



Provincial Circular

SALESIAN PROVINCE OF CHENNAI (INM)



INM-DBL-CIR 59/12-2025

DECEMBER 2025

The Manger and the Maze: Guiding Youth to Abundant Life at Christmas

Introduction

As we begin the month of December and continue our journey in the season of Advent, we enter a time when “The Manger and the Maze: Guiding the Youth to Abundant Life at Christmas” becomes not only our theme but our guiding light. The Jubilee of Hope, inaugurated on December 24, 2024, continues to lead us toward its solemn conclusion on January 6, 2026. Even as the Holy Doors of the other major basilicas prepare to close later this month on December 28, we are invited to help young people to journey from the maze of uncertainty toward the simplicity and peace found at the Manger.

December is especially treasured by the Salesian Family. On December 5, the memorial of Blessed Philip Rinaldi reminds us of a fatherly guide who helped countless youth find direction amid life’s complexities. On December 8, we celebrate both the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and the birth of the Salesian mission through Don Bosco’s encounter with Bartholomew Garelli, with a Hail Mary, an unforgettable moment when a boy lost in the maze discovered hope beside the Manger-like warmth of Don Bosco’s heart.

As 8th December marks the foundation of the Salesian Congregation, we renew our commitment to guide the young toward abundant life, culminating in the joyful celebration of Christmas on 25th December, where the Manger remains our surest compass through every maze.

A Promise and a Paradox

In the silence of the first Christmas, a promise was born not in thunder, but in the cry of a child: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Yet, for countless young people, this abundance feels like a distant dream, eclipsed by the shadow of addictions that promise fulfilment but deliver only emptiness. Saint Augustine’s timeless insight reveals the heart of the issue: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” Addiction is a disordered attempt to satisfy this God-given restlessness.

The Illusion of Fulfilment: Understanding Addiction

Addictive behaviours are counterfeit solutions, mimicking fulfilment while leaving the person more isolated and restless. They are a thirst for the infinite, tragically misplaced in finite and destructive outlets. Recently, I met Ravi a bright 16-year-old boy. His eyes, once full of dreams, were glazed over; his academic performance was in freefall. He was spending over eight hours a day on a mobile betting app. He wasn’t living; he was disappearing. His story is tragically common.

Across India, millions of young people are being ensnared, their capacity for relationship, study and joy systematically diminished.

A Generation in Peril

The scale of the challenge is captured in a sobering portrait of a generation at risk:

Digital Addiction: Studies indicate that 35-45% of Indian youth show symptoms of social media addiction, with urban adolescents averaging 7-8 hours of daily screen time.

Pornography: An estimated 70% of young males aged 15-25 have been exposed to online pornography, with increasing patterns of dependency.

Gambling: Mobile betting apps have devastated the life of several youngsters.

Substance Abuse: Millions of youth grapple with alcohol use disorders, with many needing help.

These addictions do not operate in isolation; they assault the very foundations of a young person's holistic development:

Physical: They lead to stunted growth, neurological damage and increased mortality.

Intellectual: Addiction impairs cognitive function, with studies showing a 30-40% drop in academic achievement among affected youth.

Emotional: Depression, anxiety, and suicide rates are 2-3 times higher, with the WHO citing addiction as a major factor in youth suicide.

Spiritual: Addiction creates a void, replacing authentic relationships with God and others with compulsive idols.

This is not abundant life. It is, as the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers warned, "one of the most worrying plagues of our times."

Emmanuel: God with Us in the Struggle

Into this broken reality, the Christmas message erupts with explosive hope: "Emmanuel, God-with-Us." This is not a distant God offering empty promises. The Incarnation is the ultimate act of solidarity; God entering the human condition in its most vulnerable form. Emmanuel is with the young person seeking solace in alcohol, the one trapped in the cycle of pornography, the one drowning their anxiety in compulsive gaming.

We see this divine companionship in Scripture: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you" (Isaiah 41:10). For a youth feeling enslaved, "Emmanuel" is the ultimate assurance. He is the divine companion in the rehabilitation centre, the silent strength in the moment of temptation, the source of a hope that does not disappoint.

