

INM-KMJ-CIR 50/04-2021

CREATING A VOCATION CULTURE

APRIL 2021

Dear Confreres,

At the very outset let me wish each one of you a Very Joyful and Grace-Filled Easter! May you experience the peace and Joy of the Risen Lord in your community and in your life. In spite of the pandemic, we are still fortunate to have our parochial liturgical services in many places (even if it is a bit toned down). For this we need to be grateful to the Lord and continue to seek his protection from Covid-19 that soon the virus with all its varied mutations may be brought under control.

In this Circular, I thought of reflecting with you on the theme of Vocation Promotion, with the aim of fostering a **“Vocation Culture”** in our Province. For us, when we use the term ‘vocation’ we use it in the sense of ‘a call to religious way of life’. This then is usually the time of the year when we plan for our ‘vocation’ camp and we also appraise our young confreres in initial formation as they apply for renewal of their vows. By the grace of God, fortunately, our Chennai Province, is still being blessed with good vocations. For this, we praise and thank the Almighty and all our present and past formators and vocation promoters. But this does not mean that we can afford to sit back and relax, delegating this delicate task to just one Salesian or to a few others interested in formation. The future of our Congregation lies with each one of us. Therefore, **every one of us needs to be a Vocation Promoter in his own space and time. Every Salesian needs to reflect and see whether he has inspired at least one other young person to a consecrated way of life!** This was what Don Bosco envisioned and this is how the early Salesian Congregation rooted itself so firmly in the Church.

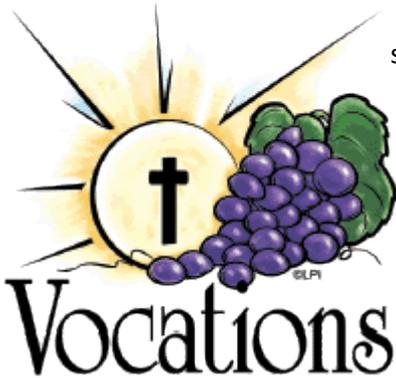
Fostering Religious Vocations Today

Right from the beginning, God chose those whom he wanted to do his mission. In **Exodus 18: 21** we read, *“Choose from the men who are capable those who fear God, those who are trustworthy and those who hate dishonest gain.”* In **Mark 3: 13** we read, *“He called unto Him whom He wanted; to be with Him, to be sent out to preach and do resist evil.”* *“You did not choose me but I chose you” (Jn 15:16).* *“God does not revoke the choice he has made and He does not take back the gifts He has given” (Rom 11:29).* In Jeremiah, we read, *“Can I not do with you as the potter does to the clay?” (18:6).* So, there is a choice. We are chosen and we are living that “closeness” with God. And therefore, it is our duty even today, to continue to help those who are with us to discern the invitation of the Lord to priestly and religious life.



We very well know that, globally, the number of young people coming forward to live their lives as consecrated people, is very much dwindling. Therefore, if we want more priests, sisters and brothers, we all need to **ASK**. Our first and foremost duty will be to pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. Jesus says in **Matthew 9:38** *“to beg the master of the harvest to send labourers into the vineyard.”* Of all the ways we can work toward the increase of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, prayer is undoubtedly the most essential. For this, we also need to **teach young people how to pray**. Pope Benedict XVI said that unless we teach our youth how to pray, they will never hear God calling them into a deeper relationship with Him and into the discipleship of the Church. Invite active young adults and teens to consider a vocation to the priesthood or consecrated life. A simple, sincere comment should not be underestimated. An easy way to do this can be remembered by four letters: **ICNU**. “John, I see in you (ICNU) the qualities that would make a good priest, and I want to encourage you to pray about it.” It is a non-invasive way to encourage openness to a religious vocation.

