorer ones. He could be approached at any time of the day or night, without any prior appointment or other such formalities. Whenever any missionary visited the Bishop's House, he would leave aside all works to attend to him. For him the person mattered more than his work. S. Karotemprel summarizes his personal experience of Bishop Ferrando thus: As a student of theology I remember going to him either to borrow books from his small library or ask for a small contribution for the work in the so-called village 'oratories. He was always accessible and ready to help. He would come out and often walk with us, exchanging news. Literally, everyone felt free to go to him for anything.

As a front-line missionary he made use of all available resources and methods to reach out to the people in the villages. Some of these are very effective and relevant even today after half a century has run its course, and indeed make North East India the near perfect missionary Church paradigm. It is hoped that by the analysis and presentation of some of these simple methods of missionary work, we come to know better the person behind such ventures. Many missionary episodes and events are narrated rather elaborately with the intention of depicting the reality as best as possible.

1. **Pastoral Visits and Apostolic Journeys**

Bishop Ferrando and the pioneer missionaries initiated some new missionary methods in their strategy for the evangelization of North East India, which were completely people oriented. They took the Good News to the people in their homes and hearts, instead of waiting for them in the church. The Bearer of Good News on the move was the picture of a missionary in the North East. The evangelization method that reaped such a rich harvest in the North East had one essential characteristic the missionaries were always on the move. They constantly toured the villages, visiting the people in their own houses. Most of the villages were inaccessible by vehicles and the missionaries would undertake daylong journeys on foot to reach some of these villages. Yet, moving from village to village, they visited every family in its humble settings around the hearth and listened to the woes and worries of the people, gradually paving the way for their entry into the Christian community.  While visiting the families they paid the Good Samaritan's attention to the sick and the dying. The sacrifices of the missionaries touched the hearts of the people and they responded positively to the Gospel message. Bishop Ferrando freely mingled with the people, sharing their meals and sleeping in their small huts.

 As the Bishop of Shillong, with the entire North East India under his care, Bishop Ferrando was able to make regular pastoral visits to his flock scattered throughout the region.  Bishop Ferrando knew that he needed to know his flock of him and he believed that there was no substitute for a warm personal contact.  He set a marvellous example to his fellow missionaries by making frequent visits to the nearby as well as far-flung communities regularly.  He would often exhort his missionaries: You cannot convert the souls if you always move around in vehicles.  To be close to the people and to know their problems we need to go on foot. In the early years, most of these tours had to be done on foot or occasionally on a mule. Often he traveled on foot to the then distant villages of Jowai and Dawki, 70 to 100 kms away from Shillong, he climbed the hills and crossed the rivers and walked the rugged paths to reach the remotest of villages. Most hours of the day were spent in walking and the nights were spent in meeting the people. There was not a single village in Khasi Hills which he had not visited. His pastoral visits would extend to weeks, for he had to travel from one end of Assam to the other His love for the flock urged him to visit them as often as he could.  Fr. Ravalico testified to the apostolic zeal of the bishop when he said: His Excellency Mgr. 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.

Bishop Ferrando loved to attend the Sobhas and Jinglasengs, both in the plains and in the hills.With hearts full of trust and confidence, the people awaited their Pastor's arrival.His presence always brought added joy to the Block, enkindling in them love and enthusiasm.On such occasions he, in return, gained their love, loyalty respect and obedience. Every visit of their Pastor had a lasting impact on the parishioners and on the people in the villages. He exhorted the Christians to keep their faith alive and he moved among them bringing Christ's love, peace and joy. Bishop Ferrando was very fatherly in his approach to all, young and old alike, and thus be won the hearts of all.  He not only loved them but also had a great concern and regard for them.  This is expressed in his own words: "The apostolate of evangelization and charity must be effectively exercised among the people of the rural areas."

On reaching a village he would hear confessions, teach and instruct the people and visit the sick in their huts.  He always carried with him something to give to the poor.  People in their turn loved him as their Shepherd and manifested their love through simple gestures and little gifts.  They would bring him oranges, bunches of bananas, a packet of biscuit or even a chicken or a few eggs.  They always felt content with the graciousness with which their gifts were accepted.  He would lay his hands on each person's head and bless them.

These tours were also experiences of adventures.  The mission district of Raliang seemed inaccessible at the beginning.  It is 100 Km distant from Shillong.  The means of transport and communication were scarce.  Fr. Jellici, who once accompanied Bishop Ferrando while making a tour to Raliang, recounts the following incident.

*At nightfall we were in Joual and spent the night there.  The next day the Fathers at Raliang sent a mude for the Bishop to ride on The Bishop was happy to have the mule.  for the journey was long and arduous.  He mounted the mule majestically and started off beautifully.  The bishop praised the Lord for the beautiful nature around him.  After some time, Bishop Ferrando asked Fr. Jellici to go ahead and inform the Fathers and the Christians of his arrival from him.  No sooner than Ft Jellici arrived at the mission station, he saw the mule stride into the compound and go directly into the stable.  Imagine the surprise of the Fathers!*

 *"What might have happened to the Bishop?" the Fathers queried 98 As some of them came out to look for him, they saw him at a distance exhausted and bathed in perspiration, and quite annoyed with the mule.  Over a cup of tea, he told them that the mule was very capricious; it was either going too close to the hill, so his foot would hit against the hill-side or against the sharp stones on the sides, or it would go just above the precipice, as if it wanted to throw him down.  On a level ground it bent its back so that both the legs of the Bishop dragged on the ground.  So, he stopped the mule to rest a while, no sooner had he got down, the mule galloped off to the mission, leaving the Bishop alone in the middle of the road.  As the Bishop was a sturdy man, the mule found him too heavy, so it looked for ways to get rid of him*

Though Bishop Ferrando had a special love for the Khasi-Pnars, he toured the villages of the Assam plains too with equal enthusiasm .  He learned Hindi so as to be able to preach to them.  He regularly attended the annual Sobha in the Assam plains, as well as in the Garo Hills.  He was a missionary for all.  It is worthwhile to take note of some of the missionary episodes which Bishop Ferrando narrates himself in The North East India, his own memoirs of his mission experiences:

*To find a proper place to sleep at night during the missionary tours was one of the big problems.  The problem was aggravated due to the lack of a hygienic toilet.  In huts, which are shaken both by the winds and the rains, it was really difficult.  The beds were made on matted bamboos or on hay or on the skin of animals.  The mosquito net protected one from the mosquitoes but not from the other Insects such as bed bugs.*

*Once in a small dark and low room, Fr. Ephisius Usal was tormented by an invasion of rats, and one of them even nibbled off part of his ear!!*

*After the work of the day and after dinner, the evening hours were best suited for meeting the people.  All the nooks and corners of the hut would be filled with people.  They would sing and pray, hold discussions and listen to instructions far into the night, even beyond midnight.*

*Once, when we visited Haharam on the western side of Shillong, the Christians of the place made a hut for Fr Willy, Fr. Attard, Fr. Tonello and me.  We slept on new mats that were spread out.  A hay-screen separated the room where the fathers slept from the adjoining room where the Bishop slept.  And to honor authority, my bed was raised up, a real bed suspended from above, tied by wicker ropes to the posts of the hut.  At midnight, when I was fast asleep the wicker ropes broke and the Bishop descended solemnly to the ground amidst loud noise and pandemonium!  One of the fathers from the other room shouted, inquiring: "What has happened? Yet another one called me by name, and the third one concluded loudly: "it is an earthquake.  "All inquiries ceased there and they continued to sleep. I remained silent and crouched under all the bedding materials. The donkey that was tethered nearby tried all the time to adjust the fallen burden and I too slowly found a comfortable position to sleep. Then the cock began to crow nearby and with the arrival of the morning light the truth was revealed and for days we laughed heartily at the earthquake."  Like this the missionary is always happy even in the midst of difficulties and inconveniences.*

*One morning as I woke up, I was surprised to find around my bed many small children standing with joined hands.  They were contemplating for a long time how the 100 Bishop slept!  Then I needed the help of the catechist to get a little privacy, away from those angels, to get up and dress myself for the day "*

Bishop Ferrando traveled for miles on foot across forests and paddy fields to reach the Christian communities, at times wading through rivers, walking through vast marshy lands, in inclement weather, fighting leeches and often coming across wild animals along the way. He would spent sleepless night in the huts trying to ward of mosquitoes. All this had an effect on his health. He narrates one of his pastoral visits to Barpeta for the annual Sobha:

*I visited Barpeta Road in 1939, accompanied by Fr Marengo and Fr Tonello. We attended the annual Sobha in Doomni, a flourishing center of very fervent Oraon Catholics. It is an old community ", very strong in faith. They had youth and women groups to take care of the apostolate. From Barpeta we traveled the whole night through a dusty road full of potholes, and having no bridges. We were traveling on a bullock cart, with the buffaloes drawing the cart behaving very capriciously Fr Marengo used to hurl out litanies of strange words that only he and the buffaloes understood!  By the time we reached our destination of Doomni towards morning, our bones were aching terribly but the warm welcome we received at Doomni more than made up for our aching limbs and we were able to smile sincerely.  There was more than enough work for the three of us confessions and communions seemed to be without end.  At the end of our stay there, our host, the tea garden manager of the place  he offered us a picnic on elephant-back to the bonder of Bhutan.  Since this mysterious kingdom, a land prohibited to foreigners, had aroused our curiosity and fascination, we accepted the offer willingly.*

 Yet another visit to Ranipur and Doomni also reveals the Bishop's passionate love for people in the villages:

*Now we are in Ranipur village, which signifies "place of the Queen'. Here around 1000 Catholics work in the tea gardens. We have come for the "Sobha", the annual convention of the Catholics.Fr Orestes Marengo, the future Bishop, is the organizer. He is filled with enthusiasm like a new priest.The bishop is invited to make his pastoral visit. Ft Marengo could not accompany me and so he had given me all the detailed instructions for reaching Randpar from Guwahati. The instructions were very clear after getting down from the train, my people will be waiting for you. You cannot miss them." But between saying and doing, between words and understanding, there are lots of misunderstandings due to distances, the delay of the trains and the condition of the locality The conclusion grapes 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 guesthouse on the border of the forest.  I was bone tired, ravenously hungry and it was already night.  Putting on a brave face and hiding all my hunger pains.  I lay on a bed made of coir and tried to sleep.  I was suddenly awakened by a loud commotion: "Monsignor Monsignor! Where is the Bishop?" I jumped out of bed and responded: "I am here. There were about 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 horse 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 is filled with wild animals and our night is their day. The forest became alive with roars, barks and cries of different animals. It was indeed a unique experience to listen to the noises of the forest at night. Fear made me forget about my tiredness and hunger, the eyes had to be wide open and the ears attentive , so that between so many men and torches the wild animals may not creep in. Fr. Marengo intoned a 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 guests who were hardly recognizable due to the dust and sweat.  My dress was all torn and it did not look like the white cassock that I had put on in the morning!*

*In those days there was the 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 wave.*

 *Fr.Marengo played the role of both Martha and Mary. For his work was a great solace, preaching a great joy, and confessions a good rest.  He had such a command over the local languages ​​that during the homily he used to switch from one language to another language or dialect to explain the message better in the local dialect. After lunch I administered some 350 confirmations to the assembled Boros and Santhals.  Needless to say, there was a certain amount of disorder and confusion among such a throng of people.  The good 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!  But the troubles did not seem to be over yet!  The sky was overcast and threatening to rain; the sun was about to set.  The Eucharistic procession had just begun and I carried the Blessed Sacrament under the trees that were swaying violently in the strong wind.  The storm blew with all its fury and the rain poured down in torrents.  It was a cyclone.  The procession route turned into a rivulet.  The darkness was as thick as the forest around.  I covered the Blessed Sacrament with the humeral veil and proceeded forward, almost being carried along in the arms of two sturdy catechists.  When we reached the chapel we realized that the wind had taken away half of its roof.  Thanks be to God, the storm finally blew over Calmness returned and I gave the blessing.  The faithful glorified the Lord with their patience and living faith of him.  After two hours they were ready for a variety concert that marked the conclusion of the pastoral visit of the Bishop. Thus the annual convention ended with success and failures, meetings and departures, indeed life and death.  During each pastoral visit the Paschal mystery is always re-lived.*

 Mr. Carlus Dkhar , an ex- head - catechist from Jongsha narrates the following about the pastoral visits of Bishop Ferrando : " In 1960 , Bishop came to visit Umsning village . He came on foot from Smit "He walked very slowly and I kept pace with him. We stopped at Jongsha for a cup of tea. Then we walked again through the rugged road till Umsning. People loved him and came to meet him. There was the procession, the blessing of the chapel, baptisms and confirmations. He gave a sermon in Khasi. As I walked from Smit to Umsning I marveled at how these Shepherds loved their flock and like Jesus worked with compassion and commitment. He used to speak to everyone, asking "dear children how things are in your homes, where is your house etc.  " People used to surround him to kiss his hands, to hear him and to receive his blessings . He was very fatherly and loving in his approach to the people.

 Fr. Mauro Casarotti narrates the following incident: Once Bishop Ferrando was visiting his people in a Khasi village near Mairang.  The path that led to the village was a very steep climb.  Without minding his heavy constitution, Bishop Ferrando trudged on together with Fr. Albera.  After a while, the Bishop slipped and fell into the slush.  His cassock from him was fully soiled.  Albera helped him to the ground.  Hiding his pain, he stood up and handed his cassock to Fr. Albera, who went to a nearby stream and got it washed.  The Bishop sat under a tree till his cassack was somewhat dry.  He was very relaxed, and proceeded to the village as though all these were part of the missionary program!  I rate him not only as a missionary but as a leader and a formator of a generation of missionaries... In his time, traveling from Shillong to Imphal was not a joke.  Yet he had to make such hazardous journeys many times, as the whole North East was shepherded by him.  Bishop Ferrando loved the various tribes and appreciated their customs and practices.  He enjoyed their ceremonies with an open heart.  He never showed that he was busy or in a hurry.  Here is his humorous narration of the hearty welcome ceremony given to him in some of the villages of the tea gardens in Assam:

*Who has not read about the visit of a Maharaja to the various corners of his domain?  He sits on a throne atop the back of an elephant which is decorated and caparisoned with precious things, other elephants solemnly and majestically pave the way for the Royal Mount, surrounded by people holding lances.*

 *The arrival of a poor missionary like me, to a village it was not ever so majestic and clamorous, but sometimes it resembled the entry of Jesus to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, at least in the poor animal!  At the same time the arrival of the missionary was a big event for the village.*

*The Christians would await us, all in queue, beating drums and holding flags.  What a sight and what a harmonious melody for the ears!  From far away one could hear the beating of the drums that are made of animal skin and the beating stick of heavy wood.  There are big drums, which could be carried only by at least two persons.  Sometimes I would be carried solemnly on horseback.  On my arrival at the welcome spot, I would be helped to land safely: two girls would then come near to wash my hands and another two would dry my hands. We would need a lot of patience because all these are part of the ceremonies according to their custom.  Then the garland with flowers would follow and one's face would be almost invisible in that floral exuberance.  And at a sign from the catechist all would kneel down to get the blessing of the Bishop. After that I would sometimes be taken on a palanquin, carried on the shoulders of eight men.  Then the procession would move ahead and I can do nothing but laugh heartily!!*

 *I would be like the Pope on his official chair of him at St. Peter's however, goodness me, the road is not so plain and level.  During Vatican II, when I saw the Pope being carried towards the hall in his open chair, I did not feel any envy, as I thought of my own similar journeys in Assam!  As the procession advanced, the people would clap their hands and wave flags and sing.  They would sign of the entry of Jesus to Jerusalem.  Meantime I would be looking forward to reach the meeting place, the chapel Finally these would come into sight, the bamboo stage and the flags and the chapel.  I would then descend and the catechist's voice would bellow a thunderous "Jai Jesu" The Christians would respond with enthusiasm and greater interest.  Then I would be seated solemnly and made to listen to the welcome addresses of joy and gratitude.  While the girls performed their dances and songs, I would be served a cup of tea.*

*Then the serious work would begin-confessions instructions, prayers and songs; by the time everything is over, it is already late night, sometimes near midnight.  Usually in the Tea Gardens a good bed will be awaiting you, or else in the sacristy there will be a bed made of straw We would try to sleep as soundly as possible, since the real day of the Lord would begin in a few hours time.*

 For Bishop Ferrando pastoral visits and personal contacts were of prime importance for the success of missionary work.  He speaks of an incident at Mawsmal, a village 5 km away from Cherrapunji, where through personal contact an entire village was won over to the Catholic faith.  Protestants surrounded this village and Catholics had not made any headway despite the many efforts of the missionaries.  Three years ago, due to a good old Khasi man who became a Catholic, the seed fell on good soil.  This old man was like a great patriarch, blessed by the Lord with many children, grand children and great grandchildren.  When he was converted to the Catholic faith through the personal contact of Bishop Ferrando, half of the village received the Catholic faith along with him.  He administered 105 baptisms in the village and the rest of the villagers are catechumens.  The old man was Petrus, and like the apostle Peter he was an apostle till the end and he went to see the good Lord with great satisfaction and contentment.

1. **Little Children as Small Apostles in the Villages**

 Bishop Ferrando was very fond of little children and they loved to gather around him. They thronged around catching his hands, kissing his Episcopal ring and so on. Many were the initiatives taken by him for the care and education of the children and youth. He started schools. and boarding houses both in the towns and villages. On the day of the first communion of the children in the Cathedral, the children were given free meals. He would move among them with ease and comfort. A picnic was organized for these children every year. He would accompany these children, with the simplicity of a child and he would play with them. The Bishop's face radiated joy while in the company of these innocent children. When he used to climb up the Malki hills, the children would greet and swarm around him. At times a train of them would be walking along holding hands and shouting “Khublei Bishop, Khublei Ipa”

 "During the pastoral visits of the Bishop the little children played an important role. He called them "Small Apostles" (Bimbi apostoli). Bishop Ferrando narrates the function and responsibility of the small apostles in the villages.