Our Call to Action

In response, the Church must become what Pope Francis calls a "field hospital," offering comfort and healing on the front lines. We must foster environments where young people can speak openly about their struggles without judgment or shame. Parents, teachers, and youth workers must be equipped to recognize the signs of addiction and intervene with wisdom and love, mirroring the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine for the one.

The current situation of the young who have fallen a prey to various addictions manifests a reality very different from the parable of the Good Shepherd mentioned above. Many social analysts, youth workers, spiritual masters and psychologists admit the fact that, today, ninety-nine sheep out of one hundred are lost due to addictions and only one sheep remains with us. In this situation, as the shepherd of the young we cannot work or search all alone, we need to network with others, that is, with all the members of our community, the Salesian family and others who can share in our mission. In fact, St. John Bosco himself realised and admitted that he needed the help of others in order to carry out the mission entrusted to him by God. Our formation to be apostles of the young has constantly prepared us and insisted on becoming a father and friend of the young. Today's youngsters are losing themselves in multiple ways but the pity is that they are not aware of it.

The lesson Jesus gives us through the parable is that no one should be lost. God refuses to accept that even a single person is beyond His love. While human logic might say, "losing one among many is no great loss," the Shepherd's heart burns for the one who is most wounded, forgotten, or abandoned. His mercy is not occasional, it is His constant way of loving. God throws no one away; He searches tirelessly, one by one, until each one is found. This mission of the Good Shepherd was embraced passionately by St. John Bosco, who dedicated his life to seeking out the poorest and most 'at-risk' youth. He walked the streets to find them, welcomed them, believed in them, and revealed God's tenderness to them. Today, we as Salesians and Sons of St. John Bosco have to carry forward this same mission, that is, to go where the young are most lost, most in danger, and bring them home with the compassion of Jesus. Our mission for the young mirrors the Shepherd who refuses to stay in the fold but goes out into the night searching for the lost one: His beloved.

As we prepare for Christmas, this parable becomes even more moving. The mystery of the Incarnation is God Himself entering our darkness to find us. Jesus becomes the Shepherd who not only looks for the lost but becomes one of us, walking our roads, entering our wounds, and carrying us back on His shoulders. The manger itself speaks of this love: God chooses not a palace but a feeding trough, placing Himself at the very level of human poverty so that no one can say, "He is too far from me." And if our lives often feel like a maze, confusing, broken, full of dead ends, Jesus enters that maze from within, tracing every path until He finds us. Christmas is the celebration of a God who would rather be born in a manger and walk our maze of suffering and uncertainty than lose even one of His children.

Dear Confreres, in every community, someone is lost or missing. Their absence leaves a real emptiness, and we must not accept it as inevitable. Jesus teaches that no one is definitively lost not even at the last moment. His perspective is always hopeful, creative, and compassionate. The whole flock rejoices when the lost one is found. We, who have been found by mercy, are called like St. John Bosco to seek, welcome, and gather every lost brother and youngster back into God's joyful embrace. Our initial and on-going formation teach us this great secret.

Conclusion: The Light That Breaks the Chains

This Christmas, as we gaze upon the manger, let us see it as God's definitive answer to the world's pain. The light of the Christ Child "shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). The darkness of addiction is powerful, but it is not more powerful than the Light of the World.

Let us be that light for our young people. Let our families and parishes be places where they experience the authentic, abundant life Christ promises; a life of relationship, purpose, and joy. Let us assure them, through our words and actions, that no matter the struggle, "Emmanuel – God with us" is present. He is the hope that breaks every chain, the love that casts out all fear, and the promise that in Him, they will find the life for which they truly long. May the Peace of the New-born King fill every heart seeking freedom this Christmas season.

