

## Making a World of Difference: Beginning with the New

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“We’ve got two things in common,” National Director Father Andrew Small, OMI told his new friend 'Ananda' in Bangladesh. Since a look at the duo might make one think otherwise, he quickly clarified the statement for the child whose name means “joy.” “We’re both small,” Father Andrew said with a smile, indicating his own last name and the boy’s age and height, “but we’re big in God’s eyes.” Then came a mission connection: “And we both went to Oblate parish schools.”

The start of Father Andrew’s mission journey in Bangladesh January 19, 2012 was in the newest diocese in the country, Sylhet, announced as a new mission diocese by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI just in July 2011. (Originally Sylhet was part of the Dhaka Archdiocese.) He was greeted with a music-filled rally on his arrival at Kalagool ESA Primary School at Kalagool Tea Estate in Khadim Nagar, Sylhet. (Bangladesh is one of the major tea-producing countries in the world.) The school is run by Oblate missionary Fathers, the Religious Community to which Father Andrew now belongs and the priests who educated him as a child. That village includes 50 families, all depending on the tea gardens for a living.



Father Andrew was welcomed also by another Oblate priest, Sylhet’s Bishop, Bejoy D’Cruze, OMI. Of the diocese’s seven parishes, in fact, six are run by Oblate missionary priests, with one parish staffed by Holy Cross missionaries. Sylhet is a tribal diocese. In total, 22 priests, including two local priests, and 33 religious Sisters serve in those parishes. Out of a population of about 8.2 million, some 17,000 are Catholic. “With such a small tribal community, employed mostly in tea plantations, there is a lot to do,” Bishop Bejoy observed.

Sylhet is known for some 132 tea estates in the hilly and forested terrain. The Catholic Church in Bangladesh is known for its services, which are open to all communities. “The Church has a lot to offer the poor and those most in need,” says Bishop Bejoy. He noted that most don’t earn enough - about 50 cents a day - and cannot afford daily necessities, including food, clothing and housing. They can’t even send their children to school, or receive adequate health care when they are sick, Bishop

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Bejoy added, noting that education and health services are among his top priorities. And, of course, there is the need always to reveal Christ's saving love to the poor and vulnerable. Catholics worldwide, through the Pontifical Mission Societies, can offer what they can to support Bishop Bejoy, and the priests, religious and lay catechists serving with him.

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