

St. Patrick Church, Sonapur

Beginnings of Catholicism

After the World War I some families of Adivasi tribe settled down on the southern hill-slope of Moniganj mountain range of Sonapur. Yakub Dhanwar, Henry Purthy and Paulus Murari were some of the Catholics among them. And, they seemed to be the first Catholics in that area which was then part of the Archdioceses of Shillong. They were pastured by the priests from St. Joseph's Church, Panbazar. As per the oral tradition, in 1920 the first village chapel was made. The land for this village chapel was donated by Late Yakub, Henry and Christina.

When Fr. Patrick Burns became the parish priest of St. Joseph's Church, Panbazar, he helped the Catholics of Ural to start the work for a concrete church building. The villagers were cooperative and the construction was completed and blessed in 1965 by Bishop Stephen Ferrando.

Growth and expansion

In the subsequent years a few more became Catholics. They were mainly from the communities of Garos and Karbis who live alongside Karbi Anglong. After the establishment of the new parish at Sonaighuli in 1978, the Catholics of Sonapur area were looked after by the new parish.

In 1990 the Catholics of Ural celebrated the Silver Jubilee of their village Church, under the guidance of Fr. Mario Porcu SDB, the Parish Priest of Sonaighuli. The Jubilee celebrations were presided over by Archbishop Hubert Rosario of Shillong- Guwahati.

On 22 May 1994 more than 100 families of Baptist Christians from the villages of Marlap, Bantheporongnam, Amguri and Rongphar became Catholics. This event made the Archdiocese to consider the possibility of opening a parish at Sonapur.

Initial preparations for opening the parish

In January 1994, Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil entrusted Fr. Joseph Olickal with the responsibility of opening a parish at Sonapur. He stayed in a small room adjacent to the village church at Ural Basti which was inhabited by 47 Adivasi Catholic families belonging to Munda Tribe. Meanwhile, Fr. Lukose Cheruvalel SDB, the financial administrator initiated the process of acquiring a suitable plot of land.

As the negotiations were on for the purchase of the new land, Fr. Joseph Olickal constructed 35 houses for the poor families of Ural Basti with the help of Karl Kubel Stifsting of Germany. Fr. Lukose Cheruvalel coordinated the project. The houses were inaugurated by late Silvius Condapan, the then Labour Minister and blessed by Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil on 18 October 1995.

On Pentecost Sunday in 1995, thirteen Baptist families belonging to Karbi Tribe were officially received into the Catholic Church during the Holy Eucharist presided over by Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil at Amguri.

After a long struggle, 18 bighas of land with a dilapidated house was acquired at Nazirahat along the national highway. After the renovation of the house and required arrangements, Fr. Joseph Olickal began to stay in the new plot.

In December 1995, the village church at Khetri which was closed for some years due to misunderstandings between the Catechist and the faithful was re-opened by Fr. Joseph Olickal. Since then, the Catholics were organised and celebration of the sacraments resumed.

Establishment of the parish

In December 1995, Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil canonically erected St. Patrick's parish at Nazirakhat, Sonapur with Fr. Joseph Olickal as its first parish priest. In the following year on 16 January, St. Patrick's School was opened with 28 students on its roll. The parish facilitates education for children from far away villages by providing boarding for both boys and girls.

On 25 January 1996 the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC) began their missionary work in the parish. They are engaged in the pastoral, educative and healing ministry of the parish.

In May 1996, Fr. Joseph Olickal was transferred and Fr. Norbert Kerketta of Dibrugarh Diocese took over as parish priest.

In December 1998, Fr. Mathew Kottaram, Vicar General of the Archdiocese blessed the foundation for the new school building in the presence of Fr. Alex Ravindran HGN, the parish priest. The completed school building was blessed on 4 September 1999 by Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil.

Sr. Silbina Aind MC and Fr. Nicodim Aind SDB are the first religious from the parish. Sr. Silbina Aind was professed in 1999 and Fr. Nicodim in 2001. Sr. Omani Kathar HSM from Rongphar village was the first Amri Karbi to become a religious.

Mr. Korno Ramdey and his family were the first Tiwas to be baptised. They were baptised by Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil on 19 March 2001.

Fr. Joseph Kallikatt and Fr. Rohan Mascarenhas served the mission as parish priests.

In 2012 the construction works for the extension of the school began by Fr. Crosper Sangma, the parish priest. The work was completed in 2013 under the supervision of Fr. Johnny Mavelil. In the same year, the work for the new parish church was started. It was completed in April 2014 and was consecrated by Archbishop John Moolachira.

In January 2015, Ural village Church celebrated its Golden Jubilee. Bishop Michael Akasius of Tezpur, Bishop Joseph Aind of Dibrugarh and Archbishop John Moolachira solemnized the three-day long jubilee celebrations.

Conclusion

Sonapur parish has 220 catholic families spread across in 8 villages. They are from the communities of Adivasi, Boro, Amri Karbi and Tiwa. The catholic life of the parishioners is maintained by various activities such as annual sabha, organised programmes in the villages, and regular catechists' meeting.

The parish life is strengthened through various associations like catholic youth association, catholic women association, altar boys and girls association, holy childhood association, Sunday school students association and catholic teachers' association.

Presently, Fr. Narzarene Acharya and Fr. Pramod Kumar Digal are serving the parish as parish priest and associate parish priest.

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