Make it attractive. The challenge for priests and religious is to be joyful models of their vocations. Vocations must be talked about regularly if a “**Vocation Culture**” is to take root in our institutions, parishes and homes. This means, first and foremost, the people need to hear about vocations from priests through homilies, prayers of the faithful and discussions in the classroom. **Vocations kept out of sight are out of mind.**



In the Gospels we read the story of how Jesus chose his first disciples. Their stories were as vital to the early church as our story is to the Church today. Whether it is dramatic, ordinary, inspiring or mundane, **share your vocation story and invite others to share theirs!** Giving altar servers recognition in some way during mass is an excellent way to make them feel special and give an increased importance and holiness to their service. **Friendships between youth and priests and religious can often aid in the discernment of a vocation.** Young people need to see priests and religious as approachable and friendly. We Salesians, need to spend time with the youth. **The efforts of religious men and women in vocation promotion often go unnoticed because they do not exhibit a love of religious life.** It is encouraging to see women and men who are enthusiastic that they have devoted their lives to the Lord. **By sharing the love you have for your vocation, you can be an inspiration!** Let others experience the human and spiritual support that exists in our community and the love and companionship that is inherent in religious life.

Study on Recent Vocations to Religious Life (2020)

Religious Life reflects the endless story of call and response amid changing demographics. It is fitting to note here some of the findings that the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) published the 2020 Study on Recent Vocations to Religious Life. The 2020 study serves as a follow up to the NRVC's landmark 2009 Study on Recent Vocations and includes both comparisons and new research. The survey sent to Major Superiors was designed to identify what attracted new members to religious life and to their particular religious Institute or Society; what they found helpful in their discernment process; what their attitudes and preferences are regarding community life, prayer, and ministry; and what sustains and challenges them in religious life. This is the link:

<https://nrv.net/509/publication/9180-2020-study-on-recent-vocations-to-religious-life?mode=full>

The major findings of the 2020 Study can be distilled to the following key points:

ENDLESS CALL: Women and men continue to respond to the call to religious life.

APPEAL: They are drawn by prayer, spirituality, charism, community life, and mission.

ATTRIBUTES: Culturally diverse; embrace intercultural, intergenerational living.

LIFESTYLE: Committed to a simple lifestyle and in solidarity with the poor.

OUTLOOK: Filled with abundant hope for religious life amid changing demographics.

The above affirms that **religious life is a valid and vital vocation.** Each of us can confidently invite and support women and men to consider the unique vocation to consecrated life. **The incentive to promote vocations is the belief that the charism of religious life remains attractive and necessary,** which this study clearly demonstrates is the case. We know that inquirers and discerners, led by the Spirit, are seeking to learn about vocation discernment. **Let us encourage them and recognize all who have answered God's call, as Mary did, with a resounding YES!** The grace of perseverance is not a *cliché*; our oldest and newest members are influential role models of fidelity, courage, and audacious hope.

Creating a Culture of Vocations

There are many ways to promote vocations and vocations awareness in our daily lives. The best among them is Prayer. Here are a few practical suggestions which we can put into practice in our communities to promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life. **Young men and women who often feel they might have a vocation sometimes hesitate to come forward before answering the Lord's call.** The following suggestions provide opportunities to dialogue with those considering a vocation to priesthood or religious life, and to support them in as many ways as possible.

1. **Eucharistic Adoration and Rosary for Vocations** – Begin Eucharistic Exposition for Vocations in all our institutions, especially in our parishes. **Prayer before the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is particularly fruitful for vocations. A regular daily or weekly parish rosary for vocation intentions is also very fruitful.**
2. **Encourage Prayer for one's own Vocation** – Encourage and lead young people to pray to the Lord for discernment in their vocation. Encourage them to frequently ask the Lord if he is calling them to priesthood, religious life, married life, or the single life?
3. **Mass Intentions for Vocations** – Every community can offer a mass on a regular basis for the intention of increased vocations to priesthood and religious life.
4. **Invite the Vocation Promoter to address our students:** We are fortunate to have a full-time Vocation Promoter. Collaborate with him in on vocation awareness activities. Let him know the names of young men and women whom you feel may have a priestly or religious vocation. In a parish setting, the parish priest and assistant priests are primary influences on young people considering priesthood and religious life. In the same way, in our educational institutions, the Headmaster/Principal should also make vocation promotion a top priority. Invite those showing interest in priesthood or religious life to speak to the Rector/Parish Priest and then to the Vocation Promoter. **We never pressure young men or women, but rather help them to grow in their spiritual life and discern and pray about their vocation, and encourage them to learn more about possible vocations.** The Lord wants a free response from those whom He calls.
5. **Encourage Parents** – Invite the parents of priests, sisters and seminarians to give a talk to your parishioners or students at the end of Mass about the joy of being the parent of a priest, sister or religious. **Parents need to hear other parents speak on vocations.** Speak to parents' groups and parish organizations about their role in vocations.
6. **Celebrate Vocation Day** – Have special Masses, talks, or events during special days such as World Youth Day or Vocation Days.
7. **Vocation Literature** – Put up vocation stories of priests, brothers, or sisters who are from the parish displayed with a short biography in the Parish hall or in any other suitable place. Include a weekly or monthly article or "corner" in the Parish Bulletin on vocation reflection or vocation prayer. Place a vocation prayer card in the hymnals or parish boxes. A vocation website or a link on the official website of the institution towards creating a culture of vocations.
8. **Encourage young people to attend conventions, rallies, retreats and other events that promote Catholicism** – Gatherings of young Catholics such as World Youth Day, conventions, retreats, etc. are times where young people find themselves considering their lives and their faith and are often graced occasions of personal discovery and discernment.
9. **Annual Visit to a Seminary, Monastery, or Convent** – Having young people visit religious houses and seminaries provides tangibility to priesthood and religious life.
10. **Vocation Prayer** – The Vocation Prayer that we have can be prayed in common everyday not only by Salesians but also by all our beneficiaries in the schools, colleges, parishes, oratories, etc.



