



INM FMA / Pro.Cir.18

December 2024

My Dearest Sisters,

Viva Gesu`! Affectionate greetings to each one of you!

Spiritual Practices: Potent Catalysts for Spiritual Growth

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual growth begins the moment a person comes to faith in Christ and continues until the person enters Christ's presence after this life. Consecrated persons find that participation in the spiritual practices of the Church and the religious communities accelerates their spiritual journey. Meditation, personal and common prayer moments, fasting, journaling, yoga, and participation in various religious or spiritual practices are potent catalysts for spiritual development. Engaging in self-reflection, pursuing acts of service and reading sacred scriptures and spiritual books are standard methods for fostering spiritual growth. Scientists and psychologists, studying the effects of such practices, have found that these spiritual practices improve one's mental health, social connectedness and well-being, thereby providing empirical support for the benefits of spiritual growth.

1. Rich Tapestry of Biblical Teachings on Spiritual Growth

The Bible says that spiritual growth offers guidance, principles, and encouragement for believers to mature in their faith and relationship with God (Eph. 4:15). The Bible emphasizes the importance of growing in knowledge, understanding, and living spiritual truths, and it presents the process as a lifelong journey (Col 2:6-7). Biblical passages focus on the transformative power of the Spirit and demonstrate the reality of spiritual growth in their daily lives. It outlines various aspects of spiritual growth, such as the transformation of character, the deepening of faith, and the importance of community communion in nurturing one's spiritual life (Pet 3:18; Gal 5:22-23).

The Bible provides a rich tapestry of teachings on spiritual growth, emphasizing the transformation into Christ-likeness, the deepening of personal faith, and the expression of spiritual fruits in one's life. The followers of Christ are encouraged to pursue a path of continual spiritual growth, marked by an ever-increasing capacity to love and serve others through engagement with the scriptures, prayer, and community fellowship. Practices of spiritual disciplines and unconditional services to others are vital components of spiritual growth. The Church and the Institute offer ample opportunities to deepen one's faith life. The communal aspect of religious community life encourages accountability, support, and shared experiences, which enhance the ongoing journey of spiritual maturation.

2. Spiritual Growth in Religious Life

Spiritual growth is the process of becoming more mature in one's relationship with Jesus Christ. One who is growing spiritually will become more and more like Christ. The spiritually mature will be able to "discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). Scripture offers valuable insights into how one can grow progressively in spiritual life. It is Christ's power in religious persons that gives them the possibility

and the ability to grow spiritually (2 Pet 1:3; Eph 3:20). As they rely on His power and follow His teachings, they can develop greater spiritual maturity. Peter provides a peek at the process: “For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For, if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:5-8).

Involvement and participation of everyone in the life and mission of the local church and the exercise of our spiritual gifts are invaluable to the development of spiritual maturity (Eph. 4:11-16). The Disciples of Christ are called to speak “the truth in love,” with the result that “we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love (Eph. 4:15-16). One can also evaluate one’s spiritual growth when one can measure one’s growth in the “fruit of the Spirit”: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).

The consecrated persons need to be aware that growth often comes through trials and tribulations. Just as physical strength is built through exertion and straining against resistance, spiritual strength is developed in the hard times of life. St James encourages: “My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.” (Jam. 1:2-4). Because growth comes through trials Scripture also teaches not to grow weary in the spiritual process. Much spiritual development is the result of persistence and perseverance. “Brothers and sisters, do not grow weary in doing what is right” (2 Thess. 3:13). “So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time if we do not give up.” (Gal 6:9).

3. Characteristics of Spiritual Growth

The following are the characteristics that signify spiritual maturity and growth in one’s life. **Regular Spiritual Practices**: Engaging in regular practices such as prayer, meditation, or reading spiritual texts that nurture one’s spiritual life; **Enhanced Self-awareness**: A heightened understanding of one’s thoughts, emotions, and behaviours and how they relate to one’s spiritual journey; **Practicing Mindfulness**: Being fully present to daily activities, such as eating, walking, or listening to someone, to cultivate awareness and gratitude; **Practicing Forgiveness**: Actively working to forgive individuals who have wronged, understanding that forgiveness is a gift; **Deepened Sense of Inner Peace**: An enhanced state of calmness and serenity regardless of external circumstances; **Ready Detachment from Materialism**: A shift in focus from material possessions and status to spiritual values and experiences; **Greater Resilience**: Improved ability to navigate life’s challenges and adversities with faith and trust; **Increased Sense of Gratitude**: A more profound appreciation for life’s blessings, big and small; **Commitment to Service and Generosity**: A natural inclination to help others and contribute positively to the community; **Augmented Empathy and Compassion**: A greater understanding and connection with others’ suffering and joy; **Unconditional Love and Kindness**: An expanding capacity to unconditional love and kindness towards oneself and others; **Connecting with Nature**: Spending time outdoors to appreciate the beauty of the natural world, recognizing the divine in all of God’s creation.