*It is not easy to enter a new village and to break the ice of indifference But it is enough to start a village school and in a few months you have the entrance ticket assured I visited some of these villages where Fr. Foglia had begun schools First of all the children, who come running to meet us half way greet the Bishop and a missionary on their arrival to a village, and accompany us to the village they sing and dance along the road. They take us to their schools and there in front of the school they dance, sing and play and make us happy. The whole village is gathered there. The parents are happy as they see this type of education based on disinterested love. Often these small apostles accompany us, as we visit the families.  As we walk along, they give us all the information about the entire village if there are Catholic families, how they live, who quarrels among themselves, who does not attend Sunday Service, who helps the needy and the marriages that are not settled, children without first communion etc.  As we reach the village, we are able to address the families very personally by their names and knowing their condition.  As we go along with the children even non-Christian families invite us.  In those families we do not speak about religion, instead the children will start presenting the matter and then it is easy for us.  In this way the small apostles prepare the way and guide the adults.  They are like John the Baptist, going ahead of the missionaries to the non-Christian villages.*

 On another occasion an entire village was won over because of a single child.  He explains how helpful children can be in our apostolate.  These incidents, as narrated by the bishop himself, throw light on this fact:

 *I was returning after the blessing of a chapel at Mawkyreus south of Shillong.  Don Dal Zovo was with me and we were walking on the hills for hours and were tired Suddenly as we reached a group of huts in a village, in the middle of the road we were stopped by a girl of about eight or nine years.  She had a child on her back tied with a piece of cloth.  She greeted us.  " Khublei Bishop! Sankgeh Kyndiat ! (Good day, please wait here). We remembered that we were in a most democratic world among a matrilineal clan, where the woman had supreme power. Hence there is nothing to marvel at if the little girl ordered us to wait and then disappeared!  She entered a hut, called out her mother, grandmother and other children, so that they would come and greet the Bishop who was passing by.  She demonstrated to the new comers how to salute the bishop.  First kneel down, then take the hand and implant a resounding kiss on the ring as the Khasis usually do.  Then she brought some more of her friends de ella from the village and began to sing a song in honor of the bishop.  Those who did not know the song accompanied the others with their rhythmical clapping of hands.  Then they accompanied us, singing all along I felt I was in Palestine where the Hebrew children singing Hosannas accompanied the Lord.  Such is the simplicity of our small apostles.  We got entry into this pagan village through a little girl.  After a few more visits the entire village asked for a catechist to instruct them.*

  It takes openness to the Spirit and practical wisdom.  to make use of all the opportunities to proclaim the Good News and to become innovative and creative missionaries.  Bishop Ferrando would not let go on any such occasion; instead, he harnessed them all for the sake of the Gospel.  Bishop Ferrando's greatness is seen in the fact that he made use of every event and situation to evangelize the people.

1. **Involvement of Lay Catechists in the Villages**

 Bishop Ferrando encouraged the missionaries to appoint catechists who would instruct people, approach new areas, and look for fresh opportunities for the growth of the Church.  The active involvement of the local lay catechists in the work of evangelization shows that Bishop Ferrando believed that the missionary mandate of the Church is not limited to the ordained ministers and the religious.  The document, Guide for Catechists states: "Apart from the explicit proclamation of the Christian message and the accompaniment of catechumens and newly baptized Christians on their road to full maturity in the faith and in sacramental life, the catechist's role comprises presence and witness, and involvement in human development, inculturation and dialogue. In the multi-cultural and pluri-linguistic context of North East India, the local catechists played an irreplaceable role in evangelization. With the asset of knowing the local languages, customs, traditions and the intricacies of family and clan relationships they could adopt right approaches Instructions received from the missionaries and the dedicated attitude of the catechists, were the right components for carrying the Good News to the non-Christian villages. The presence of the local catechist created confidence in the people. It is with the help of these catechists that a single priest is able to look after a mission station or parish, with even a hundred and more Christian communities or sub-stations, spread over many villages.  Realizing the urgency of catechists in the villages Bishop Ferrando wrote to Rev. Fr. Peter Ricaldone, 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 the spokesmen of the missionary Give me more catechists and we will have more.  thousands of conversions each year.  In the annual report of the mission for year 1936-37 the Bishop further expressed the urgency of having more catechists in the following words: "From every part of the mission, the villages ask us for catechists. We are already burdened with too much work; we do not have the means; how should we respond? Are we to tell them: "You will not be baptized; you will be at the gate waiting till we can send you a catechist?  " A good catechist would mean a new community, new baptisms and new conquests of souls.

 The animation and the training of the catechists and the school teachers were important aspects of the missionary work in the region. Therefore, centers were set up in Jowai, Marbisu, Naharkatia and Guwahati for the training of catechists. Every missionary was advised to make every effort to send suitable candidates to become catechists. Bishop Ferrando appreciated the selfless services of the catechists . In his book *The North East India* he devotes an entire chapter for describing the great work of the catechists, their difficulties and problems.  The catechists do most the work in the mission land, especially in rural areas. And there is a need to multiply them as Jesus multiplied bread and fish, "says Bishop Ferrando. He mentions some of them who were particularly outstanding and heroic in their commitment as catechists."

1. **Cluster of Mission Stations**

From the beginning of the Assam Missions, one of the missionary methods that proved very successful was the opening of new mission centers wherever possible.  Bishop Ferrando experienced the urge to move on to new places and peoples, in keeping with the spirit of his motto, " amor Christi urget nos - the love of Christ impels us." In the Khasi-Jaintia Hills the already existing mission stations were Latiumkhrah, Sohra-Laitkynsew, Jowal and Raliang. Bishop L. Mathias had opened Tura (1931), Cherra (1931), Dibrugarh (1931) and Tezpur (1932). The following stations were opened in subsequent years in order to reach out to the people who awaited the Good News:

1. Barpeta Road – 1933

2. Golaghat – 1940

3. Mawlai 1941

4. North Lakhimpur – 1945

5. Damra - 1948

 6. Digboi – 1949

7. Marbisu - Mawngap – 1950

8. Naharkatiya – 1950

9. Mawkhar 1951

10. Bagmara – 1952

11. Tangla – 1952

12. Nongpoh – 1954

13. Chota Pukhri – 1955

14. Pynursla - 1957

15. Dhekiajuli – 1959

16. Nongstoin – 1966

17. Sojong in Karbl - Anglong – 1967

18. Bengtol – 1967

Besides the main mission station there were a number sub - stations attached to each mission center, which were entrusted to catechists or village elders.

1. **Promotion of the Local Clergy**

Bishop Ferrando was convinced that true effectiveness in evangelization and success of mission depended on local vocations. In his own words: "It is local priests and religious who can evangelize India in its fullness. The first responsibilities that Stephen Ferrando shouldered on his arrival at Shillong as Catechist, as Novice Master and then as Rector of Our Lady's House, added further conviction to the urgency of forming indigenous missionary personnel.  When the headquarters of the mission at Shillong went up in flames in the devastating fire of 10 April 1936, looking into the rubble of burnt - out ashes, Bishop Ferrando expressed his primary concern for the construction of a seminary for the formation of the local clergy.  He wrote: "Shillong the heart of the diocese without cathedral, without seminary, without bishop's house. These are formidable problems under which one can be oppressed, if not sustained by trust in Mary our Help. But still the thought that worries me most is to have at the earliest the house of formation and the seminary for the indigenous clergy on whom depend the entire future of the Mission. Discerning the signs of the times he encouraged and promoted local vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. He writes: "Only those in the mission field will understand the importance of indigenous vocations and the urgency of making any sacrifices for this indispensable work... the native clergy who know the language, the traditions of the people and who are used to the climate of the place, will be like a brother among his people and how effective will be his proclamation of the Good News!

 In 1962 Bishop Stephen Ferrando laid the foundation for St. Paul's Minor Seminary, for the formation of the Diocesan Clergy.  A considerable number of local vocations, as well as vocations from other regions of the country, has been nurtured through this institution: the numbers continue to grow today.

 He also invited seminarians from the major seminary at Poonamallee in Madras to join the diocese of Shillong and paid for the education to the priesthood of those who opted to come as missionaries to the diocese of Shillong

1. **A Unique Missionary Insight**

Genuine missionaries develop a capacity for insight into peoples' needs. Thus Bishop Ferrando's contact with remote villagers and their primitive, squalid living conditions in mud huts, their total illiteracy, malnourishment and very high levels of infant mortality immediately convinced him that the existing missionary personnel methods and institutions were not adequate to tackle these multifarious problems.  It was this insight that led Stephen Ferrando to gather a group of girls who would be willing to risk the hard life of remote villages and live there to evangelize, to prepare catechumens for baptism and the sacraments, to teach hygienic ways of living, bring minimum levels of literacy, teach essential childcare to mothers of families and engage in basic health care.  Here was the nucleus of the new Congregation for women that he envisaged, the small seed that has grown into a large tree over the past sixty three years, the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians.

 Bishop Ferrando was well aware of the difficulties involved in such a venture; but finding it an absolute necessity, he went ahead with the project, recommending it to the prayers of many.  He recalled the humble beginnings in one of his letters from him to the Sisters:

 "I shall never forget, dear Sisters, what happened in those days. A group of girls came forward to meet the need and did it all by consecrating themselves to God.  It was like saying here we are, send us 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.

Bishop Ferrando was very fortunate in having some very saintly Salesian Sisters (FMA), like Mothers Luigina Saletta, Teresa Villa and Nelli Nunes for the initial 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 Persons like Constantine Vendrame, Orestes Marengo, Joseph Dal Broi.  Attilio Colussi and Noel Joseph Kenny have been able by their example and words to give the nascent Congregation a specific missionary and Salesian spirit, as well as orientation.

The Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians is the lasting memorial and legacy of Stephen Ferrando to the Church in North East India and even outside India.  The heart of Ferrando continues to beat in the Congregation in all its vitality, as is seen in the number of novices every year, and where the heart is sound, the body too is strong and active Ferrando lives on in his Ferrandine Sisters, a name jokingly coined by others, which has now become a legacy and a program of life for collective existence and mission, namely, to be a missionary among all the people and everywhere, especially in the rural set up.

Speaking of the MSMHC, many rank it among the most significant and Spirit-inspired events in the history of the Catholic Church in North East India.  The Congregation contributes a major share in the building up of the local Church in this area.

1. **Introducing Creative Means to Nurture the Flock**

To nurture the faith - life of his flock, Bishop Ferrando along with his missionaries experimented with and successfully introduced a number of new evangelization and catechetical methods, which proved very effective in the past and are relevant even today.  Among them , the most notable were :

* Personal contact with the people through regular visits to the far - flung Christian communities.
* Organizing the annual Sobha and weekly or monthly jingiaseng
* Systematic catechetical instruction for adults , youth and children
* Preparation for the Sacraments , especially pre matrimonial classes
* Setting up clusters of mission stations and sub stations
* Appointing Catechists as leaders in the village communities
* The Catechists meeting and retreats, and the monthly recollection on every First Friday.
* Pastoral animation of missionaries on the occasion of the monthly recollection.
* Participation of religious women in the work of evangelization and catechesis through systematic village tours.
* Involvement of novices and brothers in organizing oratories and Sunday Masses in the villages.
* Popular devotions, especially Marian devotion in the months of May and October, and distributing the picture and medal of Mary Help of Christians during solemn celebrations.
* Celebrations such as Pope's day, Vocation week
* Eucharistic and Marian processions, family prayer, rosary, and devotion to the Sacred Heart and First Friday practice.
* Enthronement of the Sacred Heart and the Bible in the families
* Formation of associations and groups such as Catholic Action.  Mother's Association, Youth Groups, the Sodalities and Association of Altar Servers.
* Translation of the Bible, Catechism books, prayer books and hymn books into the vernacular languages.
* ​​Utilizing the Mass Media, the Press and other means of Social Communication for the work of evangelization and catechesis
* Learning the local languages and study of cultures, customs and heritage of the people
1. **Collaborative Leadership and Friendly Attitude**

Stephen Ferrando, though not a gifted fund-raiser for the missions, had the great merit of letting others take the initiative for the work of the missions.  He fostered inventiveness and creativity in the work of evangelization.  Thus he allowed Fr. Archimedes Pianazzi to dedicate himself to the evangelization of the Garos.  Fr. Constantine Vendrame for the work among the Khasis and Fr. Leo Plasescki for the work among the Adivasis of the Assam plains.  As a missionary he recognized, with no pretensions, his limitations.  The freedom of action and the room for initiative that he offered his collaborators produced some of the most outstanding missionaries in this region.  I have trusted their ability and capacity.  His missionaries often referred to Bishop Ferrando as "our good bishop." This indicates the kind of mutual respect and trust that existed between him and his priests. As a good leader of the Block, he was always appreciative of the work done by his collaborators.

In casual conversations and on formal occasions, he would seek the advice of competent and prudent persons. Thus he relied much on the counsel and advice of persons like Mgr. E. Bars. Fr. J. Arokiaswamy, Fr.R. Dal Zovo, Fr. E. Gutierrez. Fr. 1. Kenny and others. Thus he knew how to get the whole-hearted collaboration of his fellow missionaries

. Bishop Ferrando was very human and friendly in his dealing with all, which made everyone to feel at home in his company. Priests and missionaries longed to come to the Bishop's house because of the family atmosphere created by Bishop Ferrando. Fr. Mauro Casarotti SDB, shares the following experience. As a Provincial, going to Bishop's house was like going home for  I .  Whenever I went to Don Bosco, Shillong for visitation or for any other purpose, I made sure that my meal was at the Bishop's house, always with Bishop Ferrando.  At table, he was not a Bishop and for me it was real joy to sit with him thus and have a heart to heart chat.  You see, the late Archbishop Hubert D'Rosario and I were novice companions.  Later on as a Bishop, he was very much a Bishop even at light moments.  There was a vast difference in sitting at table with him as a Bishop and Bishop Ferrando.  This is what I mean, when I say that your Founder was a homely man in whose presence everyone felt at home.

1. **Pastoral Animation and Solidarity**

 Bishop Ferrando understood well the human and spiritual needs of his missionaries and encouraged the monthly meeting of all his missionaries in the Diocese, in order to encourage and make the missionary work more effective.  All the missionaries would gather around him for a day of recollection and for planning the future.  missionary activities.  Both the bishop and the clergy looked forward to this day.  It was a forum where they all freely shared their missionary experiences, their woes and worries.  He gave plenty of freedom to his missionaries and had close rapport with them.  The family spirit, which reigned among them, eased the missionary fatigue and problems.  This practice is still continued today, to unite the missionaries around the pastor.

As Bishop it was one of the primary concerns of S. Ferrando to take care of his missionaries.  Once in 1938, Fr. Farina, the Parish Priest of Raliang fell seriously ill and the news was brought to the Bishop.  There was no proper road and it was rather difficult to reach there immediately.  The Bishop wanted to be by the side of the ailing priest and so he set out on foot with the catechist who brought the news.  They had to traverse 90 kms to reach the place.  On reaching the place the Bishop was very sad and disappointed, as Fr. Farina had succumbed to the illness and had already died.  But everyone admired his sensitivity and concern for the missionaries.  The death of the missionary saddened him and he wept as though his own dear child had been lost.

He himself had traversed immense distances walking through thick forests, wading through the swollen rivers, scaling the steep hills and balancing down the jagged slopes.  I have experienced the difficulties of living in poor living conditions, of hunger and thirst.  He suffered from frequent bouts of malaria.  The stress and strain of missionary life made him realize that his co-workers needed time for rest, care and recovery.  The monthly meetings of missionaries in Shillong and the annual retreats were occasions not only for spiritual exercises.  120 but also opportunities to regain energy.  They were truly moments of renewal, spiritual as well as physical.  S. Ferrando never failed to make mention of the hard work done by the missionaries in all his reports on the mission

.  10. **Predilection for the Poor**

Bishop Ferrando's predilection for the poor people was proverbial.  In dealing with them he showed extraordinary patience, understanding, care and concern. The fact that he loved to tour the remotest of villages and spent days and weeks in the company of poor people during his pastoral visits was a proof of his love for them.  He would write regularly to his superiors of the urgency of starting schools, hospitals, mission centres, in the numerous needy areas of the region, always in favour of the poor.  He opened many boarding schools for the poor children of the plains and hills and educated them and started the orphanages for boys and girls in Shillong city His constant visits to the villages made him aware of the problems of illiteracy, poverty and disease, particularly the pathetic condition of women and children.

 For the physical wellbeing of the poor people, he began the Nazareth hospital in Shillong in 1959 and set up dispensaries in almost all the parishes.

As a Founder whenever he had a chance he opened the convent for the Sisters in poor settings, in remote areas, so that the poor are taken care of by them.  A concrete example is the Convent at Malki.  He found many poor children who needed help and education there.  The area was not safe and difficult to approach.  Many priests objected to sending the Sisters to such an unfavourable place.  He describes the condition of Malki: "Then Malki was a poor village, of poor people who worked hard day. and night to keep their body and soul together…. Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin have given you a field which is poor, poor little children so dear to Jesus -Our Lord Jesus Christ is very pleased to be here in Malki and has entrusted this garden to your care, to your attention you must be very glad to go around like the Blessed Virgin just for this purpose - to go to villages like Malki where there are so many poor children, so many needy people, so many poor women, ignorant people.  who know nothing about Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is only out of his pure love for the poor people in Malki that he started the Convent there in utter poverty. We had no proper place to stay, but he wanted the Sisters to take care of the poor children there.

His charity towards others is proved by his uninterrupted dedication to people in need.  He was very much moved by the sufferings of people and was very kind, tender and understanding in dealing with them.  Whatever he had been he would sacrifice for the needy people.  If we gave him anything as a gift, next time we would not find it; he had already given it to some poor people.

During his pastoral visits to the Garo Hills, he realized the need of opening a Leprosy center for the poor people of the area.  The Bishop recounts an incident, which led him to care for these poor and abandoned children of God.

