

# INDIA - GUWAHATI REGION

Official Languages: **Hindi, Assamese, English and Bangla**

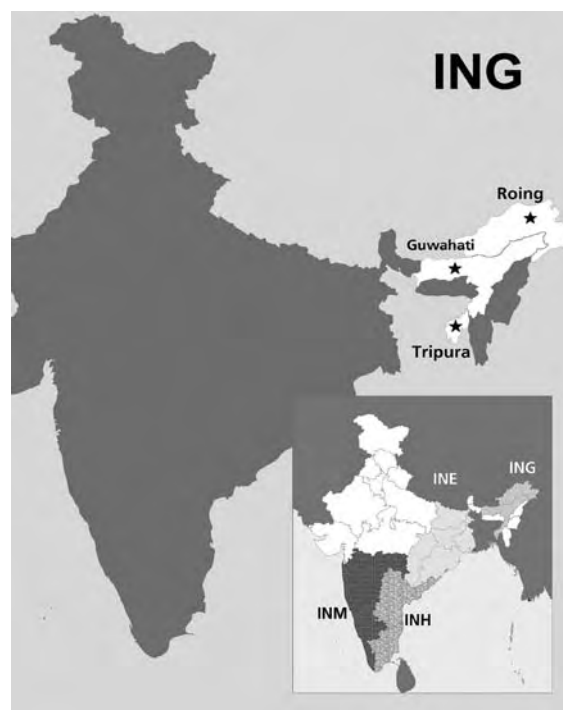
## Vision Statement

*“I have come that you may have Life”  
(Jn 10:10)*

## Mission Statement

*Impelled by the Triune God, the members of India Guwahati Region seek to deepen the experience of the Divine in us and in our people. Sharing in the religious aspirations of our people, we seek to remain united to Christ, to one another and to all. Hence we are committed to share the Word of God with the people of North East India through the fourfold prophetic dialogue, and endeavor to promote the “fullness of life” for all. Living an authentic religious missionary life in intercultural communities, we bind ourselves to establish harmony and fraternal communion among ourselves and with our people.*

*We accompany them in their search for human dignity and cultural identity, and strive to work for their integral development. We will join hands with all people of good will to preserve the integrity and sanctity of creation.*



## 1. Societal Setting

North East India, though politically an integral part of India, is culturally and ethnically a world apart. It accounts for 8% of the total geographical area of the country and has 3.9% of the total population. There are 300 distinct tribes who speak around 400 dialects and languages. It is estimated that 32 million people live here, among whom 9.1 million are made up of indigenous people. The state of Meghalaya has 81% of the population as tribal while Arunachal has 70% and Tripura has 29%. North East India as a

whole is surrounded by countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, Tibet, China and Myanmar. Land and natural resources, customary laws, and cultural identity, inter-cultural living, a deep sense of the sacred, community centered living, openness to face new challenges, and human resources are the strengths of the region. There are various problems of development – problems of economic disparity, illiteracy, intolerance based on religion and caste, regionalism, desire for political self-rule, migration, joblessness, displacement of peoples from their land, etc. People in this region follow the traditional religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Animism. Compared to the rest of the country, the Northeast India Region has a larger following of Catholicism. As per the latest statistics of 2013 the Catholic population stands at 12%.

## 2. Ecclesial setting

Christianity has its origin in India from the apostolic times, but the missionary dimension of the Church was brought to the forefront only in the sixteenth century. The majority of the Christians belong to the Schedule Tribes followed by the backward communities. So, the Church has a lot to contribute to the development of its members and as well as to those who belong to the lower strata of the society.

The Church in the North East consists mainly of the tribal population. The area is economically under-developed and therefore the vast majority

of the people are poor. Most of the dioceses do not have enough diocesan clergy to care for the large number of faithful and those who are open to listen to the good news. The local Bishops depend heavily on the religious congregations, both men and women, for the pastoral development of their respective dioceses. There are enough local vocations in a few older dioceses but most of the dioceses look outside their areas for vocations and missionary activity.

Christians belonging to other denominations outnumber the Catholics. There are no noticeable conflicts among them nor are they overtly antagonistic to Catholicism. Ecumenical movements have not picked up much mainly because of their suspicion of the Catholic Church. Unlike in some other parts of India, the northeast is rather free from conflicts based on religions. Therefore inter-religious collaborative efforts have not been felt as a priority in North East India.

There were conflicts based on cultural and social affiliations and the desire for greater influence in self-government that have given rise to serious conflicts in the past. The issues are far from resolved. The Catholic leadership has been very much involved in finding solutions to conflicts in the past thus becoming peacemakers.