News from the Province

Salesian Mission Day @ Don Bosco Tirupattur

The two-day celebration on 8th and 9th November brought together around 300 participants from various Salesian formation houses and institutions across the province. We thank Fr. Michaelraj Lazar and the community of Don Bosco Tirupattur for their warm hospitality and tireless efforts in organising the event. We are immensely grateful to Fr. John Alexander, Vice Provincial, Fr. Anto John Jagadish Head of the Committee, Fr. Jesumanikam David, Fr. Santhana Arul Nicholas, Fr. Amalraj Aaservatham and the entire missionary team who organised the event with meticulous planning and dedication. The gathering ended on a joyful note, with renewed missionary fervour echoing Don Bosco's words: "The world is waiting for you."

Deacons Pastoral Assignments

Four of our Deacons are placed in the following communities for their pastoral experience during the Advent and Christmas seasons.

D Arul Prasanth Nathan - Sacred Heart Church, Polur

D Arokia John Paul Arockiasamy - St Antony's Church, Veeralur

D Clement Arokiaraj Sebastine - Mary Help of Christians Parish, Basin Bridge

D Arokia Dass Lourdasamy - Our Lady of Assumption Church, Maranodai

We extend our prayerful best wishes to our confreres as they begin their pastoral ministry in these parishes.

Province Participation in South Asia–Level Meetings

The SPCSA recently conducted a series of renewal and orientation programmes for various ministries across multiple locations. Several Salesians from our Province took part in these gatherings held in Shillong, Siliguri, Guwahati, Goa, Mumbai, and Bangalore. These meetings were an enriching experience for our confreres, and they will definitely help them to serve better in their places of ministry.

I also attended a few of these meetings and had the privilege of meeting Rev. Fr. Stefano Martoglio, Vicar General and Rev. Fr. Gabriel Stawowy, Economer General. These were valuable occasions to present to them some of the developmental initiatives we have planned for the future of the province.

Strengthening Vocation Promotion in Our Province

The Congregation has firmly integrated the Aspirantate within the heart of youth ministry, offering young people the chance to experience the Salesian mission during their formative years. Through this environment, students enter a phase of genuine discernment, supported by the attentive accompaniment of the entire community.

All our boardings and hostels are recognised as Apostolic Student Communities, which calls for sustained and meaningful follow-up. With this renewed emphasis, every institution is encouraged to provide strong formative guidance. The vocation promoter, together with the boarding teams, will play a key role in identifying potential candidates.

Young people who express a sincere inclination toward Salesian life will receive systematic accompaniment through regular interactions, guidance sessions, and personal mentoring, helping them grow in clarity and commitment. This collaborative approach ensures that every interested young person is supported and none is overlooked. It also reaffirms the Congregation's dedication to fostering future Salesians.

We kindly request Rectors, Leaders and confreres to send students who show signs of a vocation to the December winter camps scheduled at various locations.

One Day Winter Vocation Camps:

The one-day winter vocation camps for this year are being organised during the Christmas Vacation. It is our duty to spread this information and encourage students and young people, especially within our own institutions, to attend this camp to learn about the Salesian Way of life and be inspired to follow Jesus in the footsteps of St. John Bosco. Please do contact the Vocation Promoter for any clarifications in this regard: Fr Anto John – 7411424124/7358175004.

The details of the camp venues are as follows:

Date	Day	Place
26.12.2025	Friday	St. Bede's Anglo-Indian Hr. Sec. School, Santhome, Chennai
27.12.2025	Saturday	Don Bosco Boys Home, Thattanchavady, Puducherry
28.12.2025	Sunday	Don Bosco Hr. Sec. School, Polur, Tiruvanamalai Dist.
29.12.2025	Monday	Dominic Savio Boys' Home, Tirupattur
30.12.2025	Tuesday	Mount Don Bosco, Kotagiri, Nilgiris Dist.

Healthy Soul in the Healthy Body

Sports continue to play a vital role in promoting healthy bodies and calm minds among our young people. In this context, every effort is being made to utilise our sports facilities more effectively, both for the benefit of the students and as a means of generating income to sustain our

institutions. Several communities have already begun exploring new initiatives to strengthen sports-based engagement. These efforts aim to create structured programs that enhance physical well-being while supporting the financial needs of our houses. The proposal to expand such initiatives will be placed before the council for further reflection. It will also encourage a healthier lifestyle and a more vibrant environment in all our institutions.