 *Once during my pastoral sit to the Garo Hills, we were crossing a river by boat.  Because of the sand the boat could not proceed and we lost a lot of time in getting down from the boat to clear the sand.  It was getting dark and we had to find a place for the night.  There was a village on the other bank.  We were hosted in a Christian hut.  On a poor bed there were two sick people.  We were also given a corner of their house.  We had an enjoyable evening; we prayed, sang and I also gave them some instruction. Towards midnight we slept.  Only in the morning did we realize that we were guests in a leper-village.  And those two sick people were also affected by the terrible disease.*

 *The leprosarium in Tura is three km away from the town . The lepers are grouped as in a village.  They are happy there.  They live in huts alongside the Church that is built by Fr. Anthony Bucceri.  They have a school and a dispensary. The Sisters of Christ Jesus are the angels who care for them, comfort and console them.  They clean their wounds, visit the houses and take care of their children. When I went there for Mass I found a family atmosphere. Belief in God and faith sanctify the pains and fill the heart with trust and even joy. I celebrated Man for them and distributed the Blessed Sacrament to sixty of them.  The Sisters assisted in carrying the Blessed Sacrament to those huts where those who could not walk to attend the Mass stayed.*

 *Peter received his faith from him in the leprosarium.  After a few days he disappeared, however, he returned after a few months, all radiant with joy and told the missionary now please go to my village: there are forty persons desiring baptism.  He had escaped to his village from him to be an apostle. Now he is totally unable to do any such apostolate but he is very fervent and we spent an evening with him. The inmates of the leprosarium had many things to tell and ask us.  A number of Catholic girls are working in the leprosarium as nurses. The Sisters work in the leprosarium of Tura and at Molokai in Nongpoh*

 *I cannot forget the last leper I met in the jungles of Garo Hills. There was a feast and the Sisters had come to distribute medicine and food to the lepers.  One poor leper reached late a day after the feast.  After having walked two hours he reached the place, tired and dust covered on seeing me he extended his hands that were mere stumps without any fingers and feet all disfigured and bleeding. He cried out "Sisters! Sisters The unfortunate man, who knows how long he had to walk searching for the sisters! We helped him at once to find an angel sister. That was my last encounter with a leper.*

 Every year, during the Eucharistic procession in Shillong, thousands of people used to come from Jowal, Rallang, and West Khasi Hills. In those days there were no motorable roads and people had to walk the whole day to reach Shillong. So the people had to spend the night in the mission compound. The Bishop used to provide for the rice and curry and all other necessary things. Whenever poor people would come to the Bishop's house, he would meet them no matter what time of the day. Even during the meal if someone called him, he would leave the meal and attend to the people. He would tell the confreres that these people have walked for hours and have come, we should not delay them as they have to go back to their villages before it is too dark. When he saw poor people, he would give them whatever he had, even his own personal things from him.  For Bishop Ferrando, Jesus was really present in the poor.

1. **Evangelization through Schools and Colleges**

One of the main concerns of S. Ferrando as a Bishop was the advancement of the people through education.  Since people were generally illiterate in those days, education was one of the top priorities of all the missionary activities.  During his time itself.  Shillong had become an outstanding educational center for the entire North Eastern region of India, with three university colleges.  St. Anthony’s, St. Edmund's and St. Mary's In Garo Hills he felt the need for a school for girls and called in the Sisters of Christ Jesus who went on to open three centres in the North East, one at Tura (1948), another at Kohima (1948) and a third one at Raliang (1950).  Eventually wherever there was a mission center, a school was set up for the education of the people of the locality.

It was his great desire for him to have vocational schools.  established in different important places of the diocese.  In his writings he noted with pride the accomplishments of the vocational schools at Don Bosco Shillong and Don Bosco Guwahati.  It was his vision of him to form an 'elite section of well-educated Catholic youth who would enter into politics and government service, in order to influence decision making for the people.  He insisted with the missionaries that a Catholic school is run as an expression of the identity and mission of the Church.  Part and parcel of that identity is the missionary character.  because the Church is essentially missionary, and the mission of the Church is evangelization.  A Catholic school that does not evangelize, is not a Catholic school.

1. **Medical Care: The Fifth Gospel**

The missionary vision of Bishop Ferrando was holistic The preaching of the Word along with other developmental works promoted a holistic growth of the human person.  His missionary project included education, health care and other developmental activities.  In a region deprived of medical facilities, the contribution of the missionaries to health care was crucial.  Bishop Ferrando described the care of the sick as the "Fifth Gospel" of the missionaries.  He wrote: In fact, the Divine Redeemer told the apostles, "Preach and cure the sick. The missionary is the minister of the Word of God, but in order that the people realize the truth of the Faith, he must speak the language of charity, and render everything possible to cure physical illness”.

 Bishop Ferrando narrates an incident about the magic of medicine in the villages. Last winter I was in Umpanal, a village in Karbi Anglong. On one morning, after the Holy Mass in the small church, I was surprised to see a great crowd of Mikirs, Christians, non - Christians Catholics and Protestants, waiting for me in one corner. I asked them if they wanted to hear the gramophone. They replied at once: That also!  But specially we want your magical medicines.  I laughed, but they were all very serious. Then the catechist recounted that a couple of months ago many in the village had died due to cholera Yes, cholera, malaria, dysentery, black fever and all other tropical fevers, especially the skin diseases, including leprosy have been tormenting the people of that village. He continued that, out of 20 children born that year, 15 had died due to various illnesses. In the nearby villages also the story had been the same the medicine of the missionaries healed all kinds of illnesses. How much good can be done through medicine and the Bishop promised to send someone with the medicines

1. **Love for the Cultures of the People**

Bishop Ferrando showed keen interest in the cultures of North East India He took pains to learn the languages ​​and to study the history of the country and of North East India in particular. He made known the beauty of the local culture in many of his writings. In one of his articles he writes about his visit to Ummiuh village and how he took part in a public discussion organized in the manner of the Khasi dorbar In another article he writes about Tyrna village and the beauty of it cascades.  In describing the Nolt Kalikai Falls, he narrates the legend of KaLikai.  The name is derived from the story of a mother who lost her only daughter and in despair jumped into the abyss of this frightening falls.  The legend is that the roaring of the waters is nothing but the cry of the mother and her child.

 His familiar and clear explanation of the intricacies of the Khasi religion shows how great an interest he had taken in the culture and religion of the people.

 *The ancient Khail religion constituted in itself a basis for the missionaries The Khals believed that in the beginning of creation, there was no sin in the world.  People communicated freely with God the creator and there was great happiness on the earth*

*There was a tree on Lam Dingies.  It was so tall that it touched the heavens and men ascended to heaven and descended to earth through its branches.  The one might the enemy of God and people cut down the tree, thus breaking the communication and easy relationship between God and men.  Consequently, the shadow of death.  unhappiness and disharmony covered the earth.  But God did not abandon the people.*

 *The cock is the symbol of the Khasi people and it is painted on their flag. Among the Khasis there is a clan that even today, practice the cult of a serpent called Thlen.  who is appeased only by human blood.  The serpent in turn compensated the worshiper with material prosperity. Those who practice this peculiar cult are called "nong shah-noh," a kind of secret society of the place.  The Khasis used to be afraid to travel at night.  The " nong shoh noh was an alarm of terror Now the practitioners of this cult of blood have almost vanished*.

During his visit to Cherrapunji on the feast of Don Bosco, he described with joy the beauty and magnificence of the Khasi traditional dance and the elegance of their costume.  He encouraged these dances and thereby helped preserve the traditional cultural heritage and won the hearts of the people.

Archbishop Tarcisius Resto SDB recounts an incident to illustrate Bishop Ferrando's love for the Khasi culture: "I recall when I was a boy, every year from 1934 to 1944 we used to go for the annual Eucharistic Procession of Sohra. On Saturday afternoon and on Sunday after the procession, there used to be the Khasi dance. Bishop. Ferrando used to sit for hours to watch and encourage the dancers. At the end of the dance, he would distribute prizes to the best dancers. He used to do this when he went to visit the parishes in the plains and hills of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland.

 Bishop Ferrando wrote about the importance of the cultural practices in many of his articles in Bollettino Salesiana. He wrote: "Our people in the villages know very little about graphics and artificial things.  They are very close to nature and they do not have modern artistic things like the paint and brush to express themselves in art; but they have their own splendid personality, poetry and music.  Their souls become alive with music and dance and are living expressions of their culture.  They never dance in pairs or solo; instead in large groups, as a community.  The dance is not just for entertainment; it is rather a language of religious sentiments, joys and sorrows of life.  There are dances that depict war themes that awaken fear and awe in us; there are other dances of hunting, farming, fishing and harvesting as well as that which portray religious and inspirational themes.  In this simple civilization the dances accompanied with rhythmic music and beating of drums irradiate joy and zest for life..  Christianity has not repudiated these folkloristic manifestations; instead, we have accepted, sanctified and ennobled all that is honest, beautiful and good.

 Bishop Ferrando realized the role of Salesian joy as the meeting point between the traditions of the local people and the Christian faith. He wished that the festive celebrations of the people, which are often accompanied by energetic drumbeats and colourful dances, could form part of the heavenly feast in the Kingdom of God. In appreciation of the local culture, he wrote: "When the Khasis dance, adorned in their brilliant costumes and in the presence of an enormous crowd, they represent the traditional, national solemn events; and one realizes with joy that Christianity not only does not destroy what it finds good and innocent but it also sanctifies and leads to Christ.  When that dance progresses with a magnificent choreography under the vault of the beautiful blue sky ... and especially when the dancers approach the bishop to pay him respect, how I wish that all the Khasis would accept Christi

Another evidence of his interest in the culture of the people was his willingness and happiness to participate in their cultural practices.  Thus, in his tours to villages he would happily take part in their cultural practices.  While touring in Nagaland in 1939, he described how he was happy to undergo the purification ceremony performed on him by the village people.  The Naga young men covered him with leaves and then made him pass through the arch decorated with bows and arrows and monstrous figures, in order to expel all evil spirits from him.  After this he took part in the council of the village where the chief crowned him with a headgear made of buffalo horns. On another occasion in another Naga village the boys were doing the yell of happiness to welcome the Bishop in their midst.  The Bishop too joined in that yell and the joy of the crowd knew no bounds.

 In his visits to the Adivasi villages in Assam, he would allow himself to be welcomed with the traditional washing of hands and in some cultures even of the leg and the garlanding with flowers.  In many places he allowed the people to carry him on portable chairs, to make them happy.

Speaking about the need to preserve the culture of the people, Bishop Ferrando quotes Dr. Radhakrishnan, the great philosopher and thinker of India and who was President of India, and who wrote about the hill tribes who were despised and oppressed till then : We need to approach the hill tribes with affection and friendship and not with an air of superiority or disrespect. We should not take away their innocent joys, their dances, their feasts and solemnities. We need to put aside that psychological "big brother" complex. The Salesian missionaries in Assam, beginning with Fr. Mlekus to Fr Vendrame, from Fr. Farina to Fr. Tome, from Fr. Piaseski to Fr.  Ravalico have been doing precisely this for years.  He made a happy blend of the various dimensions of evangelization, while remaining deeply sensitive to the demands of a pluri-cultural context.  Bishop Ferrando and the missionaries made use of festivals and celebrations as occasions for evangelization.  He wrote: The grandiosity of the functions is a means for evangelization. From the villages numerous persons Christians, non- Christians, catechumens and Protestants, come for the celebrations and they say 'it is beautiful, like paradise. We need to make use of all the chances to proclaim the Good News to these children of God.

1. **Integral Approach to Evangelization**

Bishop Ferrando as a missionary was also a visionary who understood the relationship between human development and evangelization. Today we speak of the integral approach to evangelization Bishop had already initiated steps towards such an approach.  He introduced cooperative societies in the villages in order to make the people economically self-sufficient.  In the plains of Assam, Rice Banks were set up, to rescue the poor people from the clutches of moneylenders, especially in times of floods and draughts.  Today the Church in the region.  continues to be in the vanguard of human development.  especially in the remote villages.

1. **Empowering Women**

The familiarity with the tribal cultures of North East India had made Bishop Ferrando aware of the status of tribal women in society.  He knew from experience that tribal women could play an active role in family, as well as in social life.  He could read in them great potentialities for evangelization and catechesis in the rural areas.  Reflecting on the good that could be done by women, the idea of starting a religious Congregation for indigenous women dawned upon his mind.  Already as early as in 1939 he gave serious consideration to this idea of ​​his.  His vision was to have an indigenous Congregation of women, whose charism would basically be "missionary work".  He envisaged the type of missionary work wherein the Sisters would go into the villages all over the region, to evangelize, to catechize, to heal the sick and to educate the people.  The special thrust of this Congregation would be the empowerment of women in the villages.  This great vision was finally realized on 24 October 1942.  According to some historians, the founding of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, was the most outstanding contribution of Bishop Ferrando towards the indigenization of the Church in North East India

1. **Missionary Animation**

 Bishop Ferrando spent the last ten years of his life doing missionary animation in different parts of Italy and helping to raise funds for the missions in North East India.  Wherever he was invited, he spoke of the missions and aroused enthusiasm for the missions, formed prayer groups to support them and created circles of benefactors to continue the many works he had initiated.

Such missionary animation was nothing new.  Since 1935. Stephen Ferrando kept on writing articles, news items and reports on the missions of North East India for *the Salesian Bulletin and* *The Young Missionary (Bolettino Salesiano and Gioventu' Missionaria),* the international reviews for the Salesian Family. These writings had a profound and telling effect all over the Salesian Congregation.  They made known the missions and the missionaries, inspired many missionary vocations, and moved many to pray for the missions and support them financially.  Such missionary animation in fact, helped the Christians in the home countries of the missionaries to renew their Christian living and commitment to their faith.

**A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF STEPHEN FERRANDO AS A MISSIONARY BISHOP**

 During the funeral oration for Bishop Ferrando Cardinal Siri of Genova defined him as an Intrepid Missionary, very rightly so, as he was a courageous, daring, heroic, audacious, valiant and bold missionary.  As a missionary he made some very unique contributions to the Church in North East India.  His multi-faceted personality of him, especially as a missionary bishop, reveals some unique features, which are examined below

1. **Missionary Spirituality**

Bishop Ferrando bequeathed to the missionaries of the region a unique spirituality.  It is marked by pastoral love manifested in concern, tenderness, compassion.  openness, availability and love for the people, especially the poor He believed that in a vast mission area like the Assam Mission, this is the unique way to God, the path to holiness; this demands from the missionaries a special kind of asceticism, which requires sacrifices without limits.  It was born of the Gospel truth of unconditional love of God and of His people, of a simple piety that enabled one to accept God's will always, of joyful and total service to His people.  It was based on Don Bosco's motto "give me souls and take away the rest." with added emphasis on being a passionate missionary

He Inspired the missionaries to follow the Little Way of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, the patrons of the missions, and to offer everything for the sake of saving souls.  The fatigue and pain of missionary journeys, the attacks of mosquitoes, leeches and bedbugs, the lack of sleep, food and rest, all these could become means for saving souls.  He understood and lived the value of doing little things out of great love and wanted all to follow the 'Little Way, the surest way to win souls.  He was able to transmit the spirit of joy, hard work, simplicity and loving service to people.  The genius of Bishop Ferrando was his total simplicity.  All his life he remained a simple missionary, always available and approachable.  All those around him experienced the genuineness of his spirituality.

1. **Bequeather of a Great Missionary Legacy**

Every great missionary lives on in the people he has worked for.  This is absolutely true in the case of Stephen Ferrando.  He lives on in the Church in North East India Bishop Ferrando and the pioneer missionaries initiated some new mission strategies in the Northeast, which were completely people oriented.  They took the Good News to the people, instead of waiting for them in the church. Bearer of Good News on the move was the picture of a missionary in the North East. Moving from village to village, they visited every family in their humble settings around the family hearth and listened to their woes and worries gradually paving the way for their entry into Christian community.  The person of the Touring Missionary gradually became the hallmark and legacy of the Church in Northeast India.  In a very special way he lives on in the Religious Congregation he founded, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians.  One of the major contributions of Bishop Stephen Ferrando to the Church is the Congregation of the MSMHC, whose members try to keep alive the fire of missionary enthusiasm and emerge as a vital force in the Church's evangelizing mission.

 The challenge posed by the life and person of Bishop Ferrando is one that has to be faced by any one-priest sister or brother entering the field of mission to further the Kingdom of God.  It is the duty of the missionaries in North East India to incarnate in the world of today the vision, mission and charism of Bishop Ferrando, as he himself gave a human face to the Gospel message in his time and day

1. **Initiator of " Apostolic Excursions**

 The so called Apostolic Excursions (*Le passeggiate apostliche*) began by the novices and the staff of Our Lady's House, Shillong, under the guidance of Bishop Ferrando, later on continued by the clerics of philosophy and theology together with their staff), became one of the significant annual events in the history of the Assam Mission. It was a vacation trip with specific goals catechesis of the new Christian communities and preaching the Good News in non-Catholic villages. The first of such apostolic excursions took place in 1925, when S. Ferrando was the novice master .The first group of newly professed young Salesians and the clerics who reached Shillong that year set out for Lankynsew about 90 km distant from Shillong.  The enthusiastic young group and the staff stayed there for a month, visiting all the villages in the area, giving religious instruction.  conducting prayer services, administering the sacraments and caring for the sick.  They prepared a variety of catechetical materials, charts, drawings and filmstrips. The apostle was characterized by joy and fun games and sports, music and drama, and every other form of entertainment to attract children, the youth and the elderly.  The energetic group went from village to village climbing hills and crossing rivers.  They sleep in makeshift houses.  At the end of a month, they brought new life to the entire area, revived the faith of the new converts revived and added new numbers to the communities .Several new Catholic communities were established as a result of such intense apostolate.  These apostolic excursions became an annual feature of the formation houses.  The people of Laitkynsew and the nearby villages like Tyrna and Mawlong waited with eagerness for the annual visit of the novices from Shillong. The Good News was often carried in this way to various villages in a spirit of joy and spontaneity and each such visit became a day for the propagation of the faith.  The villages like Mawpat, Mawtawar, Mawpdang, Laitkor, Umpling and Mylliem, on the outskirts of Shillong, were initially approached by such apostolic excursions of the novices.

1. **Popularizing Festive Oratories**

The apostolate of the festive oratory became a powerful means of evangelization and catechesis in Shillong and in other parts of Assam.  The beginnings the oratories in Shillong can be traced back to 1924. Fr Stephen Ferrando and Fr. Constantine Vendrame were its of Founders.  They began to gather children together. without any differences of race and religion - Catholics under the auspices of Protestants, and non-Christians under the auspices of Our Lady's House.  Games of all types (football was the main attraction), little lotteries, abundance of fun, music and drama on special occasions, religious instruction and attendance at Church services all these formed the normal activities in the conduct of the oratories.  The novices and the clerics of Our Lady's House took an active part in conducting these oratories.  The atmosphere of joy and unity that prevailed in the oratories cemented a strong bond among the youth themselves, and between them and the missionaries.  The Protestant and non-Christian children attending these oratories imbibed the same religious sentiments and they were naturally drawn to the Catholic faith.

In the beginning these oratories faced numerous difficulties.  The missionaries knew very little of the Khasi language and the customs of the people.  Initially the number of children was very minimal. Some Protestants made fun of such an initiative and tried to obstruct the children from attending them. Several parents and guardians of the children were apprehensive of the motives behind this venture and tried to prevent its smooth running.Yet the noble initiative survived and became a grand success.

