

## EVALUATION – REPORT ON THE RELIGIOUS APPROACH TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN CHUKNOGOR MISSION (April 2002)



1. – MY ASSIGNMENT TO CHUKNOGOR. After my coming back from the sabbatical year, I was assigned to Chuknogor. The superior already defined the purpose of my presence when I was asked to go there:

- Pastoral care of the new baptised people;
- Catechumenate for those who want to become Christians.

I joined Fr. Luigi and Fr. Sergio in Chuknogor last February 2001. Fr. Luigi remained there only a few days just to give me the opportunity of an exchange of ideas and vision about Chuknogor and its activities.

2. – SOME PREMISES. a) *BEING ACQUAINTED WITH THE NEW SITUATION*. At the age of 61 it was not so easy for me to start again. My first task was that of being acquainted with this new situation: to look around and try to understand what was going on. So starting from Chuknogor I paid a detailed visit to six different villages of the area, where we have tuition programs, trying to collect all the data concerning the families and the situation of the villages. It was my intention to extent this visiting program also to the other villages. But then the raining season came and I stopped my going around. Up to now I did not resume it, just because it is not clear to me what I'm going to do with these data.

b) *LINK WITH THE PAST*. No need to say that the presence of Fr. Luigi, through a long process of awareness raising, has created a movement among the Rishi people, especially among the young ones that would not be easily stopped. That's enough to justify his 20 years of presence in the area. Fr. Luigi's two souls are continued on one hand by Fr. Sergio in the line of awareness process and human promotion according to the report we have just listened to and on the other hand by myself in the religious approach to the Christian faith. Although Fr. Sergio uses the plural form in his report, Sergio himself carries on the different activities he is talking about. Obviously we discuss together and especially in the matter where money are concerned we consult each other before taking any decision. We try to use transparency as rule among ourselves and in the approach to the others.

c) *PRESERVING THE ORIGINALITY OF CHUKNOGOR PROJECT*. The first intuition I got soon after my arrival here was that the different kind of gatherings of the baptised people or of the catechumens should happen in a separated place outside the mission compound. This move would guarantee the originality of Chuknogor as a project meant mainly for the non-Christians. At the same time it would give to the catechumenate project more consistency and freedom of action. Then I abandoned the idea of moving out just because we have enough land inside the compound for this purpose. Actually there is a need of a proper place where to carry on this activity. We wanted also to submit a project to the superior in this regard, but then we decided to postpone the idea in order to consult the S. X. Community during the April Assembly.

**A. PASTORAL CARES OF THE SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.** As you know, we have in Chuknogor a small community of about 10 people, who were baptised by Fr. Luigi during the Jubilee Year 2000. Beside there are also two old Christian families, whose mothers originally are from Baradal. Last year all of them were confirmed by the Bishop Michael in St. Joseph's Cathedral and among them we had the first two Christian couples. I start the report in this matter by saying that this community is a privileged one because in no other place of the world such a small group of people has so much attention: we have our regular celebration on Sundays with the due preparation every Friday and then on Mondays we have Bible class. Twice a month a PIME Sister comes for teaching songs. This should be an apostolic community. Instead we do not see any sign of creativity or any attempt to communicate to the others their own experience of faith.

DISCIPLESHIP OR SENSE OF BELONGING TO A COMMUNITY? Right at the beginning so many questions arose within me about the process of conversion started in Chuknigor. I know that Fr. Luigi's approach was that of discipleship based on the principle that the way of becoming Christians should be the way of becoming disciples of Jesus. No doubt about the excellence of this method which should be anyway integrated in a vision of the church as a community of disciples. The individual approach on the one hand offers the advantage of a freedom of choice and therefore of a deeper understanding of one's own faith, but on the other hand it presents some difficulties.

a) THE DIFFICULTIES are related first of all to the original community (somaj ), where they do belong to, which is the Hindu community. Instead of transforming the environment through the impact of their presence, they are on the contrary still stuck on the old mentality and undergo its negative influence.