Don Bosco and Vocation Promotion

Don Bosco was someone who nurtured many ecclesiastical vocations. The numbers are so big. He always attributed every vocation to singular grace of our Lady. It is from the Basilica that more than 10,000 Salesians have received the Missionary Cross and went into different parts of the world to be a sign and bearer of God's love. Don Bosco used to tell his boys and the early Salesians that we are brought to a Salesian house not just by chance; but it is a singular invitation from our Blessed Mother. **It is Mary who has brought us here. We believe that Mary Did It All and today too She Does It All!**

Don Bosco also thought of vocational accompaniment as something that happens because of the family. He expected the supporting declaration of the parents with regard to the freedom of choice of their children and saw this support as an important element for this journey (BM XVII). **Don Bosco did not support ecclesiastical vocations in the case of those who see it as a means to help their families.** For him, this motivation is a very poor one. (Paternal Testament) (BM XVII). *When a son abandons his parents to obey the Lord's invitation to follow Him, Jesus Christ takes his place in the family (BM IX).* This was the conviction of Don Bosco and this is how he encouraged the young people who wanted to follow the Lord. He assures the family of the need and the greatness of encouraging vocations by the parents. In one of his discussions with a countess, Don Bosco told her, *"You do not appreciate this great gift of vocation that God can give to a family as it is a very sublime vocation (BM VI).*



Reading through the different statements of Don Bosco it is also evident that he was not just adding numbers. He guided the young towards a process of discernment as we understand it today. He says to someone who wanted to pursue his vocational journey, *"it is during this novena to the Holy Spirit that I want to recommend the thought of vocation" (BM XIII, XI).* *"No one can undertake the ecclesiastical state if he is not called by God", says Don Bosco" (BM XI).* Don Bosco was very prudent in advising his sons to invoke the light from the Holy Spirit that the Spirit would help them to observe whether the true signs of vocation are seen in a certain person. He knew that it was not just a human act (BM V). *"I think that at times the choice of our vocation may not be done with interior liberty when we judge it according to our limited intelligence" (BM VII, V, IX, XII).* **It is a process of the heart speaking to the heart.** To decide about one's vocation one needs to bring himself to the point of death. (BM XI). To some parents, Don Bosco said, *"Vocation is not something that we can impose on anybody. If one feels within himself this inclination he will reflect, pray, and thus he will have the capacity to decide by himself. But if one does not have this inclination, we cannot create this inclination and force it out" (BM XII).*

Vocational Animation in the Salesian Community

Don Bosco created an atmosphere of vocational growth at the Oratory and he encouraged it in all his houses. Once Mons. Zappata told the parents of a boy who asked for advice with regard to the vocation of their child, *"Send your son for a few months to Don Bosco, if he has no vocation Don Bosco will awaken the vocational desire in him" (BM XII).* Such was the atmosphere at the Oratory that helped the youngsters to fall in love and remain with Don Bosco. One of his faithful sons as a Salesian in the earlier years of the Congregation Fr. Francesco Piccolo told Don Bosco, "I would like to offer myself to you." And Don Bosco replied to him that he would take that offering and offer it to the Lord (BM XII). This was the way in which Don Bosco helped his boys to kindle the light of vocation in them. **"Our oratories and hostels must be the seedbed of vocations."** This is what Don Bosco wanted (BM XII). **"Visit the colleges and the schools often during the year so that you can illumine them with regard to their vocations" (BM XII).** *"Patience, sweetness and relationship in keeping with the civility of a Christian from the part of the teachers and professors can gain many vocations" (BM XVII).*

