

## Diocese of Sylhet - Mission Appeal (2020)

I am Bp. Bejoy N. D'Cruze, happy to share about mission and ministry of Sylhet Diocese with you. Sylhet in Bangladesh is a new Diocese, erected in September, 2011. I am the first bishop of this Diocese. In the beginning literally I was a landless and homeless bishop. He lived in the rental Muslim house for five years. By the Grace of God and help of many benefactors I managed to buy a few pieces of land, land is very expensive because of overpopulation. We built our first house for my Priests, for me and for the use of meeting, gathering and retreats. The first Church in Sylhet city where there are 350,000 people mostly Muslims and a Seminary where we have 37 Seminarians. I don't have a Cathedral or a Pastoral Centre. There are eight Dioceses in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is predominantly a Muslim country, 160 million people, Christians are less than one percent.

It is a Diocese of indigenous people. They are very simple, close to the nature, have a great sense of hospitality and faithful to their religious obligations. This is the region where we grow tons of Tea, very good quality tea. One of them is Lipton Tea which comes not only from Bangladesh but from Sylhet Diocese. A good number of Catholics work in the Tea plantations. They are poor not because they are lazy but they are denied a just pay. Even today one earns USD 1.25 for one's hard labour per day. With this little money one can't buy 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 Church stands by them. Though it is a new Diocese there are 60 primary/elementary schools in the villages, 6 secondary schools, 10 boarding hostels for 800 children at the Parish Centers where they stay, get enough food and good education and formation. In our schools we have about 9,000 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 Mother Teresa. We provide services to all, irrespective of caste and creed. Since 2019 Diocese has Centre for the handicapped children where we have 16 children. Here they learn sign language and brail. Now are building a proper house for them spending about USD 100,000.oo. There are 115 paid Catechists. Though it is a new diocese and Muslim country but there is a big possibility of evangelization. There are 700,000 Hindu workers in the Tea plantations 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 spread of Covid – 19, now our main work is to supply food to many poor families both Christians and Non Christians especially 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.

Many ask me about the relationship between Christians and Muslims because there are discrimination and violence in the Muslim countries. Here Christians have been living in peace and harmony for ages together. Since five years situation has been deteriorating like many other Muslim countries. Fr. Piero Parolari, an Italian PIME, 65 years old, was a medical doctor, 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, body was full of blood, fell down from the bike, passerby took him to the hospital. On 22 March, 2016, Hossain Ali, 60 years old was brutally killed in the day light; 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, Capital, 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. I was threatened to death on 22 December, 2015. Of course so far nothing happened to me, still safe, Polices gourds the Bishop's House but I move freely everywhere because I have to visit my people and carry out my pastoral activities. Maybe they have forgotten me. Please pray for the safety of minority in all the Muslim countries especially Bangladesh.

I would like to thank the Parish Priest for giving me this opportunity to share with you about the Mission and ministry about Sylhet. Sincere thanks for your kindness and generosity for the mission of Sylhet.

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