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DARJEELING DIOCESE NEWSLETTER

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2026

Bishop's House, Darjeeling - 734101 INDIA

MARCH

## Bishop's Message



Dear Brothers  
and Sisters in Christ,

*As we journey through the holy season of Lent, the month of March invites us once again to return to the heart of the Gospel—the call to repentance, renewal, and deeper communion with God. Lent is not merely a time of giving up something; it is a grace-filled season of opening ourselves to the transforming love of Christ, who walks with us in our struggles, strengthens us in our weaknesses, and accompanies us on the path of conversion.*

*This year, I invite every family, parish, religious community, and youth group in our diocese to live Lent with intentionality. Let us make room for silence so that we may hear God's voice. Let us embrace acts of mercy—towards the poor, the lonely, the migrant, the elderly, and the forgotten. And let us renew our commitment to prayer, especially through the Eucharist, the Stations of the Cross, and personal reflection on the Scriptures.*

*In a world often marked by noise, distractions, and divisions, Lent becomes a gentle but firm reminder that true peace begins within a converted heart. When Christ is allowed to reign in our lives, reconciliation becomes possible, forgiveness becomes healing, and charity becomes joyful.*

*As we prepare for the celebration of Easter, may this Lenten season lead us to a deeper encounter with Jesus, who continues to bring hope to our diocese and to each of our families. I encourage all of you to walk this journey together, supporting one another with patience, kindness, and faith.*

*May the Lord bless every household of our diocese with renewed courage, strengthened faith, and the grace to live as witnesses of His compassion.*

*Wishing you a prayerful and grace-filled March.*

+Stephen Lepcha  
Bishop of Darjeeling.

## HAPPENINGS AT ST. JOHN BERCHMANS PARISH-KURSEONG:

### REPAIR WORK OF St. John BERCHMANS PARISH COMMUNITY HALL.

The historic St. John Berchman Parish community hall, a cherished landmark built in 1939, is currently undergoing essential repairs. This initiative is part of "Hamro Gaow Hamro Samadhan" project, a commendable effort by the Government of West Bengal to preserve and enhance local infrastructure for the benefit of the local community.

The repair work was inaugurated on the 26<sup>th</sup> of Feb 2026, with a solemn prayer service, a fitting start for a building that holds great significance for the Parish community. The service was led by Rev. Fr. Pradeep Rai, the Parish Priest, who was accompanied by Rev. Fr. Silas Lepcha, the Assistant Parish Priest, their presence of underscored the importance of the event, bringing together parishioners and lay leader in a moment of thanks giving and hope. "Hamro Gaow Hamro Samadhan" aims to address the needs of communities by restoring key structures and facilities. The project acknowledges the cultural and historical value of buildings like the St. John Berchman Parish community hall, ensuring they continue to serve as centres for community gathering support and brotherhood.

Shri Shadeo Tamang, Pradhan of St. Mary's Gram Panchayat II, along with the Government engineer and contractor and the members of the PFC, executive members of St. John Berchmans Catholic Welfare Association, ICYM Youth, Nari Samaj and local lay leaders were present for the occasion.

As per the approved work scheduled the total cost of the repair work stands at Rupees: 10 lakhs only. The amount comprises the cost for Hall ceiling (new) entire electric wiring of the community hall, office rooms outdoor Kitchen. Besides this, two generators and Solar lighting along the premises of the church compound is also included.

Rev. Fr. Pradeep Rai, the Parish Priest, on behalf of entire Parish community of St. John Berchman Parish expressed his gratitude to the Honourable Chief Minister of West Bengal Madame Mamta Banerjee, Block Development Officer Kurseong, GTA Chief Shri Anit Thapa, and the Pradhan of St. Mary's Gram Panchayat II for their support and concern.

The initiative is a testament to the power of community spirit and the importance of preserving landmarks that hold historical and emotional significance for generations to come.