4. Sacraments Offer Singular Graces for Spiritual Growth

The reception of sacraments connects believers across time and space, linking them to the vast tradition of faith that spans centuries. The sense of continuity and belonging to a larger salvation story is profoundly comforting and inspiring, providing strength and perspective in times of doubt or struggle. It reminds individuals that they are part of a divine narrative much larger than their experiences, offering hope and encouragement as they navigate their spiritual journey. It significantly strengthens

spiritual growth by fostering a deeper connection with the divine, encouraging conversion and renewal, reinforcing the sense of community communion, and connecting everyone to the enduring legacy of the faith. They are reminded of the profound truths at the heart of their spiritual path through the sacred practice, empowering them to live with greater purpose, love, and commitment to spiritual development.

Participation in sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation, offers religious men and women a unique opportunity for reflection and introspection, allowing them to examine their lives, confess their sins, faults, and failures and reaffirm their dedication to Christ's path of holiness. The process of self-examination and renewal is crucial for spiritual growth as it encourages individuals to confront and release patterns of thought and behaviour that distance them from God and their spiritual essence. For example, by choosing to forgive and seek forgiveness, cultivating a heart open to love and grace through the sacraments, one will be able to reflect on moments of anger or resentment that one has harboured. The Sacrament of Holy Eucharist inspires acts of service and love towards others as participants are moved to embody the principles of compassion and sacrifice in their daily lives.

Communion is a significant sign of one's spiritual growth. It is a powerful reminder of a community's core principles of faith, love, and sacrifice. A deep connection with the divine reinforces one's commitment to the spiritual journey and the effects of living in alignment with Christ's teachings. Communion of heart and mind is an expression of living concretely Christ's sacrificial love for humanity. Participation in the Eucharist and the reception of Communion emphasize unity and a sense of belonging. The collective experience strengthens the bonds within the faith and religious community, reminding individuals that they are part of a larger body of believers walking the same spiritual path. It reinforces the idea that spiritual growth is not a solitary journey but one enriched by shared experiences and mutual support.

CONCLUSION

Spiritual maturity is the desire of every Christian and consecrated person. It is God's will that everyone grows to be more like Jesus. The consecrated persons have the promise that the Lord Himself will oversee their growth and bring them to maturity. "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). "Finally, brothers and sisters, put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, and live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11). The role of personal and community practices in spiritual growth and the mission cannot be overstated. These practices lead us to the transformative work of the Holy Spirit, aligning our hearts with God's will and receiving divine wisdom, guidance, and assistance.

We need to be convinced that spiritual practices facilitate us to cultivate intimacy with God, strengthen our faith, and empower us for effective ministry. We need to prioritize these practices in our personal lives and create environments of spirituality within our ministry contexts. We have to be steadfast in seeking God's presence trusting in His power to work in and through us. Spiritual growth contributes to maturity by encouraging everyone to live with intention and purpose and make decisions that align with the highest values and aspirations.

Fidelity to spiritual practices helps us build and live genuine relationships and efficiently fulfil the daily pastoral practices that reflect a commitment to contributing positively to the world and the cosmos. For example, an individual who values environmental stewardship as part of their spiritual practice chooses to work in sustainable development and advocate for conservation efforts, integrating spiritual values with their professional and personal actions.

Points to Ponder and Share:

1. **How are you growing spiritually in daily life?**
2. **What are the Biblical teachings/passages that help you grow in your spiritual life?**
3. **List the Characteristics of Your Spiritual Growth**
4. **How do the Sacraments offer you singular graces for spiritual growth?**

CELEBRATIONS DURING THE MONTH

01 Sun	-	First Week of Advent/International Aids Day
03 Tue	-	St Francis Xavier
05 Thu	-	Bl. Philip Rinaldi
09 Mon	-	Feast of the Immaculate Conception
10 Tue	-	International Human Rights Day
12 Thu	-	Our Lady of Guadalupe
25 Wed	-	CHRISTMAS
26 Thu	-	St Stephen
27 Fri	-	St John the Apostle and Evangelist
28 Sat	-	Holy Innocents
29 Sun	-	Feast of Holy Family

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Congratulations: Salesian Cooperators' Promise Day! Six members of INM FMA units of Salesian Cooperators made their Promise on 1 December 2024 at Don Bosco Shrine, Aynavaram, Chennai. It was wonderful to witness the extension of the Salesian charism through the committed life and apostolic work of the Salesian Cooperators. I thank Sr Joseph Jackulen Anthony, the Province Delegate for the Salesian Family and the Local Delegates of FMA units for accompanying the Aspirant Cooperators in their initial formation. Let us revive all the units and encourage lay collaboration and apostolic fruitfulness in all our institutions. Let us encourage our young people to dedicate themselves as promised Cooperators.