As the number of novices and clerics increased at our lady’s house,they reached out to kore and more villages.(Nongthymmai, upper Shillong, Malki, Umpling, Lightkor, smith, Umlingka, Nongumlong, Mawlai).With the apostolate of the oratories They would spend their Sunday afternoons in the oratories , which in turn served as the laboratories for their missionary training. With the establishment of the Sacred heart theogolate at mawlai, Shillong in 1938, and later Orients Theological collage in 1979, the apostolate of the oratories became more organized and began to bear positive results in evangelization and catechesis.  The oratory day and the catechism competition became regular annual features tact with the youngsters in the oratories became an effective means for contacting new communities and groups in the villages.  It was through these oratories that villages like Mawtawar and Mawpat, suburbs of Shillong were initially contacted: now these have flourishing Christian communities.  Some of the youngsters attending these oratories have since become priests and religious

1. **Missionary : A Universal Brother / Sister**

 Through his life and teachings Bishop Ferrando taught that the missionary is a universal brother or sister to all, one who needs to transcend the differences of ethnicity, caste, colour, creed or language.  For a missionary everyone is a child of the Father; the missionary should feel urged to bring all to the unity of the family of God.  The pioneering missionaries in North East India were of different nationalities, yet their example of living together as one family inspired the future missionaries to commit themselves to the cause of the Gospel and God's Kingdom with a large and open heart.  Pope John Paul II would later on speak of this attitude as an essential characteristic of missionary spirituality.

 Bishop Ferrando had the missionary universalism of St. Paul.  He felt that the Good News had to be preached to all – Khasis,  Garos, Karbis.  Tiwas, Assamese, Adivasis Boros, Nagas, Manipuris and all the other tribes of North East India; they were all children of God and entrusted to his care of him.  He toured among all these tribes of the vast region without any distinction.  In deploying the missionary personnel among the different tribes of the region, Bishop Ferrando was guided by the motive to accomplish the maximum good for all.

1. **Efforts towards Strategic Planning**

 As a leader with insight into the future, Bishop Ferrando realized the importance of establishing mission centers in strategic places. In Garo Hills, Tura was an important place and he knew it could be a central place from where the missionary activity could be carried out in remote villages. In Lower Assam, Guwahati was a strategic place and he gave importance to it in his planning. In Upper Assam he knew Jorhat would play a very important role in extending the Catholic mission to Nagaland and Manipur. He started a center at Golaghat with the same purpose.

 For the better administration of the Church in the whole region, the entire diocese was divided into twelve zones or districts.  Each zone was put under the supervision of one head-catechist. These catechists were the link with the priest-in-charge. Every first Friday of the month the catechists came together to the center to report about their activities. This gathering was an occasion for their animation and instruction. When they returned to their flock, they communicated verbatim the instructions and plans of their pastors to the Christians. In this manner the entire region was looked after.  Today these zones have become fifteen full-pledged dioceses.

1. **Some Shadow - lines of Bishop Ferrando**

 It would be naive and really inaccurate to presume that Bishop Ferrando was the paragon of all that is virtuous or that he was the perfect paradigm of Church leadership. In exercising his ministry as the Bishop of the vast diocese of Shillong, Stephen Ferrando did often experience the criticism and disapproval of his confreres.  Many lamented his lack of leadership and inability to resolve problems immediately.  He was slow in making decisions as well as in executing them.

 " Fr. Uguet, the provincial, in a letter to Mgr. Mathias blamed Bishop Ferrando for several ills of the mission. Mgr. Ferrando changed his mind very fast. Many confreres were tired of it and were beginning to send letters to the superiors. " In December 1946 Mgr Mathias wrote to Fr. Peter Ricaldone, the Superior General of the Salesian Society, that Mgr Ferrando had to suffer a little because of those who had come out of the concentration camp.  It said: "Mgr. Ferrando suffers a little. For those of the North the camp was certainly not a school for perfecting themselves. They have become difficult to satisfy.” By April 1947 Mgr. Ferrando was so discouraged, that he asked the superiors to find a replacement for him! He wrote to Fr. Peter Berruti, the then Catechist General of the Salesian Society who had charge of the missions as well, that only the good of souls and the honor of the Congregation induced him to make this request. In the twelve years as bishop, he had only misfortunes the fire, the war, the desertion and betrayal of the first Khasi priest, so much of change in the personnel, the enormous and daily financial worries.

 Fr.  Leo Piasecki wrote: "There are many who do not like Mgr. Ferrando's way of settling matters. He knows that he is not liked and not able to say the last word about different problems, and many times he gets excited, and this makes things worse. It seems things improved a little, but the common opinion is that he is not the right man for the right place.

Fr. Pianazzi summarized the following as the cause of the malaise in the mission:” Mgr. Ferrando was excellent as a man and as a Salesian: but he did not seem to be the suitable person to govern others. He was impulsive and constitutionally incapable of thinking. It was not merely a question of tiredness which certainly was there. He could be manipulated. One who spoke to him last was always right. He was never sure of what he said or promised. There was no organization in the mission. The personnel were not directed in the work. There was no organism which functioned. Every head of district acted on his own. “

However, the problems were gradually resolved and the best in Stephen Ferrando emerged, and that too in adverse situations. The initial discouragement gave way to deep faith and the mission work progressed and witnessed phenomenal growth down the years of his episcopate Church leadership.

The elements that really prove the greatness and nobility of Bishop Ferrando as a Shepherd are his human approach to people, his fatherly rapport with them and his brotherly support to his fellow missionaries. The nobility of a person is seen in his or her relationship with others. He was a pastor par excellence. Today people remember him not as a great intellectual genius or as a great builder, but rather as a good bishop who loved his people and who went out to meet them. The people continue to remember him as a very gentle person, very generous, one with a smiling face, simple and holy. These adjectives describe the type of man he was and the impression he created on the minds and hearts of his people from him. These positive traits show the Shepherd's heart that he had in such a great measure.  Reminiscing on the contributions made by the great missionaries of the past. Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil says: "If the Church in North East India has grown so fast, the initial impetus was given by Bishop Stephen Ferrando. He could inspire great enthusiasm and missionary zeal in all his 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 us with."

 When Fr. Stephen Ferrando was nominated bishop he chose the motto "Apostle of Christ". The missionary mandate of Jesus go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father and of Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I have you (Mt 28:19 -20) was always ringing in his ears and he felt an urge from within to proclaim the Good News. The phenomenal growth of the Church and the ecclesiastical infrastructure that he set up during the years of his ardent missionary apostolate, show that he was true to his motto till the very end.

The letters and writings of Stephen Ferrando reflected one perennial theme: the preaching of the Good News. The constant appeals that he made for more personnel for the mission had the clearly focused aim of the spread of the faith and the growth of the Church in the northeastern region of India. The life and activities of Stephen Ferrando are not merely things of the past, or just narratives as part of a recorded history, he still continues to inspire the missionaries of the region and enkindle in them missionary zeal even today, as he did in his own living days.

**FAREWELL** **INDIA ! (1969)**

Political and ecclesiastical events of the 20th century brought about many changes both in India and in the Church globally. The Vatican II, the gradual indigenization of the Church leadership in India and the phenomenal numerical growth of the Church in North East India called for new organizational structures. The aggiornamento that was called for by Pope John XXIII and Vatican II, touched the Church in North East India in no small measure.

One of the first persons to be affected by the new process was Bishop Ferrando himself.  After having spent 46 years in the missions of North East India, he had to lay down the office of Bishop of Shillong and leave India, the land of his toils and achievements.  With great generosity and humility he willingly accepted the suggestion of resigning from the Episcopal office.  For Bishop Ferrando the will of God was unquestionable, and though it broke his heart, he said his flat heroically. He did not manifest any reluctance or lament about what was required of him; the nobility of his character was seen as he went through his pains silently. He knew that the seed had to fall to ground and die in order to produce an abundant harvest and he prayed that his sacrifice might help the greater growth of the Church, for which he had toiled untiringly.

He tendered his resignation on 26 June 1969 to Pope Paul VI.  As a gesture of special appreciation for the work that Bishop Ferrando had accomplished in India, the Pope elevated him to the archiepiscopal rank as the Titular Archbishop of Troina.

Two reasons account for the resignation request from the Church authorities in Rome. In the first place, the enormous work of the administration of the diocese necessitated by its numerical growth and geographical expansion called for a younger bishop of greater physical stamina and energy. In the second place and more importantly, the Government of India asked the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India (CBCI) to appoint Indians to head the Indian dioceses; this request was made in tune with the Central Government policy adopted soon after independence, of not allowing any new foreign missionaries to come and work in India and especially in the northeastern region of the country.

His return from him to Italy was one of the most painful experiences of his life from him for Bishop Ferrando.  He came to India and to the northeast as a missionary at the age of 28. He gave wholehearted service to the Church for 46 long years. The man who had given his youthful and mature years, his strength and vitality to the people of North East India, never looked for any recognition whatsoever. He moved out of the scene as silently as he had entered it. His obedience was proverbial. He would have loved him very much to stay on with his people. But that was not God's plan, I have confided to his confreres of him in Genova.

Thousands of people poured in, from far and near to have a last glimpse of their Shepherd and to receive his paternal blessing from him before he parted from them. The farewell for the outgoing Bishop and the welcome for the new Archbishop was held on 21 September 1969, at Shillong Government officials and leaders of the various Church denominations of the region were present on the occasion to pay their homage to Bishop Ferrando in appreciation for the great work done for the growth of the Church and for the social and cultural development of the people of the entire northeast. Bishop Ferrando reminisces about the highlights of the event in his memoirs:

For the welcome and take-over ceremony, those present included the Archbishop of Calcutta, Mons.  Marengo and all the bishops of the suffragan-dioceses of the new archdiocese. There was a flambeau procession and the concelebrated Holy Eucharist. A growing enthusiasm was seen everywhere. The government authorities, the Anglican bishop, the representatives of non-Catholic groups, were all honored participants at the event.  The new archbishop in his inaugural homily affirmed that the Holy Father wanted to put his seal of approval on the Church in North East India by the establishing the new ecclesiastical province of Guwahati – Shillong. It is a sign of appreciation from the Vicar of Christ, for all the faithful work done by the great missionaries who preceded us. He continued: 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 by 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 of him.

As he saw the people 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 continued in the same vein, exalting the great merits of his predecessor, who has now been made the Tinular Archbishop of Troina and who guided ably the diocese for 35 years. " In all truth, " he concluded, " Mon Ferrando is the architect of this new archdiocese.

 The president of the Catholic Action read out a moving address in the name of the entire Catholic population of Shillong diocese. It beautifully summarized the sentiments of the people:

Beloved and honorable Monsignor, with hearts full of love the Christians of Khasi - Jaintia Hills bid farewell to their beloved spiritual father Mgr S. Ferrando. Our human life is a mystery : when you were born at Rossiglione near Genova on 28 September 1895, no one would have ever dreamt that you would spend half of your life - time in a far, far away country, and experience a hard life for the sake of God's people here and for His Kingdom .... We in this beautiful hills and valleys of Assam are blessed to enjoy the fruits of your hard labours... How can we, oh beloved father, not feel at a loss, broken and lonely as you take leave of us after years of your being with us... you did so much for us, for our spiritual and material well-being;  you built churches, hospitals, schools, seminaries, set up 20 parishes, and above all you have given us a local Congregation of Sisters to take care of us... Beloved Monsignor, thank you for everything, we will never be able to pay you back for all that you have done for us. We ask Almighty God to supplement whatever we cannot express in our feeble words. Dear Monsignor, we feel that the world is so heartless, that when you are aged and weak you have to go away to Troina... we want you to remain with us and keep you with great respect, admiration and love in the warm lap of our sweet hills.  God's ways are mysterious and hard to understand; never the less, we believe everything is for our good. So even though we are heart broken to part from you, yet, we accept it as the will of God. May God heal our incurable wounds caused by your departure... Beloved Monsignor, your poor children have nothing valuable to offer you, but our golden and silver drops of tears which will paint our gratitude, prayers, love and sweet remembrances. Our good God and our heavenly Mother will ever follow and protect you. Oh. good and kind-hearted father, do not forget us your children; keep us ever in your heart. It looks like the time for trial has arrived in our midst too... pray for us that we may remain ever faithful in the midst of the strong storms and darkness of life.... Before we end, we stretch our hands to wish you good luck, safe journey and good health. May you have happy, grace-filled and fulfilling days ahead.  Millions of thanks and baskets full of well wishes to you our dear good father, from your children who love you dearly.

22 September 1969, was a sad day for all in Shillong as they bade a tearful farewell to their 'good Bishop.  Accompanied by Fr. Maurus Casarotti, the then Salesian Provincial of Guwahatt province and Fr. Mario Bianchi, his long-time secretary and Chancellor of the diocese, Bishop Ferrando left for Guwahati.

A touching demonstration of the love of the people was visible at that moment.  En-route the stretch of six kilometers starting from Bishop's House till Mawlai gate, his flock of him lined both sides of the road.  As the motorcade passed by slowly, the people with tears in their eyes kept on waving their hands silently. Bishop Ferrando kept smiling and waving his hands and occasionally blessing the crowd. But those who were close to him saw him wiping away his tears time and again. Only he and God knew what went through his mind, behind that smile on his lips. Bishop Ferrando himself recorded poignantly the event in his memoirs.

With deep sentiments of affection and gratitude Shillong bade farewell to their dear Pastor, the Bishop On the day of my departure from Shillong, the Catholic and the non-Catholic population of Shillong lined all along the six km route through the town. The Bishop proceeded slowly in an open jeep, blessing and greeting everyone.  All were silent and overcome with emotion and many shed mars. With their hand gestures they bid "Good bye" to the one who was for thirty-five years their Pastor and Teacher.... Life is always a mixture of joys and sorrows.

During that last journey there were still demonstrations of love, humility and forgiveness. Fr. Mauro Casarotti narrates the following: "When he left Shillong I was with him in the open vehicle along with Fr. Mario Bianchi. From Laitumkhrah to Mawlai gate people lined up on both sides of the road to bid him farewell. The parishioners had come with their Parish Priests from wherever possible. A priest who was not on very good terms with the Bishop did not approach him or bid him farewell. Since the priest had to accompany his people he too stood by the roadside. The Bishop seeing the priest stopped the vehicle, walked towards him and greeted him. What a fatherly gesture! I was stunned by this fatherly gesture of Bishop. What humility!

After leaving Shillong, Bishop Ferrando proceeded to Tezpur, where with Bishop Marengo and Archbishop Hubert D'Rosario , he consecrated Fr. Joseph Mittathang as the new bishop of Tezpur, on 28 September, 1969. He availed himself of this opportunity to visit the convents in Tezpur diocese and wish the Sisters goodbye.

On the day he left India for good, about 80 buses loaded with priests, religious and faithful-an estimated crowd of 3000 people accompanied him to the Guwahati airport to bid him a tearful farewell.  The airport authorities felt helpless in controlling the crowd, but a word from the priests through the public address system put them in order.  The Cathedral Parish band played its last tributes and a farewell song.  Before embarking the plane, the Bishop imparted his last blessing to his beloved Christians and his diocese.

 Leaving his beloved India, which he considered his second native country by adoption, was a very sorrowful experience for him.  However, the pains of that parting did not disturb the habitual serenity of his soul.  Fr. Casarotti further states: "Throughout his journey he was composed. I accompanied him to Calcutta. Things were different then. As he was about to board the plane to Bombay, he gave vent to his feelings. He cried a lot. His tender heart was broken." In Bombay, he visited the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians at Matunga along with Fr. Alessi.  Suddenly he was reminded of Shillong.  He said to Fr. Alessi " Do you remember my Cathedral of Mary Help of Christians in Shillong ? " And noticing two Sisters praying in the Shrine, he whispered " Oh, the Sisters, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians at Shillong, they are wonderful and some drops of tears fell from his eyes though he tried to hide them. After a brief stopover at Bombay, he left India for good, on 7 October 1969.

 Alter reaching Genova on 19 October, the Bishop wrote a letter to the Sisters describing his journey and expressing his nostalgic memories about Assam and his sisters:

 From 8October I am in Italy, but my heart is always in Shillong and Assam.  I had a very happy journey,  starting from Bombay at 8.00 pm and at 2.00 pm I was already in Rome, and then at 3.00 pm I reached here in the beautiful Bishop's room at the Sacred Heart Church built by St. John Bosco.  I could not see the Holy Father because I had no time to remain in Rome.  The climate in Italy now is like the climate of Shillong during October... In Rome with Cardinal of Propaganda I spoke of our good Sisters of Peachlands.... We were so happy speaking about Shillong.  On Sunday 12th I we went to another city called Civitavecchia, 30 miles from Rome near the Blue Sea.  I said two Masses, preached four sermons and administered so many Confirmations.  The Church was always crowded like in Shillong.  The Sisters here have a nice festive Oratory and girls stay all day long with them.  One thing which we did not have in India is Television and I spent a long-time watching Children's programme.  They showed the life of the animals in the jungles in India - elephants, bears, tigers, rhinos etc.  It seemed to be in Assam... I flew to Genova, my village.  At the airport so many Salesians, relatives and friends were waiting to welcome me.... I am extremely tired.  I cannot forget Assam .... Though in Italy also there are good Sisters like in Shillong ... I think of you often ...

 Such were his sentiments of him as he returned to his native country.  The numerous times that Assam and Shillong are mentioned, only reveal the depth of his pain and sorrow, as well as the heroic sacrifice which he silently made after his departure from his dear people whom he shepherded for 34 years. Bishop Ferrando always felt that he belonged to India, and to be away from it was an exile ... " I feel always in a land of exile, scanning the deep blue sea in the direction of India.

**HIDDEN LIFE IN GENOVA QUARTO (1970-1978)**

From June 1970, Bishop Ferrando spent the last eight years of his life in a Salesian community at Genova Quarto, Italy.  He easily inserted himself into the life of the community even after being a Bishop for many years in the missions.  It was all truly a novelty for him, after being away for nearly half a century.  He missed the active missionary life.  He joyfully accepted this as the will of God and decided to spend the last phase of his life in recollection, prayer, reading, and writing about the wonderful work that was accomplished in the Assam Missions through the great sons of Don Bosco. In Genova he lived a simple life, his only worry about being not to inconvenience anyone.

He lived as an ordinary confrere among confreres. They saw in him the perfect model of a true Salesian missionary. He was always grateful for any little attention shown him by his confreres and friends. When he had a chance, he would express his gratitude by giving away the gifts coming to him from the missions or his benefactors.  He also kept up a regular correspondence with his Priests and his Sisters in India, and whenever possible he gave them whatever financial help he could, with the limited resources he received from his friends and well-wishers.