-Peter Kerr

## Bishop Edward Barretto Celebrates Thanksgiving Mass at His Home Parish in Nirkan, Mangalore



15 January 2026, Nirkan, Mangalore — A day of joy, colour, and heartfelt gratitude filled St. Anthony's Church, Nirkan, as Bishop Edward Barretto celebrated a special Thanksgiving Mass in his home parish following his Episcopal Ordination. The celebration was lovingly organised by the parish community along with his family members, who ensured that the occasion reflected the warmth, pride, and strong faith of the people of Nirkan.

The atmosphere came alive with a vibrant Band Baja Baraat-style welcome, creating a festive mood. Parishioners lined the entrance of the church with flowers, traditional music, and jubilant greetings as they received their newly ordained bishop.



The Thanksgiving Mass was concelebrated by Bishop Peter Paul, the Bishop of Mangalore Diocese and a large number of priests from across the region. Adding special significance to the celebration was the presence of Bishop Stephen Lepcha and a



delegation of priests from the Diocese of Darjeeling, who travelled to Mangalore to represent the presbyterium and to honour their new Co-adjutor Bishop. Among them were Fr. Frederick Lepcha, Fr. Fintan Moktan, Fr. David Yojan Rai, Fr. Arun Francis Tamang, Fr. Richard Lepcha, Fr. Chrispin Tamang, Fr. Marcel Fernandes, and Fr. Alexander Gurung. Mr. John Brendan Tamsang from Kalimpong too was present all the way from Kalimpong.

In his homily, Bishop Barretto expressed deep gratitude for his vocation, his family, his home parish, and the blessings that have shaped his journey to the episcopacy. He recalled the nurturing role of St. Anthony's Church in his spiritual formation and thanked the community for their prayers and unwavering



support. The faithful responded with warm applause, many moved by the touching words and the humility with which they were delivered.

Following the Mass, a grand felicitation program was held in the Parish Hall. A large number of Religious sisters and Brothers, parish associations, clergy representatives, and family members offered their messages of appreciation. Speeches highlighted Bishop Barretto's simplicity, pastoral zeal, and commitment to the Gospel. Cultural performances by parish youth and choirs added colour and joy to the occasion.

The celebration concluded with a sumptuous lunch hosted by the parish, where parishioners and guests shared moments of fellowship, laughter, and pride in the achievements of their beloved son of the soil.

The day will be remembered as a historic and grace-filled moment for St. Anthony's Church, marking not just a milestone in the life of Bishop Edward Barretto, but also a moment of collective joy for the entire community.

# BENGAL REGIONAL PASTORAL COUNCIL MEETING

**Venue:** Dhyan Ashram, Diocese of Baruipur Diocese

**Date:** 23–25 February 2026

**Theme:** Discerning the Signs of the Times: The Future of the Church in Bengal and Sikkim

**Resource Person:** Fr. Cletus D'Souza SDB.

The Bengal Regional Pastoral Council convened its annual meeting from 23–25 February 2026 at the serene surroundings of Dhyan Ashram. Delegates from dioceses across West Bengal and Sikkim gathered to discern the present ecclesial realities and chart practical pathways for a more vibrant and mission-oriented Church in the region.



## Keynote Presentation by Fr. Cletus D'Souza SDB

Fr. D'Souza offered an insightful and inspiring reflection titled "Our Emerging Role Today in Creating a New Heaven and a New Earth."

His talk emphasised the urgent need for pastoral renewal rooted in Gospel values and authentic Christian witness.

### Central Points from His Presentation

1. Change in the Quality of Life  
A deeper spirituality, integrity, transparency, and simplicity that reflect the Gospel.  
A call to move from maintenance-mode to mission-mode.
2. The Need to be Unconventional Like Jesus  
Jesus broke stereotypes and reached the margins.  
The Church must dare to adopt creative, bold, people-first approaches.
3. Working With the People, Not For Them  
Encouraging participation and co-responsibility.  
Empowering laity to be collaborators rather than passive recipients.
4. A Paradigm Shift in Life and Mission.  
Moving from sacrament-centric to person-centric ministry.  
Prioritising accompaniment, dialogue, and community-building.