Annual Spiritual Retreat: The Sisters will be making their Annual Spiritual Retreat from 26 December 2024 to 2 January 2025 at Sacred Heart Home, Gandhi Nagar, Katpadi. We thank Fr Samuel Savio, the Retreat preacher for his availability. We wish our Sisters a happy experience of encounter with the Lord, reviving their vocational freshness.

ADIEU SR ELIZABETH PEENIKKAPARAMBAN: A LIFE OF SERVICE AND DEVOTION: We bid farewell to our dear Sr Peenikkaparamban Elizabeth, lovingly known as Sr. P.D., who returned to her Creator on 29 November 2024 from Auxilium College, Katpadi. Her life was a beacon of faith, love, and service, a testimony to her unwavering dedication to God and others.

Born on 27 May 1937 in Pariyaram, Kerala, to Mr Peenikkaparamban Devassy and Mrs Mecherry Mariam, Sr Elizabeth was the seventh of eleven children in a devout Catholic family. Having lost her parents at a very young age she embraced responsibility with grace caring for her younger siblings with

love and maturity. Three daughters of the family, including Sr Elizabeth, dedicated their lives to the Church, a reflection of the family's deep faith.

In 1966, Sr Elizabeth began her journey with the FMA congregation, making her first profession in 1969 and final profession in 1975. She served tirelessly in the communities of Bangalore, Yercaud, Thanjavur, Broadway, Polur, and Katpadi. Her roles included catering, sacristan, assisting professional schoolgirls, village outreach, and later, prayer ministry. She carried out every task with simplicity, humility, and a heart full of love for God and her community.

Sr Elizabeth had a special affection for priests especially the Salesians. Her cheerful demeanour and humour endeared her to the young Sisters. Even as her health declined in recent years, she remained steadfast in faith, embracing suffering with grace and dedicating herself to prayer and reflection.

Her final year, confined to bed, was a testament to her resilience. Despite her illness, she continued to inspire those around her with her quiet strength. She received excellent care, particularly during her stay at Christian Medical College Hospital, Vellore, and from the dedicated Sisters and caregivers at Auxilium College.

We extend heartfelt gratitude to Sr Josephine Antony Raj, the animator, and the Sisters of Auxilium College. We owe special thanks to her niece Sr Celine Anthony of INK, members of the Peenikkaparamban family, and the doctors, nurses, and caregivers who supported her all through her illness.

As we fondly remember her, we echo the words of St Paul: *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."* Sr Elizabeth's life of service, prayer, and love will remain a guiding light for us all.

Rest in eternal peace dear Sr. P.D., until we meet again and in the meanwhile continue to intercede for us, especially for fervent vocations to our Province and the Institute.

CONGRATULATIONS

- ❖ Congratulations and best wishes to Mgr Rev Dr Ambrose Pichaimuthu on his Episcopal ordination as Bishop of the Diocese of Vellore. May your new ministry be enriched with grace, wisdom, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you lead and serve the faithful. We pray that your journey in this sacred role brings abundant blessings to the Diocese of Vellore and the Church at large.

NOTE OF THANKS

- ❖ Thanks to Sr Anthony Raj Christina and the community, Sr Chinnappan Gracy Fatima and the Community, Sr Samala Elisa and the Community, Sr Paul M. Mary and the Community and Sr Salvadore Gertrude M. Nirmala and the Community for hosting and arranging for the Tri-Monthly Recollection for Senior Sisters at Fatima Convent, Kodambakkam on 1 November 2024; at Sacred Heart Home, Katpadi and Mary Immaculate Convent, Tirupattur on 10 November 2024, at Omanthai, Sri Lanka on 13 November 2024; and at Pethanaickenpalayam on 19 November 2024.