 After his resignation he wrote to the Rector Major, "I can't work anymore, but I can pray always, and I do it unceasingly, re-living the life and marvellous deeds wrought in our mission, which is always guided by Mary Help of Christians. Even when he was in retirement in Italy, his preoccupation was to find help for the Assam mission.

 During the eight years he spent at Genova he endeared himself to all. He willingly helped all those who approached him. He was affable, cordial and kind to all big and small, workmen and professionals; with his characteristic simplicity, he made everyone happy and put all at ease at table and at recreation. All liked his friendly, jovial and smiling character, and that made him very popular. He offered himself with joy and enthusiasm and at times even with sacrifices, in all that he could do to be useful to the community: administering the sacrament of reconciliation, preaching the Word, giving conferences, etc. He loved to s  solemnize the liturgical functions.  He also helped Cardinal Giuseppe Sirl of the diocese of Genova for the administration of the sacrament of confirmation.  He was in close contact with the clergy and religious of the diocese of Genova, and they held him in great esteem.  But his heart was all the time in India; he would often speak of his old mission land and always continued to pray for his beloved diocese, its people and his Sisters.

 Writing in the obituary letter of Bishop Ferrando, Don Egidio Vigano, the Rector Major of the Salesian Society testifies as follows: "He stayed in Genova - Quarto like a retired soldier, retreated from the battlefield, with the pain of loss and nostalgia of the by-gone days. His heart always remained in Assam, though physically he was in Genova, and nominally he was the Titular Archbishop of Troina. His real self seemed to be still in India, with his beloved people of Assam. There was some mystique about him when he spoke about India, and he continually spoke about Assam Missions, offered all his prayers for it, and dedicated all his remaining energies for it.  The very thought of Assam would brighten his face and he would become fully alive and energetic... In Europe, in our consumerist and competitive society, he felt like an exile, even though the confreres gave him affection and held him in high esteem for his meritorious past.  He always marvelled at the wonders the Good News brought about in Assam.  In 1972 for the 50th anniversary of the Salesian Mission in Assam, he was invited to India.  He went with great enthusiasm with all the memories of the past flooding his mind.  He was the guest of honor for the function.

Fr. Fabbian Vito who was the economer of the community at Genova Quarto has the following to say about Bishop Ferrando's stay in their community: "I used to take Mons, Ferrando sometimes to visit some Salesian centers. All through the journey he would speak of spirituality, sanctity. Don Bosco, etc. 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. He was a very spiritual man. 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 the economer, saying that he did not want to be a burden to anybody. He used to handover the account every month and used to speak to the Rector without fail. Now and then he used to go to meet Cardinal Giuseppe Siri. Occasionally, he 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 from him.  " Fr. Vito continues:" Bishop Ferrando had his room on the first floor.  He lived 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 lived a very poor life. His office had very few things. His room was very simple. What a wonderful man. What an example! In the house he was like a good novice asking permissions, depending upon the superiors. Following the time-table, helping in every way, especially in conducting all liturgical celebrations.

Cardinal Siri, Archbishop of Genova, esteemed him and held him in high regards. He used to call on him privately to discuss and ask counsel regarding the problems of the Church in Genoa and the Church in Italy in general, as he was the President of the Italian Episcopal Conference.

Bishop Ferrando availed himself of the opportunity to visit North East India in 1972 when Msgr.  Hubert D'Rosario SDB, the Archbishop of Shillong, invited him to participate in the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the arrival of the Salesians in North East India.  He arrived in Guwahati on 8 November 1972. On reaching Shillong he was given a warm and moving welcome by thousands of people at the grotto chapel.  "A Pilgrim Apostle" as he called himself, he was very happy to go around and visit his flock at the different mission stations of his former diocese.  He received a great welcome everywhere and was moved to tears recalling the hard work of the missionaries.

 He visited many convents of the MSMHC, and came to know personally how they were getting on in the mission.  The first-hand knowledge about the growth of the Congregation and the wonderful work accomplished by his Sisters in various mission-stations and centers made him extremely happy.  He was very pleased, happy and thrilled to preside over the Perpetual Profession of 22 Sisters, the First Profession of 20 Sisters and the entry of 25 Postulants into novitiate, at St. Margaret's convent in Shillong, on 8 December 1972.

 On 11 April 1973 he visited Little Flower Convent Malki, Shillong, and gave a conference to the Sisters there.  An extract from it will give us an idea of ​​the sentiments of his heart towards the Sisters and their apostolate, especially in the Malki area of ​​Shillong.

 I am about to leave for Italy ... If the superiors allow me I shall come back here again;  but we must always perform the will of God.... You see the work, the success - which is not the result of our work because without God's grace we can do nothing.  It is our Lord Jesus Christ who is doing everything.  And therefore, you must always work in union with our Lord Jesus Christ.  This feeling, this sentiment, I have tried to explain to you very often and 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 souls to our Lord Jesus Christ .... May the Blessed Virgin spread her maternal mantle upon you, upon this house , so that this convent may be like a shining beacon on the top of the mountain for the redemption of many children.

 On 24 April 1973 in a very impressive liturgical ceremony, Bishop Ferrando, along with Bishop Orestes Marengo, consecrated the Cathedral of Mary Help of Christians at Shillong.  It was his cherished dream to dedicate this splendid and magnificent Cathedral to Mary Help of Christians, for all the miracles she had accomplished in North East India, and today it stands as a perennial token of gratitude on the Cathedral Hill, protecting the whole of North East India under her blue mantle.

On 25 April 1973, accompanied by Fr. Ivano Giacomello SDB, he returned once again to his retirement at Genova- Quarto.

In 1075, Fr. Tarcisius Resto SDB , the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Shillong , visited Bishop Ferrando in his place of retirement at Genova - Quarto .Fr. Resto requested the Bishop to give a message for the people of Khasi - Jaintia Hills, who were his beloved flock for so many years. He concluded his message with this words in Khasi….

“Ngakwah ban buh ia ki shyieng jong nga ha Ri Khasi-Pnar.” (I want to lay my bones in the soil of Khasi in Pnar hills. Fr. Resto did not understand then the deep longing of Bishop Ferrando to be with his flock once again, nor the prophetic significance of those words, they parted from each other, hoping to meet again.

On February 2, 1976, Mother Mary Rose, the Superior General of the MSMHC, together with Sr. Elizabeth Packumala the Vicar General, visited Bishop Ferrando at Genova Quarto.  He was very happy to meet them.  As they took their leave of him, they asked him for a message for his daughters in India.  They recorded his words:

"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. What I can do is to pray everyday for you. "His voice though vibrant, was choked with emotion, while the expression on his face clearly indicated the deep sorrow of his heart.  Having spent the most active part of his life in India as a missionary, Bishop Ferrando longed to be buried among the people whom he loved so much.

Whenever any missionary from North East India would visit him, he would be very happy and his face would light up with feelings of inexpressible love and joy.  I have desired very much to return to India.  Once he mused: "At least as the chaplain of my Sisters, I could have remained with them in a corner!" he felt this desire very stringly, though at the same time he was very reserved and modest about his desire. But he spoke rapturously about his missionary journeys ... "

Fr . Fabbian Vito gives below the following account about the last days of Bishop Ferrando :

 He had a very lucid mind till the end. Towards the end he found it very difficult to walk, to come down the staircase, etc. So we used to send the food to his room. He would spend hours praying and reading. He kept in touch with his Sisters through regular correspondence, giving them advice, exhorting them to live their consecration in joy and enthusiasm. When anyone would visit him, he would come down with him or her to the refectory with a face beaming with joy. He had a joyful spirit- a soul in feast always. Even when he was sick, he was not found sad or gloomy. In faith he saw the will of God in everything. He was a missionary till the end and towards the end of his life he summed up his life as: "now I am not a missionary who goes but who is, who carries the mystery of Christ deep within.  " He offered all the pains and discomforts of his aging body for the missions and missionaries and re - lived the Paschal event in his life which was so hidden and so very ordinary.

**THE FINALE OF A PILGRIMAGE ( 20 June 1978 )**

Bishop Ferrando , even though advanced in age considered himself as an old oak - tree , still resisting the wind and storms And so he did not take seriously the exhortations of his doctors and confreres, who advised him to rest. He had some minor problems of health such as high blood pressure, arthritis and other ailments associated with advanced age. On 17 June 1978 some of his benefactors had come to visit him and as usual he accompanied them to the courtyard of the house. After seeing them off at the gate, while climbing back the stairs up to his room, he stumbled and fell and rolled down, the stairs to the ground floor verandah.  The community members were all out of the house at the time and it was only hours later that someone found him in that condition.  By then he was unconscious.  Immediately he was rushed to the hospital, where he remained in the same condition for two days.  On 20 June 1978, he went to his eternal reward at the age of 83. The apoplexy and internal haemorrhage was the immediate cause of his death.  The news of his passing away from him was at once transmitted to Shillong, his beloved diocese and to his spiritual daughters, the MSMHC.

 Ivano Giacomello SDB , who was on holidays in Italy , informed Mother Rose about the sudden demise of Bishop Ferrando as follows :

Yesterday at noon my brother Augustus from Turin phoned to me : " Come , come at once , Archbishop Ferrando is dying.  "I took the fastest train of this morning from Padova at 8.04 am and arrived in Genova - Quarto at 1.00 p.m. 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 ....

On 17.6.78 Archbishop Ferrando was fairly well. He said Mass at 11 a.m, for two benefactresses who were present and gave them Holy Communion under both species. Then he accompanied them to take a cup of tea to the refectory. When they took leave from him it was past 12.00.There was Fr. Da Bove with them as he usually assisted Mons. Frrando at Mass. Archbishop Ferrando ask Father to accompany those two ladies upto the gate of the Institute. Archbishop Ferrando was on his way to his room. It was there, on the ground platform of the staircase that Monsignor had a haemorrhage in the brain. He lost his senses - had fallen down and remained there unconscious for some time. As soon they saw him, they rushed him to the hospital, only to hear that nothing could be done.  So at about 4.00 p.m.  on 19.6.78 they brought him home still unconscious, and so he remained in that state till 3.00 pm  of yesterday 20.6.78 .  The 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 10.00 a.m.  there will be the solemn Mass in the chapel by Cardinal Siri.  Then many will go to Rossiglione, where the Bishop of Acqui will say another solemn requiem Mass in his native Parish Church.  The Rector Major is sending our Regional Superior Fr. Thomas Panakkezham.  Then Fr. Pianazzi and Fr. Casarotti also are expected to be here tomorrow.  I will tell you more about this beloved Father of ours when I get back to Shillong.  Let us pray for him...

As the news of his death spread, condolences poured in from many eminent persons like Cardinal Angelo Rossi, the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples and His Grace Archbishop Simon D. Lourdusamy , the secretary of the same , Cardinal Lawrence Picachy SJ , the Cardinal Archbishop of Kolkata ( then Calcutta ) as well as the President of the Episcopal Conference of India , Dr. D. D. Pugh , the Chief Minister of Meghalaya , Dr. S. D. Kongwir , the Vice Chairman and many other admirers and co - operators of Bishop Ferrando .  It is interesting to note the words of recognition and esteem that were addressed to him by people who knew him closely.

Cardinal Angelo Rossi expressed his appreciation and esteem for Bishop Ferrando in his condolence message, sent to the Rector Major of the Salesian Society.  He wrote:

Following upon our telegram to you of 23 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 Ferrando, S.D.B, 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 seal and the profound example of missionary dedication which this fervent prelate demonstrated throughout his brilliant career, 35 years of which were given over to the Episcopal ministry, first as the Bishop of Krishnagar, from 1934-35, 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 from him 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 a religious Institute of Pontifical Right.

 So aften 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 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 wished 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.

 D. D. Pugh , at the time the Chief Minister of Meghalaya , expressed his condolences as follows :

I am writing to say that I have just heard of the passing away of the Rev. Archbishop Stephen Ferrando 20 of June in Italy. As you will very readily understand, the late Archbishop who has served this area for 35 long years had naturally befriended so many people not only in Meghalaya but also through out the North Eastern Region. During the time that he was posted in Shillong, I had come to know him fairly intimately, I am therefore personally grieved to hear of his passing away and I feel sure that thousands of people would have like to join me in expressing our sorrow. I shall appreciate it very much if you will accept my condolence and also extend the same to the members of the Late Archbishop's family .

S. D. Khongwir , at the time the Deputy Chief Minister of Meghalaya , Shillong .  Articulated his sentiments as follows:

The Roman Catholic Community of the North Eastern Region is mourning the death of the Most.  Rev Archbishop Stephen Ferrando who passed away on June 20 in Italy He was 83. Archbishop Ferrando, who until 1969 was the Bishop of Shillong, was ordained Bishop on November 10, 1934. He ruled the Diocese of Shillong, which in those days included the whole of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and present day Mizoram, for 35 long eventful years.  He retired to his native land of Italy in 1969 as Archbishop.  Besides being the spiritual leader of several lakh Roman Catholics of the North Eastern Region, the late Archbishop Ferrando was also a pioneer in the field of education, social and youth welfare.  His love of him for the people, the poor and needy in particular, is well known to all.  The Archbishop of Shillong - Guwahati, the Most Rev. Hubert D'Rosario, in a letter addressed to the clergy and the faithful in the Archdiocese of Shillong - Guwahati , has said that the news came as a " shock " as only recently Archbishop Ferrando was keeping good health.

On 23 June, Archbishop D. Rosario, as chief celebrant, will concelebrate a Solemn Requiem Mass at 5.30 pm,  in the Cathedral Church of Mary Help of Christian, Shillong, for the repose of the soul of the late Archbishop Ferrando.  The Vicar General, V. Rev. Fr. T. Resto will deliver the homily on the occasion.  All priests, religious, the faithful and friends have been invited to take part in this function.

  The thirty-day mourning will conclude on July 20 when a commemorative folder would also be released.  I share with you and the Catholic Community of Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts the grief and sorrow of his death and convey mine and our government’s condolences on this sad loss.

Lawrence Cardinal Picachy, S.J. President of C.B.C.L wrote:

I was very sorry to hear yesterday the sad news of the death of Good Bishop Stephen Ferrando. I send you and your Archdiocese our sincere condolences and an assurance of prayers.  India will remember him as one of the great pioneers of the Church in North Eastern India.  He was truly loved for his apostolic zeal and his genuine love of the people of his territory.  May God give eternal rest to his soul.

Archbishop Hubert D'Rosario issued a circular letter to the clergy, religious and faithful in the Archdiocese of Shillong-Guwahati, to mourn the passing away of his predecessor.  The entire text of the same is found below verbatim…..

 Dear Brother in Jesus Christ.

  Today at 9:30 a.m.  I received a cable from Rome informing me of the death of the Most.  Rev Archbishop Stephen Ferrando SDB our former Bishop on 20 instant.

 The news came as a shock, as only recently I heard that Archbishop Ferrando was keeping good health.  We bow to God's decree and say "Thy will be done.

 On 23 June, 1978, I shall be the chief celebrant at a concelebrated Solemn Requiem Mass commencing at 5.30 p.m. in the Cathedral Church of Mary Help of Christians, Shillong, which will be offered for the repose of the soul of our late beloved Father in Christ. V. Rev Fr T. Resto, Vicar General, will deliver the homily on the occasion. All the priests, religious and faithful of the city are invited to take part in this function and pray for their former Pastor. The other parishes in the city of Shillong and moffusil may conduct a Solemn Requiem Mass for the repose of the soul of our late Archbishop in their respective churches, at their convenience, and invite their flock to attend.

The month's mind (die trigesisma) will be celebrated at Cathedral Church and on that occasion a commemorative folder will be released.

 Archbishop Ferrando has gone to his reward at the ripe age of 83 years. By the grace of God he lived 66 years as a Salesian of Don Bosco, of which 55 years as a priest of the Most High.  He was ordained Bishop on 10 " November 1934 and ruled the diocese of Shillong for 35 years. After his resignation on August 23, 1969, he retired to his native land Italy. From there he continued to follow events in Archdiocese and helped with his prayers and alms.

Archbishop Ferrando has been the builder of the Church in Northeast India and in our Archdiocese in particular. He led our Church through dark and difficult days but as valiant soldier of Christ, never gave up and succeeded in the end.  His love for the people, the poor and the needy in particular, is well known to all, especially those who have experienced it.  He will live in the minds and hearts of all in our Archdiocese.  He will continue to help us from heaven.

*Let us pray for him and beg God to grant him the reward of the just and faithful servant, the intrepid Apostle of Christ.  May his soul rest in peace.*

*United in prayer,*

*Yours devotedly in*

*+ Hubert D' Rosario Archbishop of Shillong – Guwahati*

 On the occasion of the month's mind, a commemorative folder was distributed to all the faithful.  The write-up highlighted Bishop Ferrando's greatness.  nobility and love for North East India.  It portrayed in nutshell what Bishop Ferrando was as given in the following text:

 "Archbishop Ferrando will be remembered as the Second Bishop of Shillong, who ruled the vast diocese of Assam for 34 years and saw it divided into two other dioceses of Dibrugarh in 1951 and Tezpur in 1964 and raised to an Ecclesiastical Province in 1969 with Shillong as the metropolitan See... With a spirit of total dedication, to the point of sacrificing his life, did Bishop Ferrando take charge of the Diocese of Shillong. True to his motto, right from the beginning Archbishop Ferrando became the Apostle of Christ following the footsteps of St. Paul Following his Master, Archbishop Ferrando was always on the move through his diocese to teach, to strengthen in the faith, to encourage and to lead to Christ thirsting souls. He put enthusiasm in the hearts of his priests, religious, catechists and every Christian for the cause of evangelization.

As the Father of the Diocese, right from the start, he excelled in winning the hearts of all and gained their love.  and reverence and obedience.  His presence brought added joy to the flock and enkindled enthusiasm and love in all.  He moved around as the servant of all, bent on bringing the Love, Peace and Joy of Christ to all his spiritual children.  Every visit of the Pastor had a lasting good effect on the Parish and the villages around.... His greatest sacrifice was to return for good, to his native Italy after the celebrations in Shillong.  He continued his apostolate in his own country and died in harness as the faithful shepherd.  May the glorious example of this great Salesian Missionary Archbishop spur us on to do more and better for the cause of Christ in our country and especially in North East India.