Christmas Celebrations in Our Communities

Our communities are preparing joyfully for the Christmas season, each in its own distinctive way. As Salesians, this period invites us to make our celebrations truly meaningful by reaching out in a special way to those most in need. Rather than centring our efforts exclusively on internal festivities, we are encouraged to keep them simple and channel our time and resources toward the poor and vulnerable around us.

By welcoming them into our celebrations, offering assistance and spending time with families who struggle, we live the very spirit of our mission. Such gestures not only bring light to their Christmas but also enrich our own experience of the season. May this year's celebration be marked by simplicity, compassion, and genuine solidarity, choosing to love over comfort and solidarity over extravagance.

Community Audit

Many of our communities meaningfully observed the Day of the Poor on 15 November through outreach initiatives and a thoughtful community audit. This process has highlighted the Province's deep commitment to serving the poor and accompanying them in their daily challenges. As we continue this mission with compassion and closeness, we are called to grow in solidarity and adopt a lifestyle marked by simplicity, humility, and authentic identification with those we serve. Such a way of living strengthens our witness and makes the Gospel tangible through concrete action. We express our gratitude to Fr. Edwin Vasanthan, the Economist, along with all Rectors, Leaders, and Youth Service Coordinators, for guiding and supporting this important initiative.

Usage of Mobile Phones

The sleeping hours of many confreres in initial formation have noticeably reduced due to excessive use of mobile phones at night. As a gentle reminder, Rectors/Leaders are encouraged to collect the mobile phones from those in initial formation before 9 p.m. and return them the following morning at 8 a.m. This simple practice will help restore healthy sleep routines and support better focus during the day. For the other members of the community, a more self-disciplined approach is recommended, ensuring that personal mobile use does not interfere with rest, prayer or community life. Such collective attention to well-being will contribute to a more balanced and formative environment for all.

Annual Retreat at DBYAC, Ennore

The first Annual Spiritual Retreat of this academic year took place from 24th November to 29th November at Don Bosco Youth Animation Centre, Ennore. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to Rev. Fr. Kachappilly Joy Joseph SDB, from the Province of Guwahati, for inspiring our scholastics in initial formation with his insights. We also extend our sincere thanks to Rev. Fr. Vincent Robert and the

community at DBYAC, Ennore, for their exceptional hospitality and efforts in making this retreat a deeply enriching experience for all the participants.

Rest in Peace!

Br. Frederick D'Souza SDB, belonging to the Province of Panjim, left for his heavenly home on the 2nd November 2025. We offer our prayers and condolences to the Provincial and confreres of the Panjim province.

Fr. Mathew Parackatte SDB, belonging to the Province of Shillong, passed away on the 7th of November 2025. We express our heartfelt condolences to the Provincial and confreres of Shillong Province.

Fr. Mathew Thalanany SDB of the Salesian Province of Bombay entered his eternal abode on the 22nd November. Heartfelt condolences and prayers to the Provincial and confreres of Bombay.

Mr. I. Lourdu Raj, the beloved elder brother of Fr. Louis Irudayasamy (Parish Priest, Fujairah) passed away on the 20th November 2025.

We continue to remember the deceased and pray for the bereaved family members!

Important dates and events in December

Date	Event
01 – 06	Annual Spiritual Retreat 2 @ DBYAC, Ennore
02 – 03	Monthly Recollection
07 – 08	PV: Don Bosco Mission, Bagalur
09 – 10	PV: Don Bosco, Egmore
11	PV: Don Bosco, Redhills
12	Provincial Council / SURABI Review Meet @ Redhills
13 – 14	PV: St. Antony's Church, Veeralur
15	Salesian Scholars Meet, Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur
16	Assessments of the Confreres in the initial formation are to be sent to the Provincial Office
17 – 18	PV: Idaya Deepam Novitiate, Yelagiri
25	The Nativity of the Lord

Yours affectionately,



Fr. Don Bosco SDB
INM Provincial

Date: 01.12.2025
Place: Chennai - 10