- ❖ We offer our heartfelt thanks to Sr Chinnappan Gracy Fatima and the community of Sacred Heart Home, Katpadi for hosting and arranging the Young Sisters' animation on 1 November and Recollection on 2 November 2024.
- ❖ Sincere thanks to Sr Lazar Maria Nirmala, the Delegate of Sri Lanka, Sr Arokiasamy Rachel Mary and the community of Auxilium Convent, Negombo for hosting and arranging for the Tri-Monthly Animation and Recollection for Juniors on 5 and 6 November 2024.
- ❖ We express our deepest gratitude to Sr Sebastian Elizabeth and the Community of Mazzarello Home, Tirupattur for conducting and hosting the SPM training programme for the students of Fatima Matriculation School, Kodambakkam and Kingsford from 11 to 14 November 2024.
- ❖ A note of thanks to Sr Anthony Raj Christina and the community of Kodambakkam and Sr Anthony Raj Josephine and the community of Auxilium College for hosting the Triennial Evaluation Province Assembly of Batch I at Auxilium College, Katpadi on 16 November 2024 and of Batch II at Fatima Convent, Kodambakkam on 17 November 2024. My sincere thanks to the Delegates, Sr Susai Josephine Rani and Sr Ambrose Arokia Jayaceli, for their animation and hard work.
- ❖ I express my gratitude to Sr Alphonse Mary J Isabella, Sr Mahimainathan Sathiyavani the Coordinators of Social Development and Sr Susainathan Ayesha Bindhu in charge of Women Group, VTC and Young at Risk, for planning and organizing various competitions at the local level in view of Orange Week celebrations from 19 to 25 November 2024.
- ❖ A note of thanks to Sr Maria Louis Isabel Sirumalar and Sr Anthony Sheeba for organizing the online VIDES meeting on 23 November 2024.
- ❖ A big thanks to Sr Rajendran Selvarani and Sr Dharmalingam Jeyaseeli, Youth Pastoral Coordinators for organizing the Past Pupils' Delegates' Meet on 24 November 2024, to Sr Kanickaraj Mary Tamizharasi and the community of Arni for hosting it and for Sr Ambrose Arokia Jayaceli for the animation.
- ❖ I express my gratitude to Sr Anthony Raj Christina and the community of Fatima Convent, Kodambakkam for hosting the Provincial Council Meeting on 28 and 29 November 2024.

HEARTFELT SYMPATHIES

Our loving prayers and condolences to all those who lost their dear ones in November 2024:

- To Sr Anthony Cruz Mathalen Mary at the demise of her uncle Mr Anand Raj (66) at Viluppuram on 23 November 2024
- To Sr Savari Fathima and Sr Susainathan Ayesha Bindhu at the demise of her Maternal Aunt Mrs Kanikai Mary (60) at Udayendiram on 27 November 2024.
- To the Provincial Fr Silveira Savio and the confreres of INB province at the demise of Fr Vincent Rasquinha SDB (78) on 30 November 2024.

LIVING IN OUR MEMORY

- 03 † Sr Giovanna Battista (1982), Sr Martha Griffiths (2008), Sr Annina Vembenickel (2015)
- 04 † Sr Berta Sperrfechter (1991)
- 07 † Sr Priscilla Fernandes (2002)
- 08 † Sr Helen Fernandes (2012)

- 11 † Sr Mary Josephine Anthony (2004)
 14 † Sr Clementina Lobo (2002)
 15 † Sr Terezija Medvesek (2001)
 17 † Sr Mary Bout (1994), Sr Rafaela Gisbert (2006)
 19 † Sr Amalorpava Mary Asirvatham (2019)
 22 † Sr Maddalena Maretta (1966)
 27 † Sr Beda Maria Fernandes (1967), Sr Angela Daglio (1996)
 28 † Sr Raffaella Arduini (1970)
 30 † Sr Vittoria Devasahayam (2017)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

01 - 02	Sun - Mon	Course on Self-Awareness and Inner Freedom, Yercaud (Prof. Batches 1981 - 1991)
04 - 05	Wed - Thu	Course on Self-Awareness and Inner Freedom, Yercaud (Prof. Batches 1992 - 2002)
07 - 08	Sat - Sun	Course on Self-Awareness and Inner Freedom, Yercaud (Prof. Batches 2003 - 2018)
10	Tue	Human Rights Day - Short Video Competition (Formal and Supplementary) for students at the community level
14 - 15	Sat - Sun	Provincial Council, Auxilium College, Gandhi Nagar, Katpadi
26 Dec- 02 Jan 2025	Thu - Thu	Annual Retreat I, Sacred Heart Home, Gandhi Nagar, Katpadi
27 - 28	Fri - Sat	House Staff Retreat, St Joseph Convent, Arni