 In Genova the body of Bishop Ferrando was laid in state at the Salesian community of Genova-Quarto and many people from far and near paid their last tribute to their dear friend, father and bishop.  There was a concelebrated Holy Eucharist by the community in the evening of the day of his death.  Next day morning at 10.00 am there was a solemn funeral Requiem Mass at the Cathedral of Genova.  It was presided over by His Eminence Cardinal Giuseppe Siri, Archbishop of Genova, along with the confreres form the Salesian communities of Liguria and Toscana, many of his friends, relatives, and well-wishers.  Thomas Panakezham SDB, the Regional Councilor for Asia - Australia represented the Rector Major of the Salesian Society .  Ivan Giacomello SDB, who was in Italy at that time for holidays, represented the Assam Mission.  He was secretary to Bishop Ferrando in Shillong for nearly twenty years.  At the funeral oration, Cardinal Siri highlighted the heroic virtues of this eminent missionary in Assam.  He spoke as follows:

 Essentially he was a missionary , for that matter Salesian Missionary . He lived in the period which immediately followed the life of their holy Founder - Don Bosco . The magnetic touch of inimitable warmth infused by Don Bosco was still alive in the persons and the lives of those who knew him personally. Bishop Ferrando acquired this warmth and cordiality, and enriched himself with the spirit and zeal of Don Bosco and 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 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, which was without pomp, yet armored with fortitude;  without fears and doubts, instead steeped in complete trust and abandonment to God.  Till the end, he kept up that attractive friendliness acquired from the ambience of his education (Valdocco) where he 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.  He spent his life in Assam Missions during the period of its nascent Church.  He was one of the first heralds of the Gospel in that region of North East India.  He dreamt 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, he was entrusted with the formation of the future missionaries.  The road he walked was long he reached some important milestones in life.  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 time, occurred there soon.... 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 into the spirit of beatitudes-the guiding principle 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 on 20 June 1978. Let us pray for him.  Amen.

 After the impressive function at the Cathedral in Genoa, his body was taken to Rossiglione, his native village, where the Requiem Mass was presided over by Bishop Livio Maritano of Acqui.  After the final blessing and prayers for the dead at the Parish Church of St. Catherine, the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando were interred in the family-tomb in the local cemetery.

**A PROPHECY FULFILLED (1987)**

 Bishop Ferrando loved India very dearly.  He had adopted it as his home country and loved its people as his own. From the time he landed in India, his deeply cherished desire for him was, not only to become one with the people, but also to become one with his soil. Having spent his whole life in India, his great desire for him was to die and be buried among the people whom he loved so very much. But God's ways are different and mysterious. He died, away from his beloved country and away from those who loved him so dearly. Yet, God would not disappoint the one who loved Him so dearly and served Him so faithfully.

In August 1984, Sr. Elizabeth Packumala, the Vicar General of the MSMHC, accompanied by Sr. Bridget Jacob, visited Genova-Quarto where Bishop Stephen Ferrando had spent his last days. There they met Fr. Luigi Ulla SDB, who was the confessor of Bishop Ferrando during his stay at Genova-Quarto.  He spoke to them about Bishop Ferrando's desire to be buried among his flock in India. He was interested to know what they would do to realize the dream of Bishop Ferrando.  He insisted that unless the MSMHC, his spiritual daughters make a move, nothing would happen.  "We were moved and took to heart the proposal of Fr. L. Ulla as a God-given inspiration," said Sr. Packumala.

Sr. Elizabeth Packumala and Sr. Bridget Jacob visited Italy again in 1986, with the specific intention of bringing back the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando to Shillong. They met Fr. Egidio Vigano, the Rector Major of the Salesian Society, on 15 October 1986 at the Pisana, Rome. He listened to them with great attention and said: "My dear Sisters, I am happy that you have begun to take steps for the transfer of your Founder's mortal remains to Shillong. I give you my wholehearted blessing and support. You are the right people to have him. If he desired to be in Shillong, he will surely reach there. Courage! Go ahead. "He asked them to get in touch with the Salesian Provincial of Liguria Toscana, Fr. Pasquale Liberatore.  The Rector Major himself spoke to Fr. Liberatore, about helping the Sisters with the translation of the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando to India and Shillong. The Sisters spent a week at Genova-Quarto with the Salesian fathers who knew him during his last years. It was an occasion for them to know more about his life there.

When the Sisters met Fr. Liberatore, he and his secretary helped them to get in touch with the civil authorities for the necessary permissions and helped them to contact a trustworthy agency for the transportation process.  He suggested that the Sisters should first hear the opinion of Gianni Pizzorni, the nephew of Bishop Ferrando, and then get his consent to the proposal in order to translate the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando to India, since he was buried in the family tomb at Rossiglione. Fr. Liberatore contacted Gianni Pizzorni immediately and the latter came to Genova. Fr. Liberatore explained to Gianni Pizzorni the purpose of the Sisters' visit to him. Fr. Liberatore asked Gianni whether he was willing to part with the mortal remains of his great uncle, Bishop Ferrando.  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, 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.  Whereas, here my sons and I will remember him; after us nobody will bother about him. Therefore, let the Sisters take the mortal remains of my uncle, they have a right for it. Our God is great. The Sisters left the place extremely happy with the decision of Gianni and the promise of Fr. Liberatore to extend all possible help for the translation of the mortal remains; they returned with great joy, thanking God for His unfailing love and assistance towards them.

The Sisters then proceeded to meet Rt. Rev. Livio Maritano, Bishop of Acqui, who encouraged them saying: "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 efforts to take him back to India." After making the preliminary arrangements, the sisters returned to India.

On 8 July 1987, Sr. Elizabeth Packumala received a letter informing her that the agency entrusted with the translation process and arrangements had contacted the authorities of the Rossiglione cemetery and had set in motion the entire process. On 23 November 1987, there was a phone call from Bologna, Italy, saying that the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando would leave Milan on 26 November. The Sisters received an earlier letter informing them that Gianni Pizzorni, the nephew of Bishop Ferrando, and Nemesio Mosconi, a Pizzorni family - friend, would accompany the mortal remains. The Sisters were overjoyed on hearing this happy news. Sr. Packumala and Sr. Bridget went to Calcutta to receive the mortal remains of their founder and to welcome those who accompanied them. The casket containing the mortal remains left Milan on 30 November for Calcutta, via Frankfurt and Delhi, and landed at  Calcutta on 1st December.  There was no prior information whatsoever about the personal data of the two guests who came along with the casket. Hence no arrangements could be made for obtaining their entry permit to Meghalaya State. However, a recommendation letter from Mr. Peter Marbaniang, Member of Parliament, was taken along and handed over to Mr. Som of the Meghalaya House in Calcutta, to ease the process of obtaining permission for our two Italian guests to enter the State of Meghalaya. In Shillong the Sisters, Novices and the Aspirants stormed heaven, while the two Sisters at Calcutta approached the authorities at Meghalaya House a number of times and made several phone calls to Peachlands, Shillong, and to Mr. Peter Marbaniang, to inquire about the entry permit. On 2 December, towards evening, as if by a miracle, the Sisters at Calcutta received a phone call from Peachlands and from Meghalaya-house, informing them that the permission was granted. The work for obtaining the permit began only at 6.00 pm on 30 November and on 2 December by 4.00 pm telephonic information was given to go and collect the permit. That was indeed a wonderful intervention of God because under ordinary circumstances it would have taken much longer time to obtain such an entry permit.

On 2 December, the casket containing the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando was taken out of the cargo section of the international airport at Calcutta and re booked by the Airbus flight to Guwahati on the following day, 3 December.  All arrangements were already made to bring the casket from Guwahati airport to Shillong by road. Mother Mary Rose Thapa, Superior General of the MSMHC, along with a number of Sisters from Peachlands, Malki, Nongpoh, Sonaighuli and Damra were at the airport, when the flight, bearing the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando, landed at Guwahati airport. The casket weighed 242 kg.  It was carried into the waiting ambulance by the Sisters, and taken to Resurrection Convent, Sonaighul on the outskirts of Guwahati, where the outer wooden container was removed so that the original coffin could be visible. The children of the boarding and the Christian community paid their respects to the mortal remains of the Bishop.  The journey then proceeded on to Shillong, where the Sisters and Aspirants of St. Margaret's Convent, Peachlands, were awaiting the arrival of their beloved Founder. The entourage reached Shillong at 9.30 pm on 3 December 1987. The community welcomed their Father and Founder with songs and acclamations, amidst scenes of great joy. The Sisters were beside themselves with joy and excitement. A song composed by the Sisters honouring their Founder, was intoned immediately:

Let voices now be raised in song

To praise our Founder dear.

To love, protect, encourage, guide,

We ever feel him near.

He's gone from us but still we hear

Him speaking in our hearts.

"Be faithful to the call God gave

From that way never depart"

"Do love the poor, he whispers still"

And work for souls with zeal.

Forget yourself in love for God

Such is his sweet appeal.

Love Mary, Help of Christians dear

And love her own Sweet Son.

They'll welcome you in Heaven above

When life's race has been run.

Observe your Rules

For they are wings enabling you to fly

To that dear Lord who waits for you

Above the clouds on high.

And live as in a family.

Bound by the chords of love.

Such is the path that leads for sure

To joy in heaven above.

Dear Father, we a promise make;

To keep it we will strive;

The spirit that you gave to us;

We'll ever keep alive.

The casket was then placed on a decorated table on the verandah of St. Margaret's Convent. Most. Rev. Hubert D' Rosario, the Archbishop of Shillong , later informed the whole archdiocese of the second burial of the late Archbishop Stephen Ferrando, and the Requeim Mass which would take place in the Shillong Cathedral on 12 December 1987;  a notice to this effect was sent out to all the parishes and institutions. The news of the arrival of the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando and of the concelebrated Mass that would be celebrated were also announced in the regional news-bulletin of All India Radio (AIR), Shillong, on two successive days, 8 and 9 December, in two languages, Khasi and English.  Newspapers such as Dongmusa. The Shillong Times, Assam Tribune, The Sentinel, The Telegraph gave wide publicity to the arrival and interment of the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando. The Shillong Times published an article entitled "Unusual Burial" and gave the following news: "This is going to be an unusual burial. Dead nine years back, Rt. Rev. Stephen Ferrando will be officially buried on 12 December at St. Margaret's chapel, Latumkharh, Shillong."

People kept coming to St. Margaret's Convent to pay their respects and to pray near the mortal remains of their Bishop who had loved them so very much. Many came from far and near, alone and in groups, with their family members and friends. Some of them were moved to tears on seeing the casket.  Everyone prayed fervently to their old Pastor for their various needs.  Most of them had some interesting tale to narrate: "Sister, he is my benefactor", "I worked with him for eleven years";  “He blessed my marriage”; “He was a father to me”; “I cannot forget him”;  "He gave me First Holy Communion"; "He baptized me" and so on. It is difficult to describe and impossible to forget the emotions one felt on that occasion. They were glad to spend some time in prayer and in reciting the Holy Rosary before the mortal remains of their beloved bishop Stephen Ferrando.

One of those days before interring the mortal remains, an elderly Khasi lady, while praying near the casket, was found crying bitterly. Sr. Elizabeth Thamarassery, seeing the lady in tears, went near her and inquired why she was weeping when all were glad to have the bishop back in Shillong. To this the lady replied, "No 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". What a prophecy!! The Sisters had never heard this before, nor did they have any plan earlier to bring the mortal remains of their Founder to Shillong.

At 1.30 pm, on 12 December, the casket was taken to the Cathedral of Mary Help of Christians for the concelebrated Pontifical Mass, officiated by Archbishop Hubert D' Rosario SDB . Being winter season and bitterly cold and since the schools were in winter vacation and most of the institutions being closed for the season, many people were not expected to participate in the Holy Mass and attend the funeral services. But to everyone’s surprise the cathedral was full to capacity. Along with the Archbishop 26 Priests concelebrated the Holy Eucharist. Fr. Noel Joseph Kenny and Fr. Nicholas Tuligi highlighted the virtues and achievements of the late Archbishop. After the Holy Eucharist and the blessing of the coffin, the mortal remains were taken in procession to St. Margaret's Convent, to the accompaniment of the brass bands of the B.S.F.  and of the Parish, followed by all the faithful who attended the Holy Mass.  An estimated number of 3000 people took part in the functions.

The mortal remains were interred in the specially prepared tomb in the Chapel of St. Margaret's Convent, Peachlands, Shillong.  Bishop Ferrando is finally 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 hovering over it, with arms out-stretched as though watching over this valiant shepherd who awaits the promised Resurrection. He who lived so close to God in life, lies close to Him in death.

After internment there was a continual flow of people to visit the tomb and to seek his intercession. To make the chapel and tomb more accessible to the public, a side door was opened from the outside of the chapel. People place flowers and pray to their Shepherd who continues to be alive among his people.

The tomb that enshrines the mortal remains of Bishop Ferrando is a sacred place, especially for the members of the Congregation he founded.  It is the holy ground where they encounter the burning fire of missionary spirit, the source of inspiration to live their missionary Charism. He who went through the agonizing moments and struggles of the beginning, and experienced in deep faith the power of the living God, keeps calling his daughters to reincarnate the pioneering spirit and to get back to their foundational origins and roots.  As they kneel in silent prayer at the tomb, the Missionary Sisters earnestly pray like prophet Elisha, "Father, I pray you, let me inherit a double share of your spirit", to be committed to the mission and to live a life of holiness.

**A SPIRITUAL PORTRAIT**

The Spirit of Jesus enabled Bishop Ferrando, to live the life of Christ genuinely.  Jesus accompanied him all through his spiritual and apostolic journey. Jesus Christ, the unique way to the Father was the center of Bishop Ferrando's spirituality.  Basically, there is an undercurrent of Pauline theology in Ferrando's writings.  Consequently, time and again we find an echoing and re-echoing of Pauline spirituality as the basis of Bishop Ferrando's spiritual journey.  The following are some aspects of Bishop Ferrando's spiritual life.

1. **Apostle of Christ**

 At his ordination Bishop Ferrando took the motto: "Apostle of Christ ', an expression used by St. Paul to define himself. Apostle of Christ sums up the whole life of Bishop Ferrando. It is the summary of his life and mission, more precisely his way of life. The emphasis is away from the activity, to the person, i.e., being rather than doing. Apostle of Christ, for Bishop Ferrando was not merely something to be measured by the intensive apostolic journeys which he undertook, to the nook and corner of his vast diocese, nay, much more it was an intensive, qualitative, interior journey. It was an attempt to identify himself with his Master and Lord, who went around doing good, in season and out of season. Bishop wanted his vision of being an apostle of Christ to be concretized, embodied and perpetuated. In founding the congregation, he was not merely recruiting some people for accomplishing a mission or a task but rather it was an effort to flesh out his vision of generating many apostles for Christ. He handed down a missionary legacy to the MSMHC. His vision is very clearly stated in the Constitutions: "The Congregation is dedicated first and foremost to the missionary apostolate."

Jesus' mission had a perpetual dimension, whereas his physical-human existence was not permanent.  His mission was beyond himself, and to continue his mission he chose the apostles.  Bishop Ferrando's life was an attempt to be a true apostle to fulfil the vision of Christ for humanity.  The essential thing to embody this vision is to have the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5).  This called for a radical change in the attitudes, thinking and acting because Bishop was convinced that "He loved me and gave himself for me." This conviction came from the depth of his being Christ lives in me and "for me to live is Christ." The entire life of Bishop Ferrando was the effort to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and it called for a continuous process of self-emptying, which found it's culmination on 20 June 1978.

 Apostle is one who is being sent, it is a continuous act; it also implies the truth that one who is being sent has to live in constant touch with the Sender - Jesus. "As the Father has sent me so I send you" (Jn 20:21).  It is a process of becoming like the Sender.  The Apostle is called, set apart and being sent to proclaim what he has experienced from his Sender (1 In 1: 1-4).  This is self-emptying, becoming all things to all.  Being an apostle implies that the whole life-style has to be like that of Jesus.  It is to play a foundational role - Bishop Ferrando laid the foundation, did pioneering job for the Church in North East India.  He used all his resources to make MSMHC Constitutions and Regulations, 1991, art.  No .  60 careful and solid beginning, like St. Paul.  In order to nurture the faith-life of his flock, he regularly visited the far-flung Christian communities, attending the Sobhas and Jingiasengs both in the plains and hills.  In his last days when he could no longer be an active missionary, he defined himself as follows: "Now I am not a missionary who goes, but who is, one who carries the mystery of Christ within." Bishop Ferrando's missionary heart lived up to his motto till the end, permeating and instilling the missionary spirit all around.

The whole life-style of an Apostle is to be in conformity with Jesus' life-style.  Jesus is in constant dialogue with His Father and the people.  He is the Word: the Medium of the Father.  The Missionary is a medium, a dialogue between Jesus and people.  It is inspiring to note how Fr. Fabbian Vito describes Bishop Ferrando:

 "Not only he took Christ to the people but he was incarnated in India, as Christ was incarnated in humanity. As God entered into a covenant with his people, Bishop Ferrando was covenanted to the people of India. He became a bridge between Christ and the people. He had the characteristics and qualities of the Good Shepherd as well as the sensibility of his people. Evidently, we can compare him to the figure of Jacob who saw the ladder in dream, which came down to earth from heaven. The Angels of God ascended and descended through it. For me, Bishop Ferrando symbolizes this Angel who descended to the people of India, and ascended to God taking along their richness of culture, sufferings, expectations, and aspirations; and again descended bringing from God, the blessings, the covenant, to good pleasure, the graces, zeal and enthusiasm.  He was again like Moses who descended from the Mountain, all illuminated; a Moses who went from his people to speak to God about his people.  Bishop Ferrnado became a true Medium like Jesus Himself between the people and God.  I am proud of having known him."

An apostle is a man on friendly terms with God, a man who is turned towards Him in all His presence, and dedicates his life for the cause of his Master and for His people.

1. **Christ - centered Life**

Jesus Christ was the motive force of Bishop Ferrando's life. He developed a deep, personal and intimate love for Jesus right from his childhood days. Bishop Ferrando heard the appeal of Jesus deep down in his heart. The Lord who called him to be a missionary in North East India, had a plan for him that he play an extraordinary role in the expansion of the Church. He had seen the face of Christ in the poor of the villages. In fact, before seeing the poor and needy, Bishop Ferrando saw Jesus suffering in the poor, in the children. Jesus whose face is hidden in the suffering humanity.

“The war brought untold suffering to people everywhere, and North East India, being a border area, was subject to even greater hardships. Poverty and disease accompanied by fear of aggression reigned supreme everywhere.  Economic deprivations coupled with shortage of food and essential commodities claimed many lives especially from the most vulnerable segments of the society, women and children.