This disposition of Don Bosco invites us to create in all our houses an atmosphere where all will continue to value and grow in fidelity to our Salesian Vocation. This growth has to take place during our formative years and it must continue every day of our life. Therefore, **it is not a question of learning skills alone, or acquiring degrees, but it is a formation to commitment; commitment to be, commitment to do, commitment to giving of our very best to everyone and in every place, we are sent. It is formation to commitment to learning to live in the spirit of communion with our confreres (Formula of Profession).** We also saw how Don Bosco insisted on familiarity, because he drew the youngster to trusting him so he could talk about his vocation



and the privileged place to do this is in the Sacrament of Confession. **Being familiar with youth is an opportunity**

not to be missed, to witness to them the joy and beauty of a vocation to the priesthood or the consecrated life. I think it is this witness that youngsters need in order to have the courage to say “yes” to God, giving themselves totally to Him through the hands of Mary.

Vocation Promotion for Every Professed Confrere

As we see in John 1:41, we Salesians play the role of Andrew who brought Peter to Christ. **It is the responsibility of every confrere to look for vocations and it should not be left to the vocation promoter alone.** It is important that each confrere maintains a good relationship with the young entrusted to our care so that there is always the possibility of them one day being members of the Salesian Congregation. **Make use of every opportunity to talk to young people around us and at the end of the conversation casually appreciate someone and put into his head the idea that ‘he could be a good religious; priest/brother’.** Every Salesian should keep a few copies of the vocation promotion leaflets, containing the contact details of the Vocation Promoter and pass it on to good young people whom he comes across. Focus on a few promising young people in our own schools and accompany them with some programmes which provide them with opportunities to come together. In our colleges, promote spiritually motivated youth groups like ‘Jesus Youth’ with a Salesian Animator who could encourage and animate promising ones to Salesian life. Display on the notice boards of our schools and Colleges vocation promotion charts and other displays. **Always remember that the boys who are already with us in our institutions are the best promoters of vocations!**

Conclusion

What does this vocational approach of Don Bosco mean to us today? It means that all of us need to seed the interest of offering oneself to the religious way of life amidst the young people. Vocation Promotion must become one of our major concerns of the pastoral ministry in all our ambience. In order to achieve this, a summary of all the above is given below:

1. **Inspire the Young through your exemplary way of life:** These days, there is so much talk about the profile of a Salesian. In my opinion, I feel that one can be an exemplary Salesian, if we are:
 - a. Men of **Spirituality**
 - b. Men of **Simplicity**
 - c. Men of **Sincerity**
 - d. Men of **Service**, particularly to the poor youth
 - e. Men who are able to **Synergize**

Our witnessing life is the best way to promote vocations because our life speaks louder than words.

2. **Vocation Promotion should also be linked with our Shrines and Basilicas:** When the faithful come with a particular devotion, they are in search of God for certain graces. Therefore, there are wider possibilities for the adherence to the Voice of God and the Call of God to serve His Church in the Salesian way.
3. **Adult Vocations** should be also sought with the young people we have: Think of the adults, seniors (besides age limit); nowadays adult vocations remain qualitative because of the basic faith-based convictions are seemingly strong amidst such.
4. **Go to the profoundly faithful Catholic families** (*Duc in Altum* – go to the deep): we are called to move towards the peripheries of the modern world; it is not of the rural and urban division; instead, it is based on the communities of faithful in the interior parishes with profound way of Christian life.
5. **Seek the poor and get to them early:** use creative methods to reach the families that are poor but sane in faith.
6. **Let Vocation Promotion, become a Vocation Culture, a Way of Life, in every field of ministry.**
7. We need to think of our spiritual heritage: **Each One must Catch One.**
8. **A note of appreciation to the parents:** which would create interest in Catholic parents to seed the interest and desire of volunteer oneself towards the Salesian religious way of life.

