

St. Anthony's Church, North Guwahati

St. Anthony's Church, North Guwahati is situated on the banks of the great river Brahmaputra and surrounded by Hindu religious centres of great importance. It is religiously a very significant place for the Assamese as 'Satras' (cradle of their religious faith and movement) and religious training centres had its origin in this part of Assam. It was the fortress of Ahom Kings and hence majority of the people were Brahmin Hindus but at present there are Boros, Garos, Bengalis and South Indians.

The beginning of Christianity

The area began to be under the Christian influence since 1955 when the American Baptist missionaries began to visit the place. They mainly visited the Garos living in Horubaka and Surubaka. They won over most of them and baptised them. It is they who sowed the seeds of Christianity in the place. In order to make the people live the faith, they appointed local leaders from the community as pastors to coordinate the pastoral activities.

The beginning of Catholicism

The seeds of Catholicism were sown by the Missionaries of Charity in the late 1980's. There were a few attempts made for the evangelization of the Baptist Garos of Horubaka in North Guwahati but they could not make any headway as the people became hostile and chased them away. They were even prevented from entering the village.

The Franciscan Friars (OFM) made their entry into North Guwahati mission in 1997 at the invitation of Archbishop Thomas Menampampil. Friars Sagaya Soosairaj, Singarayar and Thaddeus Baxla arrived in Northeast in October 1997 and were assigned to serve in Rangjuli and North Guwahati missions. Friars Soosairaj and Thaddeus began to live in a rented house in North Guwahati from 8 October 1999. They came in contact with Mrs. Maria and her Mother - Philorius G Momin and her brother Dilbert G Momin in 2004. They accepted Catholic faith and became the first Catholics of this mission, living among the staunch Baptists in Horubaka.

Establishment of the mission

It took almost six years for the friars to buy a piece of land in North Guwahati as the staunch Brahmin Hindus were not in favour of the missionaries' presence in their land. Since education is the entry point of evangelization, the friars began St. Anthony's School in a rented house of Mr. Pudum Saikia on 18 January 2005. In spite of the continuous resistance from the locals, the friars managed to purchase a piece of land in Abhoypur, North Guwahati and put up a simple friary and a ground floor building for the School. On 27 January 2007 Archbishop Thomas

Menamparampil inaugurated the school building in the presence of the then Minister Provincial Friar Arok Sundar OFM.

Erection of the Parish

The parish was erected in 2008 with a small chapel in the school premises which became the parish chapel for the handful of catholic population in North Guwahati. Fr. Wilson Paul Nattalil OFM was the first parish priest. Fr. Tony Marshall OFM is the present parish priest and Fr. Tomy Joseph Palackal OFM is the assistant parish priest.

Besides the Garo Catholics, there are others who are working in the local institutions and some others who are pursuing their studies in Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and GNRC Hospital.

Conclusion:

"He who GIVES us, teaches us to GIVE and it is in giving that we receive." is the living project of the community at North Guwahati. The witnessing life of the friars and Catholics is certainly an inspiration to everyone around.

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