What is peculiar to the SVDs' mission presence in this area, as elsewhere, is that we are known to be primary evangelizers. We form believing communities in the areas that are entrusted to

us. Our primary focus is on this aspect of the mission. The other developmental works are incidental to this work. This explains why we have not developed or built big institutions in our missions. We have a desire to open missions in the neighboring states without neglecting the existing ministries. It still remains a dream that can be realized in the coming few years.

### 3. Intercultural Mission –*Ad Extra*

#### Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
<b>Parish</b>	13	35.1	50.0	45.2
<b>Education</b>	11	29.8	14.0	14.3
Schools	11	-	-	-
Universities	0	-	-	-
<b>Formation/ SVD Vocation</b>	5	10.8	8.4	0
<b>Administration/ Support</b>	4	10.8	16.6	7.1
<b>Other Apostolates</b>	1	2.7	5.5	23.8
JPIC	1	-		
Bible	0	-		
Communication	0	-		
Mission Animation	0	-		
Others	0	-		

#### Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	1	2.7	5.5	9.5
Retired/Sick	0	0	0	0
Others	1	2.7	0	0

#### Main Ministries

The ING confreres work mostly in frontier mission areas and also care for the newly formed communities. Wherever we have parishes we are also catering for the education of the most deprived by providing facilities of schools and hostels. Twenty four of our confreres are involved in parish and educational ministries. The confreres involved in the parish and education ministries are not stuck with these institutional ministries but they are also very much in the forefront of primary evangelization and faith formation.

Of the fifteen dioceses in the North East we work in seven: Agartala (three parishes, two schools, two hostels, in the diocesan minor seminary and pastoral center), Bongaigaon (one parish, one school), Guwahati (only the Regional House), Jowai (one parish, one school, one hostel), Itanagar (three parishes, a quasi-parish, one school and one hostel), Miao (two parishes [Roing & Tezu], one quasi-parish, one school, one hostel for boys), and Tezpur (one SVD Minor Seminary and helping one parish).

We are few in number yet most of our confreres are engaged in more than one ministry like JPIC, ecumenical dialogue, communication, education, promotion of local vocations, initial formation, etc.

**The Anthropological Institute** is one of the specialized ministries we are engaged with. During the past 11 years we have contacted a number of scholarly institutes with reference to universities and organized 11 national seminars. Based on these seminars we have brought out 16 comprehensive volumes in English. Most of them are reference books in universities and major government libraries in India.

### Characteristic Dimensions

The Bible permeates all that we do in our parishes. Preaching the Word of God, Bible sharing in the way of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and Bible seminars in the village communities of the parishes form an essential part of our parish ministry. Mission animation is carried out with regular visits to the villages and training of catechists.

SVD missionaries are 'like us', they are 'one among us', they 'feel for us' is the common saying and feeling among the tribal people of the northeast. Simple life-style, people first approach, and inroads into the tribal frontiers are the roots of this tribal people owning our missionaries as their own tribesmen.

'Water purifier' can be the most fitting analogy for SVD JPIC engagement in the nor-

theast. JPIC has made its tent among the tribal people to be the *Word in Other Words*. It is rooted and evolving from within the tribal life and culture. Instead of fighting for justice and peace which is divisive, our witnessing presence within the tribal settlement, like the **Word Incarnate**, and conscious continuous communion with the inter-tribes, cultures and languages, faiths and beliefs, has created a lifestyle that is just, respectful, peace loving, sharing and caring for one another and nature. The journey of a missionary is of life, livelihood and liberation.

We continue to strive to make JPIC the tribal art of living a happy, healthy and holy life. True to our calling, our life and mission have purified customary laws and addressed conflict settlement processes, treatment of strangers, "outsiders", superstitious beliefs and worship, and destruction of nature for livelihood. Through JPIC we look forward to make life distress-free, disease-free and desire-free.

The ING region has a registered organization called Shalom for the purpose of social work activities in the region. We also help out in the diocesan social activities. Presently one of our confreres is the director of the Agartala diocesan social service society. His involvement puts us in direct touch with the real life situations of the people living in the interior areas. We collaborate with NGOs both of other religious congregations and civil agencies for the promotion of socio-economic development of the most deserving of the people in the region. Protection

of the environment through tree planting and organic farming is given priority.

### **Priorities among Congregational Directions**

The chosen priorities from among the Congregational Directives of the 17<sup>th</sup> General Chapter for our region are: (a) Primary and New Evangelization, (b) Family and Youth Ministry, (c) Ecumenical and Interreligious dialogue, and (d) Social Justice and Eradication of Poverty. We are highly successful in implementing most of our action plans though we faced difficulties because of paucity of personnel, resources, and on account of the vast geographical distances between our mission centers in the region.