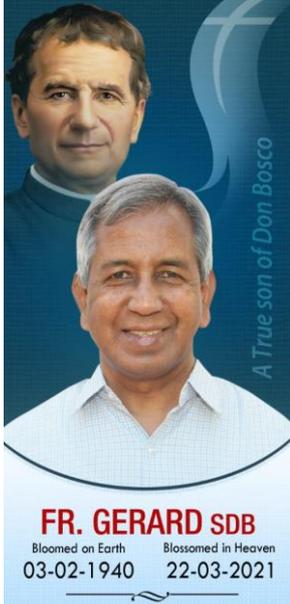
9. **Accompany the young childless mothers:** who make in turn a deal with God (like Hanna of OT) to offer the child to the Church.
10. **Happy Community Life:** create space and time for prayer; moments of community healthy living atmosphere. Offering young people our moments of prayer, recreation and social exposures which would in turn make an impact of religious vocation promotion.
11. **Come and See Programme:** offering young people a space of discernment in our local communities to stay and experience the goodness of our religious vocation.
12. **Help young people discern their way of life,** God's call. We don't need to focus only on bringing talented people to the Congregation. We need to learn about the discernment process.
13. **Accompany Young People** according to their passion and interest.
14. **Pray for Vocations continuously:** seems the last concern but rather should be the first concern of our daily community moments of prayer, should be exhibited in action.
15. **Media intervention is a necessity:** need to make qualitative media intervention (both print and visual) towards the scope of the religious way of life. Using of YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook groups to be aware of the religious vocation to the young people with whom we are in contact.

NEWS FROM THE PROVINCE

REST IN PEACE - Fr. Gerard Nellyattukonam SDB

தோன்றின் புகழொடு தோன்றுக அஃதிலார்
தோன்றலின் தோன்றாமை நன்று. - குறள் 236

Stalwarts of social ministry has been summoned by God all of a sudden transit from earthly sojourn to eternal paradise. The name Fr. Gerard has been a mantra to many, especially it is a very familiar trade mark of the people of Basin Bridge and Wisdom Town of Redhills. The factor of Gerardism will be ever fresh in all the places wherever he had set his foot. A man adjudged with innumerable adjectives both while living and even after the cessation of his earthly existence.



Fr. Gerard Nellyattukonam SDB has been a very down to earth human being. A Person known for the Himalayan goodness specifically to the most deserving sector of stratified society. God has blessed him with 79 years of very healthy life, just only last two years his health was getting deteriorated due to multiple ailments. He suffered the martyrdom of pains caused from his Parkinson disease, Rheumatoid arthritis, heart ailments, diabetes, cervical spondylitis, dislocated hipbone and other minor bowels related issues. All these were trying to conquer a single person but nothing took away his serene smile.

Even when the whole universe was battling with Covid-19, he was just untouched by it until his last breath. Corona seemed to have witnessed toughness of Fr. Gerard, yes he was very tough person to all the ease and comfort zones of life. A man never took advantage of the flow of funds meant for the poor. He had utilised all the contributions of his Salesian benefactors and other friends for the wellbeing of the sick, destitute, students, abandoned young and elderly fellow beings of our socially marginalised families.

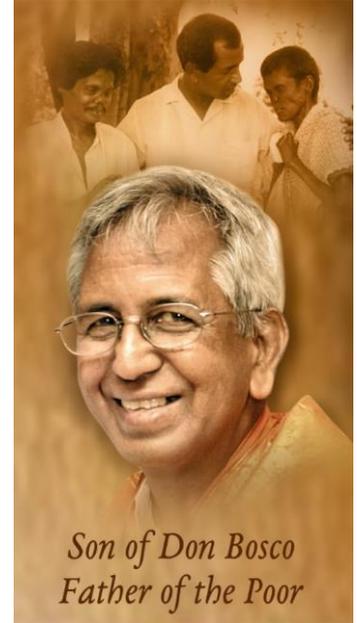
Youth of his times travelled with him all through with various stages of age groups and his love for them never impoverished to any single one of them. Fr. Gerard took very special interest to keep them active with his unconditional love for the football and education. It had been a unifying entity until 2018 at

national level tournaments. Even Some of the great personalities were bewitched under the spell of Gerardism until his last moments of earthly existence and even after.