On 5 December we commemorate **Bl. Philip Rinaldi (1856 - 1931)**. Bl. Philip Rinaldi captivated by Don Bosco's charism at 22, dedicated his life to the Salesian mission. As a priest and later Rector Major, he played a key role in forming young Salesians, strengthening the Salesian Cooperators, founding the Past Pupils Federations, and establishing the Volunteers of Don Bosco. His visionary leadership expanded the Salesian mission, particularly in Spain, and emphasized spiritual renewal, missionary efforts, and social outreach, including aiding young working women. Beatified by St John Paul II in 1990, his memorial on 5 December reminds us to emulate his faith, zeal, and dedication in living Don Bosco's spirit.

On 8 December we celebrate the Solemnity of the *Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary*, which commemorates Mary's unique privilege of being conceived without original sin, a grace granted by God through the merits of Jesus Christ. This feast honours Mary's immaculate beginning in the womb of her mother, St Anne, and highlights God's plan in preparing a pure vessel for the Incarnation of His Son. Defined as dogma by Pope Pius IX in *Ineffabilis Deus* in 1854, the Immaculate Conception asserts that Mary was preserved from original sin from the moment of her conception, a preeminent redemption through Christ. This doctrine, rooted in centuries of Marian devotion and theological reflection, celebrates Mary's role in salvation history as a model of purity and holiness. St. John Bosco urged devotion to Mary, encouraging her example of openness to God's

will, a heart free from selfishness and sin, and an unwavering commitment to virtue. As we honour Mary on this solemnity, let us strive to emulate her purity in our thoughts, words, and actions, becoming mediations of God's grace in our communities and the mission. May Our Lady, conceived without sin, intercede for us as we seek holiness and journey towards the fullness of life.

Human Rights Day, observed annually on **December 10**, commemorates the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. This day highlights the universal rights inherent to all people, regardless of race, gender, nationality, or religion, including the rights to freedom, equality, and dignity. It serves as a reminder of the ongoing global struggle to uphold justice and fairness and calls for collective action to address human rights violations. Human Rights Day inspires individuals and nations to reaffirm their commitment to protecting and promoting these fundamental freedoms for all. Let us educate our young people to respect human dignity and promote social justice and peace.

Christmas, celebrated on **December 25**, marks the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Saviour of humanity, and the Prince of Peace! It is a season of joy, love, and hope, symbolizing God's gift to the world through the incarnation. It is the time to build peace, to manifest generosity and family spirit. Beyond the celebrations, Christmas invites us to reflect on the message of Christ's humble birth in a manger and His call to live in love and service to others. Let us become messengers of Peace!

As I conclude, I urge you dear Sisters, to read the Circular Letter No.1043 of Mother Chiara Cazzuola, which speaks on the gift of vocation and invites us to an honest introspection on our mission. I encourage you to reflect deeply on Article 73 of our Constitutions, which Mother General recommended: *"In gratitude to God for calling us to the life of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, let us take special responsibility for vocations to our Institute. Let us ask for vocations through incessant prayer and by living with joyful and constant fidelity."* May this reflection rekindle our zeal, inspiring us to embrace our vocation with renewed joy, prayerful dedication, and steadfast love.

A very happy feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mother Mary to all especially to the communities of Mary Immaculate, Tirupattur and Yellagiri Hills who keep their feast!

I wish each one of you, Sisters, young people, members of the educating Communities, and Salesian family members a fervent Season of Advent and a Blessed celebration of Christmas!

Yours affectionately,

Sr. Devadoss Margaret

Sr Devadoss Margaret

INM FMA Provincial



ITINERARY OF THE PROVINCIAL
December 2024

08 - 10	Sun - Tue	Provincial Visit, Auxilium Home, Gandhi Nagar, Katpadi
09	Mon	Episcopal Ordination of Mgr Rev Dr Ambrose Pichaimuthu, Bishop-Elect of the Diocese of Vellore, at Don Bosco High School, Vellore
10 - 12	Tue - Thu	Provincial Visit, Polur
12 - 14	Thu - Sat	Provincial Visit, Jawadhi Hills
14 - 15	Sat - Sun	Provincial Council, Auxilium College, Gandhi Nagar, Katpadi
16 - 17	Mon - Tue	Provincial Visit, Michaelpuram
18 - 20	Wed - Fri	Provincial Visit, Sacred Heart Home, Gandhi Nagar, Katpadi
22	Sun	Provincial Visit, Mannivakkam