**Primary and New Evangelization:** Our region is an area with immense possibilities for primary evangelization. It is a challenging mission too on account of the difficult terrain, poor roads and limited communication facilities. Despite these hardships our confreres were able to carry out some of the activities planned under our first priority of primary and new evangelization. We had planned for evangelization through retreats and video films on biblical themes, biblical seminars, constructing village chapels as visible signs of faith, promoting lay leadership, reaching out to the poor and marginalized through our social apostolate. To a great extent we were successful in implementing these action plans.

**Family and Youth:** This ministry received some attention. One confrere is involved full time in family counseling. He also guides retreats for

parents and youth in the parishes. During these retreats, topics such as Christian principles of family, teachings of the Church with regard to family and youth, importance of family prayer and devotional practices, etc. are given importance. A few of our confreres have organized pilgrimages for their parishioners to other parts of India as a way of strengthening their faith and devotion. People participated with great enthusiasm.

**Interreligious Dialogue:** We did not make much headway in the area of interreligious dialogue. Though other religions are present in this area there has not been much effort made in interreligious dialogue as it is not yet a felt need. Occasionally interreligious meetings are held in Agartala town on important occasions of the festivals of the different religions in which our confreres participate. These are occasions that create good will among the religious leaders in the town. An ecumenical dialogue process is active in the state of Tripura. The other denominations have a good respect for the Catholic Church.

**Social Justice and Eradication of Poverty:** Regarding this ministry, we are in direct contact with the real life situations of the poor in our missions. In various ways the people are a deprived lot left to fend for themselves for their survival. We help them wherever and whenever possible to avail the governmental schemes that are for their benefit. Many a time they are not aware that there are various governmental programs meant for them. Empowering them with civic awareness is what we often do in our missions.

## Collaboration with SSpS and Others

The SVDs and SSpS have collaboration in only one of our mission centers where they help in the school and village missions. Wherever we are working in the parishes there are regular monthly meetings for pastoral planning. We maintain a good relationship at the level of administration. We have good contact with other religious congregations and they are effective mission partners in our region.

In recent years, efforts have been made to promote lay associates in two of our missions but the associations have not reached a level to be recognized as official lay associate groups of our Society.

### 4. Intercultural life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Clerics	34	30	20
Brothers (final vows)	1	1	1
Brothers (temporal vows)	0	2	1
Scholastics	2	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>22</b>

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	46.1	44.0	43.9
Nationalities	1	1	1

**Spirituality:** Through regular district level recollections, annual regional retreats and through a couple of animation programs, we were able to deepen our spiritual life. Praying the morning and evening prayers in common are regular practices in our communities. Confreres who work in the dioceses attend the monthly clergy meetings of the diocese and the recollections. These are occasions for them to receive the sacrament of reconciliation.

**Community:** Our communities are small except for that of the regional house. Periodically the members in the communities come together for evaluating the various activities. These are occasions for appreciating and encouraging the efforts of our confreres. One of the beautiful things about our communities is that practically all of them are intercultural communities. At times this aspect also becomes a problem. As much as possible issues are sorted out in the community itself.

**Leadership:** We organized leadership animation programs before the election process during the previous two regional elections that helped confreres to understand the leadership roles of the superiors and their responsibilities.

**Finance:** The region is far from self-reliant in finance. We have succeeded in making a few of our mission centers self-reliant with regard to the personal maintenance of the members. Efforts are being made to achieve this goal in other centers too.

**Formation:** There is one minor seminary in this region. We strenuously work to recruit vocations within our region. We are handicapped to a great extent to recruit from the responsive areas as we do not have a physical presence in the two vocation-rich dioceses of Imphal and Kohima. The bishops of these dioceses have welcomed us to open mission centers and to promote vocations. Now a vocation promoter is appointed in the seminary for this region.

We were not able to do much ongoing formation other than encouraging our confreres to participate annually in at least one of the renewal programs organized at various centers in the country. The mission secretary of the region organizes spiritual animation and sharing of experiences of young confreres in the first five years of ordination which is much appreciated by them.

Our mission centers are spread far apart geographically. The distance between one center and the other is quite long. Therefore coming together frequently for common spiritual renewal or other programs is rather difficult.

However, we were able to organize a couple of spiritual animation programs in each of the last two triennia in which most of the confreres participated.

We thank the Lord for what we have accomplished in the past years. We look forward with great hope in achieving more with greater commitment, dedication and accountability.

**The parish and education ministries are...also very much in the forefront of primary evangelization and faith formation.**