Five Reflection Questions Offered for Personal & Diocesan Discernment

1. What is my vision?
2. How will I evangelise?
3. How will I catechise?
4. What will I do to address the vital issues surrounding marriages today?
5. As laity and clergy, what can we do together to bring about innovation and revolution in our dioceses?

These questions set the tone for all subsequent deliberations and group discussions.

### Council Deliberations

The members engaged in deep and honest sharing on the challenges confronting the Church in Bengal and Sikkim. Several common concerns and priorities emerged:

- A. Decline in Baptisms and Sacramental Participation.  
Widespread concern about decreasing family size, migration, weakening faith practice, and diminished catechetical foundations.  
A call for renewed family apostolate, youth engagement, and catechetical revitalisation.
- B. Need for Collaborative Ministry through Synodality  
All diocesan commissions must work in synergy rather than in isolation.  
Synodality-listening, dialogue, and co-responsibility-must be practiced at every level: dioceses, deaneries, parishes, and Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs).
- C. Promoting Socio-Economic and Holistic Well-Being  
The Church must accompany communities towards



greater economic stability, education, mental health, and social empowerment.

Integrating faith formation with life skills and livelihood support.

#### D. Strengthening Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs)

BECs remain the foundational units for participatory Church.

Focus on building basic human communities that promote harmony, justice, peace, and shared responsibility.

#### 4 Way Forward

The Council identified several strategic directions for the future:

1. Reinforce Family and Marriage Apostolate  
Pre-marriage formation, counselling, and accompaniment.  
Addressing contemporary challenges such as migration, inter-religious marriages, and relationship breakdown.
2. Revitalise Evangelisation and Catechesis  
Contextual, life-based catechesis for children, youth, and adults.  
Empowering catechists and lay leaders with training and resources.
3. Youth and Vocation Ministry  
Creating spaces for meaningful youth engagement.  
Fostering leadership, faith formation, and community service.
4. Promote Integral Human Development  
Focus on socio-economic upliftment, education, health, and social justice.  
Strengthening mission outreach in rural and tea garden areas.
5. Inter-Diocesan Collaboration  
Joint programmes across dioceses to address common challenges.  
Sharing expertise, resources, and pastoral models.

The meeting at Dhyana Ashram was a moment of grace, reflection, and renewal for the Church in West Bengal and Sikkim. Inspired by the call of Fr. Cletus D'Souza SDB and grounded in the spirit of synodality, the Council committed itself to shaping a Church that is inclusive, participatory, evangelising, and future-ready.

The participants returned to their dioceses with renewed hope and a shared mission: To journey together in building a more human, more compassionate, more vibrant Christian community capable of witnessing to Christ in today's world.

## Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes celebrated at St. John Berchman's, Kurseong.



St. John's Parish joyfully celebrated the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes on February 11, continuing a tradition that has been observed for the past sixteen years since it was first initiated by ex parish priest, Rev Fr. Paul Sitling. The celebration began with rosary procession from the church ground to the Grotto, culminating in a solemn Holy Mass offered for the sick and suffering.

The feast day was attended by about 12 priests and a gathering of parishioners from both our own and neighbouring parishes. Rev Fr Michael Singh was the mass' main celebrant.

Afterwards, we returned to the church ground for a communal lunch before concluding the event.

11th February is also recognized as World Day of The Sick.



This annual celebration has become a cornerstone of our parish life, fostering devotion to Mary, who is the patroness of our village, St. Mary's Hill. Only 2 years back we celebrated the centenary of the establishment of the Grotto under the leadership of ex parish priest Rev Fr Andrew Lama. The Grotto, which is a sacred and cherished pilgrimage site, was the focal point of the celebration.

*-Shruti Chettri.*

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## BEC Animators in North Bengal to Launch Neighbourhood Human Communities



West Bengal, February 27, 2026: Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) animators from North Bengal have resolved to establish Neighbourhood Human Communities within selected BECs, marking a renewed push to promote interfaith harmony and grassroots social engagement.