b) THEN THERE ARE ALSO difficulties related to the larger Christian Community as such. There is a lack of the sense of belonging. The community of St. Joseph's to which we are supposed to refer is far away and does not show any interest in the Chuknigor affairs. This perception of mine was confirmed in the last Pastoral Assembly in Jessore. In several occasions we tried to keep in touch with Fr. Bablu, who is our Parish Priest: we had the celebration of the Confirmation in St. Joseph's; the celebration of two marriages for which we got a regular delegation; I invited also Fr. Bablu to inaugurate officially the catechumenate in Chuknigor. But for them we do not exist. On the eyes of the local church our position appear to be a strange one, a sort of erratic block, outside of any scheme of theirs. This could be a positive sign, but no doubt that this attitude creates frustration on the side of these young people, who are looked upon as strange subjects during these kind of gatherings. Beside the impressions our people got while participating to the last annual assembly are not so good considering especially the language the so called old Christians use for instance while addressing to the authority (read: the Bishop, who is always called *Probhu* and gives the impression of being a divinity, which is not according to the spirit of the Gospel).

B. THE CATECHUMENATE. 1. - BACKGROUND. Fr. Luigi opened the doors also to those families of Chuknigor who wanted to become Christians. Some of these families were already cut off while Fr. Luigi was still in Chuknigor and their names appeared on the so-called *black list*, because they spoilt the money of the local *somity*. The others, who remained (some 20 families), after my arrival very quickly revealed their very reason for becoming Christians. As far as I could understand, they hoped that by becoming Christians they would get more benefits from the mission. So, when they first came to me, I told them very clearly that Chuknigor Mission remains open to everybody: Muslim-Hindu-Christian, with no difference of religion and caste and we'll help those who are in need according to criteria of our policy. The conclusion was that most of them did not come any more.

2. - PRESENT SITUATION: a) A GROUP OF 20 BOYS AND GIRLS. Last May 2001 a group of about 20 boys and girls from class IV up to class IX came to me asking to be instructed in the Christian faith. At their request I told them to submit a written petition signed by their parents or guardians, who would guarantee that they were coming freely and not by being forced by me.

b) THE GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE. Last August a group of 15 young people, most of them college students asked me to lead their way to Jesus. They were told to present a written request and soon after we started our long journey.

c) ADULT PEOPLE. Almost at the same time a group of 5 families, whose children were already attending to the religious course, asked to come and join the instruction. They also were requested to present a written petition.

3. – THE METHOD. We know the importance the catechumenate had in the early church. We heard that in Africa the catechumenate still remains the milestone on the way to the Christian faith. But here, in Bangladesh, we have no experience of this kind, which we can confront with. So many questions are waiting for an answer: From where and how to start? Old Testament? New Testament? And then how long will the catechumenate last? One year, two years, four years? And what about the connection between what we learn and what we live? Who will judge about that?

a) PERSONAL PREPARATION: 1. - *Long term preparation*: Being aware of the importance of my role in this approach to the Christian faith, in order to have an up-to-dated vision of the teaching of the Church, I studied, in a regular base, the Catechism of the Catholic Church in the Bengali translation. It was hard, but it helped me very much in refreshing my knowledge and in preparing my program.

2. – *Immediate preparation*: For every encounter, I try to prepare well ahead what I'm going to say to the different groups.

b) PROGRAMMING THE CLASSES FOR THE DIFFERENT GROUPS. Since the beginning, I tried to make clear to every body the importance of the journey we started:

- It's a long-term journey that will last at least 4 years;
- What we learn is not just a lesson we pick up, but it's a way of living: we'll try to conjugate into life what we learn.

I meet the 3 groups in 3 different days of the week: - Wednesday for the adult group; Thursday for the boys and girls group and Friday for young people. The teaching is basically a bible teaching. For the adult group and the boys and girls we use *Nuton Manusher Abirbhab* as basic text and for the group of young people *PonchoPustok*, which is the Bengali translation made by Fr. Martoccia of a commentary to the Pentateuch.

Chuknogor, 20. 04.02  
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