Thus there arose in his mind and heart a strong desire to be at the service of the needy people, especially, women and children in the villages.  It seemed that he could not resist the call of Jesus any longer. His intention of him was clear: "a Congregation that will serve our Lord in the missions." He was moved in seeing his Jesus so suffer….. he prayed …. He dared to dream the impossible dream, until it became a reality.  And it was that Christ whom the Sisters would be serving through their catechetical and humanitarian services.  The strength, the vitality came from Jesus alone: " All that exists comes from Him, all is by Him and for Him. To Him be glory forever " (Rom 11: 33-36).

 His letters from him to the Sisters speak volumes of his ardent and intense love for Jesus.  He often reminded the novices:

 "Live not for yourselves, but for Him, who died and rose for us. We must not live for our comforts, according to our will and pleasure, but only for Jesus. Those who desire to follow Him in Religious Life are crucified with Him on the Cross and the three nails are the vows...The love of Jesus for us is immense and for our sake He suffered all the pains. If we desire to love Jesus shall we not suffer anything for Him?

Bishop Ferrando had made his own the self-emptying of his Master and Lord and he wanted his Sisters to imitate the same. He exhorts: “… wear the crucifix with reflection … carrying always the marks of the passion in your heart and body, planting in your heart one day you will rise with Jesus and you will sing with Him the hymn of joy throughout eternity.” The words for Jesus explain everything. This was the motivating force behind all his activities and associations.  He has clearly told that the Sisters are not merely social workers, but first and foremost religious who love Jesus passionately and work for love of Him alone.  "No, no. No social work without speaking about our Lord Jesus Christ. Nursing the sick, taking care of the aged, of the children, giving them medicine are beautiful social work, but they are not the end of our work ... “He is emphatic about the purpose: 'I must teach these children to love Jesus. Every one of these children is for me another Jesus. What the Blessed Virgin did for Jesus I must do for these children.'  Making known Christ and his love of him is the top most priority and it reminds us of Paul's own expression: "Woe to me if I do not preach the good news."(1 Cor 9: 16)

 Everything is for Jesus, by Jesus and with Jesus. Bishop Ferrando insisted: Your vocation come from Jesus, what we do is through his power, and all is for his glory.  In his life and in the life of his Sisters , the Lord Jesus becomes the all in all, being the cause, the motive force and the end.  The letters drive home very forcefully that ours is a life all directed to Jesus alone, to his service: we live only for Him, to serve Him and to love Him, to make Him known and loved.  He is the source of our joy and dedication: "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.  "These are not empty words, but lived experiences of Bishop Ferrando.

Jesus is the name chosen by God the Father for his Son, the name revealed by the angel, the name by which his Mother called her divine Son. While using the holy name of Jesus the vocabulary of Bishop is consistent. "Our Lord Jesus Christ", “Jesus our Saviour”, “Jesus our Spouse”, “Jesus the Bridgeroom”. He used the personal, intimate way of addressing Jesus. Jesus wants you, Jesus calls you, Jesus loves you, Jesus dwells in you, serve Jesus, find Jesus in the poor children, all we do is for Jesus. Bishop could say: " Jesus' Love is everything for me and I am completely His ... Jesus is my strength."This manner of intimately and tenderly speaking about Jesus helped the Sisters (Pioneers) to establish personal and intimate friendship with the Lord. On her death bed Sr. Mary Surin said she was not afraid, as she was going home to her Friend Jesus; Sr. Blandina Tirkey instead addressed Jesus as her Bhaia ( brother ) and went to meet him.

 St. Paul exhorted the Christians to do everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the same sentiment is reiterated by Ferrando: " Those simple words, 'all for Jesus' should often be upon your lips.  They will turn your work into prayer, and convert the dross of your most ordinary actions into the purest gold for the Kingdom of Heaven." " Let our Lord Jesus Christ take entire possession of your heart and soul .  Dear Sisters I desire that you understand that Jesus loves you, each one of you with the love of the cross and of the resurrection.  Jesus loves and we believe in His love and follow Him with the attachment of St. Paul, of St. Teresa of child Jesus and specially with the love and faith of Our Lady.  "In one of his last messages to the Sisters of Malki the holy Founder pours his heart out in the following words: "You can see the work the success - which is not the result of our own work because without the grace of God we can do nothing, it is our Lord Jesus Christ who is doing everything. And therefore, you must always work in union with our Lord Jesus Christ...The divine Spouse of your soul, Our Lord Jesus Christ, is pleased to come every day into your heart and stay with you and talk heart to heart with you."

Our love for Jesus is to be concrete and practical.  It is to be manifested in our love and care for the poor and needy, especially the children.  We are to put on the attitudes and reaction of Jesus throughout the day.  He wrote to the novices: " Love God by meditating upon the passion of our Lord, and if you have to suffer something here below, suffer it for the love of God ... If you receive any offense forgive and forget like Our Lord Jesus Christ, who on the cross pardoned and prayed for his executioners. Such was the depth of Bishop Ferrando's love for Jesus which made him commit himself wholeheartedly to the cause of Jesus.

1. **Love for Jesus in the Eucharist**

Bishop Ferrando's piety was characterized by an ardent love of Jesus in his Word and the Eucharist. His apostolic zeal was the outcome of his personal love of Christ. According to Bishop Ferrando, the Eucharist is the "gift of God's very self", given to us. Bishop sees the humility on the part of Jesus, who becomes truly a thing, a food, so small, so silent and seemingly so powerless. His ardent love for Jesus in His Word and in the Eucharist was amply visible at every celebration of the Eucharist. Indeed, it was a feast for him and he loved solemn liturgical celebrations, where he encountered his Risen Lord and Master, the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. For him, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was the model in his pastoral activities. He imitated the goodness and meekness of the Heart of Jesus. He insisted that the first concern of his priests while visiting the villages should be the administration of the Sacraments. The Eucharistic procession in Shillong became a very popular annual event due to the enthusiastic Bishop for whom such solemn occasions were expressions of faith, love and gratitude to the Eucharistic Lord. During the processions he loved to carry the monstrance for long distances with great devotion. He experienced the joys of an intimate communion with the Lord and his apostolic activities were an overflow of that love. I have recommended frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament as a means of growing in union with the Lord and he wanted all the problems to lead us to Jesus. Anyone who shared his company with him would not fail to perceive Jesus alive and ever present in his life with him.

Fr. Luigi Jellici, the only surviving novice of Bishop Ferrando narrates an incident which clearly shows Bishop Ferrando's personal love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament:

"I remember when Fr. C. Vendrame started to tour Mawkhar area with the intention of starting a mission station there, the whole Shillong rose against the Catholics, as Mawkhar was the heart of Protestants. Even the District commissioner who was a Catholic tried to prevent Bishop Ferrando from such a venture. The process went on for sometime. Finally the date for giving the verdict whether to start the mission or to give it up was due. On the previous night Bishop Ferrando could not sleep as Fr. Vendrame was adamant to start a mission there and at the same time many were opposed to the idea. Bishop Ferrando went to the Cathedral to take refuge near Jesus and prostrated himself before the tabernacle. There he found Fr. C. Vendrame too in deep prayer seeking the help of Jesus. Bishop did not doubt anymore. Next morning, I have announced to everyone, that Mawkhar Parish shall be opened.

He frequently exhorted the Sisters "Have a lively participation in the Holy Mass. Pray and sing with children." In almost all his letters to the Sisters, he assures: "I have always a special memento of you in the Holy Mass." This he considered as the greatest help he could render for his spiritual daughters, especially when he was away in Italy.

Bishop Ferrando was very much saddened when he learned about the theft of the Consecrated Host along with the ciborium in the chapel at St. Mary's Convent, Barpeta Road, Assam, in December 1961. He exhorted the Sisters and Novices to make preparation for the sacrilegious act.  He wrote, " The sad event made my heart bleed ... As an act of reparation I exhort you for 10 days to make the Stations of the Cross in the chapel altogether. We shall pray for the offender and 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.

Bishop Ferrando dared to take bold steps in order to make the Sisters genuine Eucharistic souls. In those pre-Vatican days, he gave the rare privilege to his Sisters to carry the Blessed Sacrament along with them during their missionary tours. He insisted that the Sisters receive communion everyday and keep the Lord in the house where they stayed. He knew the greatest security for the Sisters in the villages is the Lord Himself. In India even today, some of the dioceses do not allow the Sisters to have this privilege. Bishop Ferrando was bold in his initiatives and we can say that he lived far ahead of his times. He recommended that the Sisters must constantly remember that they are apostles sent out to bear fruit sent out by Christ to do his work, to do it with Him and for Him. As long as we remain united to him, as the branches to the vine, we bear fruits of genuine holiness.

Bishop always took personal interest to see that in every convent there was a prominent place for the Eucharistic Lord. He knew too well that the Tabernacle is the Sacramental sign of the dynamic presence of God. It is the place where Word becomes Flesh and pitches his Tent among us, and where we see his glory in faith. Jesus in the Eucharist is the new Temple, the place of the presence of God among people. It was the desire of the Bishop that Jesus the Eucharistic Lord accompany the Sisters in their journey through the desert of the world, just as the Tent of Israel accompanied them to the Promised Land.

1. **Paschal Dimension**

Jesus presented his death as the sacrifice of the Passover the Lamb who takes away the Sin of the World.  (Mt 14: 22-24) He, the Bread which came down from heaven, the Bread which gives life, the Bread which is broken and given for the life of the world, is indeed the Paschal Lamb. Jesus is the embodiment of the New Covenant, He is God and man. He is the supreme gift of divine life to human beings. In Him God descends and humans ascend to God. Christ wished that the new and eternal covenant realized by his passion of death and resurrection be continued by us, in us and through us.

Bishop Ferrando lived the Paschal event to the fullest in his daily life as a missionary, as a novice master, as the Bishop of Krishnagar and Shillong, and finally when he had retired to the solitude of his own native country. I have laid down his life bit by bit in daily living of his missionary vocation. He had assimilated and made his own the life of the Master by spending long hours in silence at the foot of the cross. He had much to suffer he suffered from opposition to some of his decisions and plans, he suffered from lack of personnel and finance. He suffered much at the foundation of the Congregation without anything in hand, save his trust and confidence in Divine Providence.  He suffered physical pains, especially during the missionary journeys - malaria, typhoid, arthritis etc.  Once when Fr. Bianchi, his secretary asked him whether he suffered much, he replied, "I just live my Mass - the Paschal mystery is to be lived in my daily living. He became a victim with Jesus - focusing his attention on the Master." he was able to face His cross courageously, poverty of the initial days of the mission, subsequent difficulties inconnection with the foundation of the MSMHC, abject misery and illiteracy of his people, religious ignorance, Chinese invasion, world war II, internment of his missionaries, the great fire; all these only helped to emerge the best that was in him. His deep faith and trust in God enabled him to live the Paschal mystery courageously for the cause of the Gospel. His undaunting spirit " was plagued by difficulties but never consumed " (2 Cor 4 : 8). He identified with his Lord and Master in life and in death. He died away from his land of missionary achievements, like the Lord who had to die outside the city of Jerusalem, died alone away from his dear people of North East India there were no Sisters, no friends to surround him and sing songs of comfort. Like Jesus he felt alone and abandoned, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" Though buried in the silent sepulchre of Rossiglione, he came back to his own, to live with us, to inspire and guide us, as death could not keep Jesus a captive for ever. He lives beyond death Jesus yesterday, today and forever.  Bishop Ferrando continues to live in North East India, especially through missionary charism and missionary spirituality which he bequeathed to the Congregation of Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians.

1. **Marian Dimension**

From his infancy Bishop Ferrando manifested true devotion to Mary. This devotion sustained his life from him as a Salesian missionary and Bishop. The smart little boy who took part in many a procession in honour of Our Lady of Angels in his native village, Rossiglione, could not but live that deep affection for her throughout his life. He would say "Mary is my Mother." He lived the great Marian moments concretely in his life:

**Mary at Nazareth:** The attitude at the annunciation: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word." He was always at the disposal of the Lord like Mary.  In 1954 writing to the Sisters he exhorts.  "Your penance must be that of the Blessed Virgin who said: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord...Never did Mary our Mother seek to please herself and do her own will;  but she sought only to please God and do his will from him.  "Mary at Nazareth is also the Woman of the Word. She pondered everything in her heart and waited with faith for the accomplishment of God's plan. Similarly meditating on the Word and proclaiming it gave great happiness to Bishop Ferrando. Mary is an example of service even before being asked, going spontaneously to help her cousin Elizabeth. The missionaries will also have to go out spontaneously, before being called, to render service to those in need.

Mary the Woman of Nazareth, the Woman of the Word, "went in haste "to the hill country of Judea to share her happiness of being impregnated by the Word. Her visit to her cousin Elizabeth brings the thrill of joy not only to Elizabeth, but also the child in her womb, exults on hearing her greeting. Bishop Ferrando went. in haste" to the nooks and corners of North East India and proclaimed the Good News to millions of people. He wanted the MSMHC Sisters to imitate Mary of Nazareth in the visitation and go around the villages carrying Jesus in their arms and give joy, peace, and lasting happiness to all people. The Sisters are reminded to forget their own comforts and go to the people and become a Good News for them.  "You must be very glad to go around like the Blessed Virgin just for this purpose - to go to villages... where there are so many poor women, ignorant people who know nothing about our holy religion, where Our Lord Jesus Christ is not known as He ought to be ... I am sure that in our Congregation you will continue the spirit upon which the Blessed Virgin founded this Congregation, that it must be Congregation of Charity, for the little children, for the sick, for the aged, the women, and by your charity you will draw all peoples to Our Lord Jesus Christ."

**Mary at Cana**: Mary shows concern for the hosts who might be humbled and pained on account of the lack of wine for their guests. She puts their need of her before her Son of her and asks him to do something to relieve their humiliation. And she brings him to manifest his power, to give a sign that will make all present reflect 'who is this man who can do such things.  Bishop had experienced Mary's intervention tangibly many a time, saving him from many humiliations. Mary at Cana also tells “Do whatever He tells you.” Bishop always listened to the voice of the Lord and did His will.  Having given Mary as the Mother and the Patrons of the Congregation, the Sisters are to listen to her Son and do 'whatever He tells us' in all situations of life.

**Mary at Calvary:** "Behold your Mother", "Behold your child".  Most of his letters from him testify to the fact that Bishop Ferrando considered Mary Help of Christians as his own Mother, his refuge from him and tower of strength from him.  He writes: "Our Blessed Mother is the mother of each of us and we must have love for her as we have for our own mothers...She gave us life...she became our Mother the moment she offered her Son to the Father and made us sons and daughters... In order to become true devotee of Mary, we should try our best to become her real children." Bishop Ferrando's devotion to Mary is practical and down to earth. He explains: "What does it mean to be devoted to Our Lady? It means this Everyday honour Mary, think of Mary, invoke Mary, commend yourselves to Mary, grieve with Mary work with Mary, carry Jesus in your arms, stand with Mary at the foot of the cross of Jesus, live and die with Mary and Jesus.

Devotion to Mary is a pillar of the spirituality of Bishop Ferrando.  Mary is the woman of faith, who surrendered herself to God, ready to carry out His orders from him to help Him realize His plan of salvation.  In formulating the Constitutions, Mary is given a prominent role in the life of the Sisters.

Mary Mother of God, Mother of the Church and Mother of the Congregation must be the object of deep filial devotion on the part of the Missionary Sisters... As the Immaculate Virgin. Mary is the model of the interior life of the Sisters, and as the Help of Christians, she is the inspirer of their apostolate.

As Mary brought hope and meaning to humanity so the missionaries are to make Christ present wherever they are. Whenever reference was made to the foundation of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, Bishop Ferrando would attribute it to Mary.  Repeatedly he would say: " The Blessed Virgin, Help of Christians is always the mother and the Superior of our Congregation", " She is the Patroness of our Congregation ", " She will be forever your good mother, your help and your guide", " do not forget that Our Lady is Mother of our Congregation. It was to the Blessed Mother that he entrusted the Congregation before his departure to Italy: "Finally I place yourselves under the protection of the Blessed Virgin, Mary Help of Christians.  May she be always the Mother of the Congregation, and you her beloved children, and that the Blessed Virgin may always preserve in our convents the spirit of joy, of trust in God, of being one united by the bond of charity... May the Blessed Virgin spread Her maternal mantle over each one of you and give you always this joy and peace.  "Such words can come from only a heart that had loved Mary intensely.

In the footsteps of his predecessor Louis Mathias who consecrated the whole North East India to Mary Help of Christians, Bishop Ferrando renewed the consecration and placed his entire missionary work under her patronage. The many churches and chapels dedicated to our Blessed Mother, the magnificent Cathedral in honour of Mary Help of Christians, the naming of the Congregation which he founded all speak volumes of his love and confidence in Mary. He exhorted the sisters, “you must be the joy and crown of our Blessed Mother by the sanctity of your life."

Fr. Noel Joseph Kenny summed up Marian moments in Bishop Ferrando's life as follows:

1. Born in a Catholic home permeated with Marian devotion (Our Lady of Angles)

2. Salesian school - Awakening of love for Mary Help of Christians

3. Salesian Formation - Great deepening in his love for Mary Help of Christians

4. As a soldier - Mary Help of Christians, his protectress

5. As a Priest - Often repeated and experienced the power of the words of Don Bosco- "Spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians and you will see what miracles are.

6. Master of novices and Rector of Our lady's House-personal talks, good night talks, sermons, conferences, retreats always mentioned about Marian devotion

7. Cathedral of Shillong named after Mary Help of Christians

8. Pastoral visits to the villages - took Jesus and Mary to the villages - He insisted that every Catholic home should have the picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary Help of Christians.

9. Renewed the consecration of the North East India to Mary Help of Christians

10. Solemn celebrations of Marian feasts and annual procession

11. Congregation which he founded - Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians

12. Attitude of his life always especially at his resignation - " Behold the handmaid of the Lord..."

1. **Some specific Expressions of the Spiritual life of Bishop Ferrando**

The spirituality of a person is lived and is expressed in a particular life-style, it takes varied expressions and attitudes. Some of the visible.  Expressions of the spirituality of Bishop Ferrando are considered below.

1. **Absolute Faith and Trust in God**

Bishop Ferrando's absolute Faith and dependence on God enabled him to accomplish great things in the Church. To have faith is to abandon oneself without reserve into the hands of God whose faithfulness to us is surer than our own existence. Great were the vicissitudes of his life but his faith was greater still. I have interpreted events, pleasant and unpleasant, joyful and painful in the light of faith. He trusted whole-heartedly in Divine Providence and totally surrendered himself and all his plans to his heavenly Father with the conviction that everything would turn out for the best.

