

St. Sebastian's Church, Matia

St. Sebastian's Church, Matia is situated in Goalpara district, which is 146 kilometres away from the state capital. Majority of Catholics in this area are from Garo community, among whom several are migrated from Bangladesh.

Matia is known for *Sri Surya Pahar*, where the Hindus worship the sun god. The place is in the process of becoming an industrial area with the advent of Kohinoor Paper Mill.

The people surrounding the area of the mission are traditional Assamese who are well to do. They own land and farms and are employed. Others who live around the place are from different communities such as Garo, Dalu, Hazong, Boro, Nepali, Rajabanshis and Rabha. They live on farming and daily wages.

Beginning of Catholicism

Earlier, traditional Garos of the place followed *Sangsarik* religion and worshiped ancestral spirit. They had a temple at Nandeswar Hill, situated in Matia. In course of time, the traditional Garos of the place accepted Christianity. The last one to be converted to Christianity was the pundit of *Sangsarik* religion. After his change over to Christianity, the temple was taken over by the Assamese Brahmins and it was converted into a Shiva Temple.

There are also Catholics from the migrant community who are still living in refugee camps, having minimum facilities.

Erection of the parish

St. Sebastian's Parish, Matia was erected on 18 April 2005 by Archbishop Thomas Menampampil and Fr. Crosper Sangmas was appointed as its first parish priest. Realising the need to serve its people better the Archdiocese developed the campus by constructing a school building (2005), prespytry (2008), Girls' Hostel (2009) and Boys' Hostel (2015). The newly built church was consecrated by Archbishop John Moolachira on 21 December 2014.

The Congregation of the Daughters of St. Thomas (DST) joined the mission on 30 December 2006. They offer their service in carrying out the pastoral and educative mission of the parish.

Finding the need to raise the standard of education, the Archdiocese established a school and boarding for both boys and girls. It has helped the children of the place and surrounding villages to have access to qualitative education. The school gives special focus on educating the Catholics. It has 100 seats reserved for them. Besides, some of the Catholics are helped with concessions in fees and a few are given free education.

As the parish consists of many migrants, poor and bonded labourers, its progress and growth is gradual. The parish has taken number of initiatives to assist people to overcome poverty, and

unemployment. It has initiated SHGs, skill trainings, and other programmes to sustain their livelihood.

The parish conducts annual medical camps and awareness programmes on various topics. It has taught people the advantage of livestock management and guided them to avail the many available government schemes such as housing, water supply, and sanitation.

Presently, Fr. Firose Basumatary and Fr. Joseph Perumpallil MCBS serve as parish priest and assistant parish priest respectively.

Conclusion

The presence of the Catholic mission has been instrumental in bringing progress in the lives of the people through education, health care and social ministries. Today people are aware of the importance of bank savings and are keen on planning for their better future. There is a steady progress in the lives of the people.

*** *** ***