

## **St. Joseph's Parish, Kumarikata**

St. Joseph's parish at Kumarikata is one of the vibrant parishes of the Archdiocese of Guwahati, having the highest number of Catholics. It is 92 kilometres away from the state capital and shares border with the Kingdom of Bhutan. The parish covers an area of 4,000 square kilometres. It has only two percentage of Catholic population, mostly hailing from tribal communities: Bodos, Adivasis, Garos, Santhals, Rabhas and Rajabhasies. Many of these tribes are migrants from Bihar, Bangladesh, West Bengal and other parts of Assam. Their migration began during the time of the British had continued till recent years. The highest number of Catholics is from the communities of Adivasi and Santhal. They had migrated from Chotanagpur to work in the tea gardens and Jute plantations. Having no other source of income other than the mere wages they earn they continue to struggle even today to make their living. Other tribes rely on farming and small-scale trade in their locality.

### **The pioneering years**

The first Catholics of Kumarikata were from Kokrajhar, which was part of the mission centre of Barpeta Road, managed by the Salesians of Don Bosco. The mission centre at Barpeta Road is one of the earliest Catholic establishments in Assam Valley opened in 1936. It served as landing pad for several other missionary ventures; missionaries stayed at the centre and visited new areas and established new centres. The place is known for having had the visits of Bishop Marengo who met the Boro Catholics who had settled in the villages of Kalajhar and Patkijuli.

### **Missionary Ventures**

In 1972 the parish of Doomni was established. When Fr. V. M Joseph joined Doomni Mission in 1974, he extended the mission work to Kumarikata area. In the following year he began to reside in Mariampur, a village away from Kumarikata and during that time a plot of land was bought in Kumarikata and a parish was established, dedicated to St. Joseph.

At the invitation of Bishop Robert Kerketta of Tezpur, the Sisters of Mary Immaculate came to Kumarikata on 26 June 1984. They learnt the language of the people and visited villages. Realising the importance of healthcare, they started a dispensary and in order to help the education of the poor children they started a boarding. It helped many children from different villages to get educated. Besides these, they began a vocational training centre and conducted awareness programmes in the villages especially for women and children.

Prior to the establishment of the school at Kumarikatta in 2003, the parish opened a school at its sub-centre, Shashipur in 1994. It was mainly to build a rapport with Bhutanists and to extend the mission work in Bhutan.

At present the mission has 6053 Catholics, within 1140 families that are spread over 41 villages. The mission is managed by the Salesian community with Fr. Bhaskar Raj Chinthamalla as parish

priest, Fr. Zacharias Minj and Fr. Raphael as assistant parish priests. The sub-centre at Shashipur is taken care of by Fr. MC. George and Br. Xavier Toppo.

## **Conclusion**

The mission centre has been instrumental in transforming the lives of the people in area. The qualitative education provided by the schools has paved way for the people for a better living. Having understood the value of education, parents encourage their children to grab the opportunities provided. They are convinced of the fact that only education can bring about real development.

The centre plays a pivotal role in building families by paying attention to women, girls and children through awareness and vocational training programmes. The empowerment they receive helps them to have a progressive outlook and to support the cause of the society, especially to arrest alcoholism, human trafficking, child labour, witch-hunting, and other such practices.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*