

Please note: You may send your contribution envelope at any time, before or after the collection the weekend of August 20-21

Mission Preaching -- 2022

I am Fr. Brien Chanchal Gomes, a priest of the Archdiocese of Dhaka, Bangladesh. But now I am working in Sylhet Diocese to help the Bishop of Sylhet, due to the lack of local diocesan priests.

Bishop Shorot Francis Gomes is the 2nd Bishop of Sylhet Diocese in Bangladesh. On behalf of the Sylhet diocese, I am going to share with you the mission and ministry of the Sylhet diocese. It is a new Diocese, erected in September 2011.

In the beginning, literally, the diocese was landless and homeless, there was no residence for the bishop. Bishop lived in the rental Muslim house for five years. By the Grace of God and the help of many benefactors Bishop Bejoy, the former bishop managed to buy a few pieces of land. The land is very expensive because of overpopulation.

Bishop built the first residence, which is used also for Priests' residences, a meeting, gatherings, and retreats. He also built the first Church which has a capacity of 500 people in Sylhet city where there are 350,000 people mostly Muslims and a few hundred Catholics. Still, we do not have a Cathedral and no Pastoral Centre. One minor seminary is constructed where we have now 54 local seminarians (from class VIII to X). There are eight Dioceses in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is predominantly a Muslim country, with 160 million people; Christians are less than one percent.

Sylhet is a Diocese of indigenous people. They are very simple, close to the re, have a great sense of hospitality, and are faithful to their religious obligations.

This is the region where we grow tons of good Tea. One of them is Lipton Tea which comes actually from Sylhet Diocese. A good number of Catholics worked in the Tea plantations. They are poor not because they are lazy but because they are denied a just pay. Even today one earns USD 1.40 for one's hard labor per day. With this little money, the family cannot buy the bare necessities of life, parents can't buy enough food for the children, can't go to the doctor when they fall sick and education is still a dream for them.

The poor people are always people of God and the Church stands by them. Though it is a new Diocese there are 60 primary/elementary schools in the villages, 6 secondary schools, and 10 boarding hostels for 800 children at the Parish Centers where they stay, get nutritious food, and good education and formation. In our schools we have about 8,000 children; most of them are from other religions. That is the way we touch them with Christian values and evangelize them. There are 3 clinics and two Homes of St. Mother Teresa of Kolkata. We provide services to all, irrespective of caste and creed. Since 2019 Diocese has had a Centre for the handicapped children where we have 16 children. Here they learn sign language and brail. There are 115 paid Catechists. Though it is a new diocese and Muslim country but there is a big possibility of evangelization. 700,000 Hindu workers in the Tea garden are open to Christianity. Because they see that Christianity doesn't speak about salvation only after death, it liberates them, gives education to the children, health to the sick, and food to the hungry. You would be happy to know that every year there is a good number of adult baptisms. During the pandemic of Covid- 19, we provided food to many poor families both Christians and Non-Christians, especially to Muslims. We take care of 50 street children who live in slums around the Railway station of Sylhet. Next year we hope to begin an education program for them.

At this moment, the diocese needs financial support to run the seminary and do the formation and education of the children, which costs more than 70,000 USD per year. We also need support to pay the salary of our catechists (they also work as primary school teachers to give a primary education to our children in remote areas). The diocese spends more than 60,000 USD per year on them. We get little support from the local community which is about 20% of the total cost. Therefore, we still depend on the contribution of generous donors and well-wishers.

Today, on behalf of the Sylhet Catholic Diocese, I am making this mission appeal to you, humbly requesting your generous support for the spiritual, pastoral, and formational activities of the diocese. Without your generosity and love, it would be quite difficult to fulfill the mission of God and do the work of evangelization. I hope and believe that you will make a little sacrifice and contribute generously to support our activities in Bangladesh.

I would like to thank the Mission Office and Parish Priest for giving me this opportunity to share with you about the Mission and ministry of the Sylhet diocese. I express my thanks and gratitude to you all for your kindness, generosity, prayer, and financial support. May God bless you all and also bless our mission.

(Many ask about the relationship between Christians and Muslims because there are discrimination and violence in Muslim countries. Here Christians have been living in peace and harmony for ages together. For six/seven years, the situation has been deteriorating like in many other Muslim countries. Fr. Piero Parolari, an Italian PIME, 65 years old, was a medical doctor and was serving St. Vincent hospital for 20 years. He was a great friend of the poor and they loved him so much. On 18 November 2015 while he was going to the hospital as usual by his bike, on his way he was blocked by a motorcycle with three young boys, one-shot him with a gun in his neck and another put a sharp knife into his body, the body was full of blood, he fell from the bike, a passerby took him to the hospital. On 22 March 2016, Hossain Ali, 60 years old was brutally killed in the daylight; his crime was that he accepted Christianity from Islam. On 1 July 2016 never happened at this scale in the history of Bangladesh, a group of terrorists stormed a Spanish restaurant in Dhaka, the Capital, and cruelly killed 22, most of them were foreigners. On 9 March 2017 a Christian, Gilbert Costa, a night guard of St. Rita's Church was attacked and was seriously wounded. The former bishop was threatened with death on 22 December 2015, but thank God nothing happened to him. The government has taken good security, therefore, now security people give the guard Bishop's house. Despite all these, we move freely everywhere because we have to visit our people and carry out spiritual and pastoral activities. Please pray for the safety of minorities in all Muslim countries especially Bangladesh.)