The decision was taken during a regional training programme held in Darjeeling from February 19 to 22, attended by 40 members of diocesan resource teams representing the dioceses of Darjeeling Diocese, Bagdogra Diocese, Jalpaiguri Diocese and Raiganj Diocese. The training was themed “Extending the Space of the Tent to People of Other Faiths.”

Facilitating the sessions, Sr. Christin Joseph emphasised that BECs must foster sensitivity and mutual understanding within local communities. She underlined that communities rooted in the Gospel are called to promote peace, harmony and justice through dialogue and engagement with people of diverse faith traditions.

The programme was inaugurated by Bishop Stephen Lepcha, who described BECs as vital to the Church’s life and mission. He encouraged wider dissemination of reflections on contemporary social realities and communal harmony among clergy and religious.

Regional BEC coordinator Fr. I. P. Sarto called for a



renewed pastoral outlook, urging communities to move beyond internal structures and engage neighbours across social and religious boundaries. Diocesan coordinators present at the training assured continued support for implementing the initiative at the grassroots.

Testimonies from Sikkim highlighted the practical impact of BECs in fostering social solidarity and responding to emergencies. Participants shared experiences of collaborative action during natural disasters and local crises, where communities of different faiths worked together for common welfare.

Bishop Clement Tirkey, who presided over the Eucharistic celebration, acknowledged the contribution of BECs to Church growth in West Bengal and Sikkim. He also emphasised greater involvement of youth, particularly through digital platforms, for Gospel sharing in rural areas.

Interactive model sessions on interfaith dialogue and social concerns were conducted during the training, encouraging participants to build neighbourhood-based platforms for cooperation. Delegates described the programme as transformative and resolved to convene a follow-up meeting within three months to review progress and deepen local collaboration.

*By Fr. George Jacob SAC  
Executive Secretary  
CCBI Commission for BECs*



## *Eklai (Nepali Alone)*

*Fr, tapai eklai?  
They ask me  
At bus stands,  
At railway platforms,  
After long roads  
And longer days.*

*Fr, tapai eklai?  
The question lands  
Heavier  
When I am already tired.*

*A priest chooses Eklai.  
I belong to everyone  
Yet to no one in particular.*

*No wife waiting at the door.  
No child running out,  
"Dad, you're home!"*

*No one checking  
If I reached safely.  
No one asking  
If I have eaten.*

*I am Eklai.*

*I wake up Eklai.  
I fall asleep Eklai.  
The day's dust on my feet,  
The day's weight in my chest  
No one to share it with.*



by Fr. Kinley Tshering, SJ

*Is not romantic.  
It is quiet rooms,  
Cold plates,  
Unasked questions.*

*And yet  
I chose this Eklai  
For something larger  
Than myself.*

*Because deep down,  
Below the noise,  
Below the ache,*

*I am not Eklai.  
In the silence that stays,  
When everyone has gone,  
I hear Him  
Not loudly,  
But faithfully,  
Eklai*

*"I am with you."*

## **Charism Training at Kalimpong**

The diocese of Darjeeling had organized 5 days Charism Training that began from 2nd Feb to 6th Feb 2026 at Pushpika Pastoral Centre, Kalimpong. The main speaker was Sr. Elias Mathew MSMI.



There were 26 participants including 2 priests.

Its main objective was to recognize the Charism within and to bring out for the service of mankind. By the end of the training, the participants not only recognized and understood the Charism, but also experienced the different gifts of the Holy Spirit and gained wisdom on how to use them effectively in their daily lives and ministries.



These teachings equipped attendees to discern God's presence in their lives and avoid spiritual pitfalls, strengthening their personal faith journey.

**Jerome Sharma**  
Coordinator of Diocese of Darjeeling.

## *Kindly Communicate!!!*

Tea Leaves is the medium through which the individual parishes, communities and institutions can share with others, about the activities and events of your areas of work. So please send in the reports of your initiatives and programmes to:

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