Fr. Gerard spent his last days of life with lot of external serenity. He was very regular to the religious practices of piety and always stood close to our blessed mother and Don Bosco all through his life. His friendly chats with the community confreres during the house assemblies were very inspiring moments for all the members of the community. He always kept repeating the following words "I am a poor sinner, it's our Mother Mary guided me and made all things were possible through various generous persons to the poor and deserving". He often used to say that "I have neither done nor achieved anything, SHE DID IT ALL and I was only an instrument in her hands".

Fr. Gerard kept unprecedented hope in God and manifested the divine love to everyone and even to the one who have taken advantage of his goodness at times. One of his last manifestations to his Rector reveals his true contrition and helpless of his physical inability to be part of the community confreres. However, he had always wished to be amidst children and people rather than limiting his moves to within restricted four walls. He had expressed with all his sincerity that all what he had done it with good intention trusting people but realised and conceded that some had divisive mind-sets and loosing track of the purpose for which he had initiated certain responsibilities.

Province of Chennai would never equate the incomprehensible loss of such a wonderful human being and a great Salesian with a quick call from God in an unexpected time of his recuperation. Fr. Gerard was fondly remembered by others under the innumerable titles, viz shepherd of the slum, Rowdy Salesian of Basin Bridge, Lover of Sports, Walking Gospel of our Times, etc., all these will ever keep echoing in the minds of his beneficiaries. He lived a life of Salesian simplicity and Salesian spirituality for the youth of our times. Fr. Gerard's familiarity with the famous personalities of political, spiritual gurus and social special personalities had never interrupted his true Salesian life. He channelled all the gifts for God's mission in Don Bosco's way irrespective of class and creed. Let his love for the youth ignite us to do our best to the deserving youth of our times at all levels.



வையத்துள் வாழ்வாங்கு வாழ்பவன் வான்உறையும்
தெய்வத்துள் வைக்கப் படும். - குறள் 50

INM Diaconate & Priestly Ordinations

This year, the Province would be blessed with five new Priests. The Provincial Council has admitted the following Deacons to the Priestly Ordination.

- Dn. Arockia Anbu
- Dn. Arun Sahayaraj
- Dn. Gabrieal Selvakumar
- Dn. Gabrieal Paulraj
- Dn. Devaraj Jayaraj

The Priestly Ordination will be on the 28th April 2021, Wednesday, at 05.00 pm in St. Bede's, Santhome. The Diaconate Ordination will also be on the 28th April 2021, Wednesday, at 10.00 am in St. Bede's, Santhome.

Most. Rev. Dr. George Antonysamy DD, the Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore, has consented to confer both Sacraments. We thank the Lord for these young Salesians who have offered themselves to serve Him in the ministerial Priesthood.

Approval of the Higher secondary in Andamans

The Central Government has given the approval for Higher Secondary Section to Don Bosco School, Andaman by CISCE (Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations), popularly known as ICSE. As we thank the Lord for this milestone in the Andaman mission, I appreciate Fr. Patrick Alphonse, Fr. Deva Anbu and Fr. Charles Grace for the focus and the commitment towards this mission. The first batch of 14 students from this school will be writing their ICSE exams from 6th May 2021. May the good Lord bless and assist us in the growth of this mission.

Rest in Peace

Fr. Gerard Nellyotukonam SDB (81) had passed away on the 22nd March 2021, in Wisdom Town, Redhills.

Sr. Arockianathan Mary Josephine FMA had passed away on the 09th March 2021. We offer our hearty condolences to Sr. Lazar Maria Nirmala, the Provincial and the sisters of Chennai Province.

Mrs. K. Jayamary (80), mother of Fr. Louis Irudayasamy, passed away on the 16th March 2021 at Kotapalayam, Trichy Dt. We offer our condolences to Fr. Louis and his family members. We shall continue to pray for the deceased soul.

Dear confreres, once again wishes for a **VERY JOYFUL EASTER!** May you experience the **PEACE** and **JOY** of the Risen Lord! **Alleluia!**

Yours truly in Don Bosco,


Fr. K.M. Jose SDB
INM Provincial



Date: 02.04.2021

Place: Chennai – 600010.