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 that binds us, that is the chain of Christ, that is to say, his love. Let the chain of Christ bind us in one heart and soul to form a community of faith, hope and charity.

His unshakable faith in God was the secret of success in all his endeavours, especially in the work of evangelization. His faith was nourished and sustained by prayer and meditation of the Word of God. He used to spend much time in personal prayer communing with the God of love. He loved solemn liturgical celebrations and communal worship. His soul constantly conversed with He also inculcated in the clergy the spirit of constant union with God and the necessity of having recourse to prayer at all times.

The foundation of the congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians is the most outstanding proof of his trust and confidence in God. In his letter dated 31 May 1977, he writes to Mother Mary 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. "A man of immense faith alone will be able to utter such statements. He entrusted the whole project to Divine Providence believing that he was doing the will of God. He knew he had nothing to fear and that faith could move even mountains. And the mountains of difficulties though seemingly forbidding, did crumble when they came face to face with a man of such deep faith. He Advice the first badge of sisters: if a times you feel tempted to say: Lord I cannot do it, deep down in your soul you may hear a gentle voice telling you: I will do it for you. Such confidence and trust he inculcated in Sisters from the very beginning. Remember this, we are nothing, we can do nothing, but if Jesus is with us we have nothing to be afraid of ... center your life on this rock of confidence, because the rock is Christ: to Him our fidelity. From his own experience Bishop Ferrando assured the Sisters, "I am confident that Our Lord will continue His divine assistance.

1. **Charity - Love of God and Neighbor**

In his talks, letters and instructions he insisted on fraternal and sisterly charity which he wanted to be the hallmark of his missionaries while dealing with the people. The priests of the diocese found in him a loving father. He had a tender love for the people, especially the poor, the sick and the young. All his apostolic activity of him was born of the 'Charity of Christ become a compelling motive' as in the case of St. Paul (2 Cor 5:14). His missionary zeal from him was born of that love of God and neighbour.

Bishop Ferrando was very sensitive to the needs of the people and very compassionate in his dealings with all. He had always a kind and gentle disposition.  Sylvanus Sngi SDB speaks of the charity of Bishop Ferrando: "When I was studying in class IV, Bishop used to help a number of students with books and other things to study. I was one of them. I would not have been what I am today if he did help me in those days. Many boys and girls are well placed in the society today because he helped them to study. And again in 1964 there was a terrible rain and hailstones which destroyed the paddy of Ri - Bhoi area and people were starving that year. Bishop sensing the sad plight of the people helped them by sending food stuff from the Bishop's house. After this a Protestant headmaster of that area announced during a public function where Bishop Ferrando also was present: "Bishop you have saved us from famine and death," recalls Fr. Sylvanus Sngi.

Bishop Ferrando used to visit the sick people in their homes. He visited a certain P.R. Kyndiah, a non Christian, prayed for him and blessed him. Kyndiah was healed and so impressed by the kindness of the Bishop and after sometime he became a Catholic.  Bishop was so simple and people oriented that he blessed marriages and happily would lend his own car for the poor people's marriage so that they may have more joy and contentment.  Dr. J.S.  Shangpliang recollects his experience of Bishop Ferrando in the following incident: "I can never forget the help Bishop Ferrando rendered. to me. I am what I am today is because of the Rs. 10 he gave to me for my studies. Bishop was very sympathetic and soft-hearted in his dealings with the poor and needy."

**Ill.  Poverty and Detachment**

Bishop Ferrando not only lived, but also loved poverty.  His simple residence of him for 35 years in Shillong bears witness to it.  Whatever he received as a gift was passed on to the most needy who came to his room. He educated the Sisters on this important virtue through his letters and conferences:

“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 lack the comforts of this world and be detached from everything."(4.4.1944)

“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." (17.12.1951)

"But remember that we must have poverty in our hearts to be true spouses of Our Lord." (8.4.1950)

"Be always careful about the vow of poverty to imitate the Child Jesus who being rich became poor for our sake." (2.2.1955)

Poverty- especially for poverty 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 from him.  (2. 2. 1976) ... you must be detached from everything and be very delicate in the observance of poverty, that you may become rich with Jesus."(16. 4. 1956).

Fr. Fabbian Vito, the economer of the house where Mgr. Ferrando spent his last days recalled, "he received the stipend from the Vatican for his maintenance. Punctually he used to hand it over to me.  At the end of every month he used to give me an account of all his expenses.  He was poor.  His room was very simple and contained very few things.  Cardinal Siri goes on to reveal the finer aspects of the life of Bishop Ferrando: "there was nothing extraordinary in him. His greatness was hidden under his unassuming ways. He was probably filled with that magnanimity of soul which some humble souls keep carefully buried in their own hearts.

1. **Joy and Optimism**

Habitually a happy person, Bishop Ferrando was enthusiastic about everything and everyone. His joyful and optimistic feelings were the result of a deep spiritual experience within, fulfilment of his missionary vocation, and the conviction of the presence of God and Our Lady in his life.

Bishop Ferrando wanted his Priests and Sisters to be always cheerful in the Lord, united to Him, working for Him and loving Him." Let nothing disturb the peace of your soul. Be always cheerful, because God loves you and the Blessed Virgin is your Mother.  Abide in charity, forgiving and helping one another and always going on with a smile.  Often he would repeat: "We must always rejoice when we lack the comforts of this world and be detached from everything."

He had a joyful spirit, a soul in feast always. Even when he was sick, I never found him sad. Live this trust in God and have a joyful spirit like him in the midst of difficulties and problems, for these can be overcome by faith, says Fr. Fabbian Vito.

Consecrated Bishop at the early age of 39, Bishop Ferrando placed himself totally at the service of young and fast developing Church. It was not a path strewn with roses, as the great fire of 1936, the World War II, internment of his missionaries and the Earthquake of 1950 showed. He looked at events with faith and optimism. Discouragement was unknown to him and despair was not in his vocabulary.

1. **Courageous Bearing of the Cross**

During World War 1. Young Ferrando had to fight battles in the fields of Italy in defense of his country. It was a prelude to what was awaiting him in India. He had to fight many a battle in North East India.

The Great Fire of Shillong on the Good Friday in 1936 revealed Bishop Ferrando as a man of great courage and fortitude. While the beautiful Cathedral and Our Lady's House were reduced to ashes before his eyes, his soul sought strength from an invincible power. He fumbled for words to console his flock as he said: "Out of these ashes shall rise a more beautiful Cathedral." The conflagration failed to destroy his spirit of trust in God.  He had deep faith and confidence in the power of the One who called him and sent him to be the messenger of the Good News. He would never let him down. Bishop Ferrando could aptly say with St. Paul: " We are plagued by difficulties on every side, but never consumed." (2 Cor 4 : 8)

The serene acceptance of the hardships of missionary journeys, the Christian view of suffering for the cause of the spread of the Gospel and the untiring dedication to the large diocese cannot be explained except by his spirit of faith. One must muster all spiritual powers and fortitude if one is to lay down bit by bit one's life in the daily living out of the mission. Only those who have learned lessons of love at the foot of the Cross of Jesus can share the love with others with intensity and passion.  Pope John Paul II rightly said: "It is in the contemplation of the Crucified Christ that all vocations find their inspiration. Bishop Ferrando exhorted the Sisters: "By meditating the sorrowful mysteries we learn the science of the Saints which is to suffer in union with Jesus ... it makes us understand the infinite love of Jesus for us ... "

One of the greatest consolations that a missionary can have is to die and be buried in the land of his missionary achievements, becoming part of the land of his people for whom he has spent his life. This consolation too was denied to Bishop Ferrando. On his retirement in 1969, he was asked to return to his native country. He could have easily made an appeal to be allowed to remain somewhere in the diocese of Shillong. But in all simplicity Bishop Ferrando refrained from doing it. The pain of separation from his beloved people. Especially his spiritual daughters, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, was more than he could bear. Years later, I have reported to have mentioned to Fr.Fabbian Vitto, the Economer at Genova-Quarto, that his desire for him was so intense that he would have loved to stay with the Sisters as their chaplain even in a corner of the diocese. But he added immediately: "But that was not God's plan." The heroism in him that manifested itself on occasions such as this could not go unnoticed.

1. **Spirit of Obedience**

On 11 April talking to Sisters in Malki he said: We have many defects and many shortcomings, yet throughout my life at least in this I try to do my best to follow the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ; that is to say, in obedience. One day when I was working as a young Priest, our Superior came to my school and asked: “Would you like to go to India? I would like, Father, I answered.  All right, be ready and in one weeks time you will have to leave, said the Superior. I did not know what my fate was but I obeyed. Then, as I came here to India, I wanted to be a missionary, to go out and preach the Gospel and announce Good Tidings.  Here again , one day the Superior asked me : Would you be the Master of the novices ? I answered: I am still a baby, how can I direct the novices! The Superior, however, left the place, saying. All right, tomorrow you will take charge of the novices, because the Master of novices is away.  If the Savior wishes I said. Again I bowed my head to the will of God!

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 it was written there, "CONGRATULATIONS TO THE NEW BISHOP OF KRISHNAGAR.  "I looked around and wondered, "Where is the new Bishop of Krishnagar?  "There was nobody in the office. So I guessed it was addressed to me. You see, they felt my obedience by telegram so that I will not be able to object and I bowed my head. But that day I had no peace in my soul, and the novices asked me: "What is the matter with you Master?  You look very sad. I told them : 'Oh , pray , pray , pray for me. I had to obey and I became the bishop of Krishnagar, an unknown place where I knew no language... After one year, another telegram came: "You must go to Shillong, and be the Bishop of Shillong" And I left again.  I came to Shillong... From all these you see, throughout my life I always try to obey.  Again one day, the Nuncio came from Delhi and said: 'Your Excellency, you must go to Italy and give room for another bishop younger than you.  'I said: All right!  I will go.  'And I went.  Now I came back to India for the Golden Jubilee, because I was here in India for 50 years... I do not commit the sin of pride if I say these things,  if I make the general confession of my life... We did not come to perform our will, but to do the will of our Father and the things that are pleasing to our eternal Father.  And I live the obedience and the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ who loved the meek and was obedient unto death...Obedienza et pace which means obedience and peace. If we are obedient, if we practice obedience we shall always have peace in our hearts.  "At the death of Bishop Ferrando, Fr. Egidio Vigano, the Salesian Rector Major, wrote: " He who has 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.

1. **Humility**

The consciousness of God's overwhelming presence and ever present activity generated humility and confidence in Bishop Ferrando. His basic attitude was that of John the Baptist:" He must increase, I must decrease.  I firmly believed that If we are humble, simple like Jesus, He will surely bless us and our humble and simple Congregation.  All those who knew Bishop S. Ferrando personally testified about his heroic humility. Fr. Fabbian Vito narrates: I was impressed by his spirit of humility. He was a very great man, an Archbishop, a Founder, he had rapport with important persons in the world, yet his last days were spent in silence, in humility, without lamenting about his past glory. He lived in great serenity and resignation. He never said that he held. great responsibilities. He never showed anything, not even a photograph, which would speak about himself. If you questioned him then he would answer, But not more than what you had asked. This impressed me very much. This was the sign of a great man who did not want to manifest his real greatness, because he wanted The figure of Christ to emerge from him. While speaking of the Congregation he founded, he would humbly say that it is all Our Lady's work.  It is indeed God who worked marvels in and through the life of his humble servant, Ferrando.

1. **Simplicity**

Great souls are simple and genuine and this was the case with Bishop Ferrando, says Mgr. Orestes Marengo reminiscing the years of formation under Fr. Ferrando. In his conferences and letters to the Sisters Bishop Ferrando exhorted them to remain simple. Often he pointed to them the scene of Bethlehem, asking them to imitate the spirit of Bethlehem where there was much joy, peace and simplicity in the midst of poverty of the manger. Simplicity according to him consisted in seeking only God.  All his life he remained a simple missionary. He exhorted the Sisters, Be simple with the people, your simplicity and availability will bring people closer to you and people will love your more and more, which will help you to love God and people... May God bless you and Mary Help of Christians help you to acquire the two great virtues of simplicity and humility. The simplicity enabled him to have a good disposition to accept his own limitations and mistakes. He laughed with those who made fun of his forgetful ways timely mistakes.

Bishop Ferrando was always available to those who approached him for any help at any time, no matter how busy or tired he was. The zealous Bishop was available for preaching, hearing confessions, to substitute priests who were absent or sick. Even when he was about to retire to bed he would willingly come down to hear confessions of groups who had to go back to their villages early in the morning. He would even leave the dining table to attend the people rather than keep them waiting.

1. **A True Son of Don Bosco**

Bishop Ferrando was a son of Don Bosco in the full sense of the word and he incarnated the Gospel in this region within the context of the Salesian Spirit and ambience. He was always proud of the fact that he belonged to the Salesian Congregation. Cardinal Joseph Siri has the following to say about his Salesianity:

Essentially he was a missionary, for that matter at Salesian missionary. He lived in the period which immediately followed the life of Don Bosco. The magnetic touch of inimitable warmth infused by Don Bosco was still found in the 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.

Numerous are the letters through which he kept in touch with his Superiors in Rome. He always remained a Salesian and this prompted him to imbue the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters with the traits of Salesian Spirit. Many of his letters from him to the then Rector Major bear witness to the fact that he intended to bring up the little Congregation with the zeal and spirit of Don Bosco. Our little Congregation is Salesian in style and spirit and fully mission oriented.

One of the Salesian patrimonies he bequeathed to the Church in North East India was the family spirit. Bishop Ferrando was always concerned about creating an atmosphere of mutual love, trust, understanding,  sharing, and cordial relationship wherever I have lived.  Your inheritance, your privilege is to live always in peace and joy ... always have this characteristic family spirit, joy and union. He goes on to say: ...what makes me happy is the spirit of family and joy.

**CONCLUSION**

Bishop Ferrando lived a very ordinary and simple life in the eyes of many.  But all those who are open to the Spirit of the Lord, surely can see the finger of God's hand which guided him to live a heroic Christian life. It is said that some stars we see at night disappeared millions of years ago, but their light continues to reach us. So also is Bishop Ferrando. He will continue to light the path of missionaries for a long time to come. Our life has been patterned by the examples of our forefathers and no doubt in the present days too, we look for such striking and remarkable signs to stir up our feeble faith.

Holiness of life was one of the primary concerns of Bishop Ferrando as is seen in his writings. A few of his sayings are cited here: Have always a strong desire to become a Saint, a great Saint ... Only one thing is necessary: to become a saint and a great saint ..., I will pray long before the Altars of St. John Bosco , St. Mary Mazzarello and St Dominic Savio, begging these powerful protectors of ours for special thanks to  enable you to do God's Holy Will perfectly in all things and so to become saints and great saints ... You must be the joy and crown of our Blessed Mother by the sanctity of life. Let us offer our sufferings for the poor sinners and for our sanctification practice silence, prayer and spiritual works to become great saints... I will go to the shrine of Our Lady and pray to make you holy, holy, holy. I am confident that amongst the Sisters there - will be always that atmosphere of serene joy and simplicity, all united in one heart and soul to help one another to become saints ... In my life of solitude I am always praying for the Sanctity of Sisters ... I pray to Our Lord to keep you in the holy fervour that you may become great saints. We need saintly Sisters ... I shall always be glad to help you in what I can, that you may become saintly Sisters. The call to holiness was constantly on his lips.

Fr. Louis Ulla, Bishop Ferrando's novitiate companion and confessor in his last years wrote: He awaits the hour of the Lord.  I will not be surprised if one day he is raised to the honours of the altar.  In a letter dated 3 April 1998, Archbishop T. Resto Phanrang of Shillong stated: I am happy to announce to you that we have already initiated the diocesan process ... May his holy life and unassuming ways inspire us in our missionary work.  I would invite you all to pray and seek graces through his intercession that God may guide us and that the Church may recognize and honour him as a man of God.  I exhort you also to offer prayers and sacrifices for this intention, so that we may receive tangible signs of his holiness to speed up the process of declaring him as our own saint.  On 3 October 2003 the Diocesan Process for the Canonization was initiated by Rt. Rev. Dominic Jala SDB, Archbishop of Shillong

Bishop Thomas Menamparampil pointed out the greatness of Bishop Ferrando as a missionary, to the Missionary Sisters during their Fourth General Chapter:

Blessed are you who have had so great a Founder, so remarkable for his deep faith, his missionary daring and his Salesian optimism. To be true to him is to ensure your continued greatness.  Blessed are you who have inherited the most enviable religious and missionary traditions [from your Founder]. To keep them alive is to continue to live and grow.  May you preserve and strengthen the dynamism, depth, freshness and sparkle of your unique missionary charism (given by your Founder for all generations to come).

Archbishop Stephen Ferrando was a champion of the missionaries. His love for the people and interest in the work of evangelization was genuine and uninhibited. He was alive to the possibilities of the times and dared to go where others feared to tread. He remained humble and unpretentious all his life. His great contribution to the Church and to the people of North East India will not be forgotten even in the passing of generations. His strength and merit lay in his complete confidence in the goodness and providence of God. He prayed as if everything depended on God, but worked as if everything depended on him, writes Sr. Mary Thadavanal, in her presentation to the The North East India.

Bishop Stephen Ferrando lived an unassuming genuine missionary life a life of heroism and sacrifices that would seem impossible and incredible to those who come after him

**BISHOP STEPHEN FERRANDO:**

**BIOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Born at Rossiglione 28.09.1895

Baptized at the Parish Church of St.Catherine 30.09.1895

First Communion 1903

Confirmation 08.08.1903

First Profession at Foglizzo 15.09.1912

Soldier of World War I 1915 - 1918

Ordained Priest at Borgo San Martino 18.03.1923

Left for Assam Mission 02.12.1923

Arrived in Shillong 23.12.1923

Nominated Bishop of Krishnagar 09.08.1934

Episcopal Consecration 10.11.1934

Transferred to Shillong 26.11.1935

Foundation of MSMHC 24.10.1942

Resignation from the See of Shillong 26.06.1969

Appointed Titular Archbishop of Troina 23.08.1969

Left India for Good 07.10.1969

Stay at Genoa – Quarto 1970 - 1978

Re - visited India Nov 1972 – April 1973

Death 20.06.1978

Buried at Rossiglione 21.06.1978

Translation of Mortal remains to Shillong 03.12.1987

Interred in St Margaret's Convent chapel 12.12.1987

Birth Centenary 28.09.1995

Initiated the Diocesan Process for Canonization 03.10.2003

Closing of the Diocesan Process 13.08.2006