

OBITUARY - FR. JAMES POONTHURUTHIL SDB (1955-2018)



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Shillong, Jan. 22. Father James Poonthuruthil SDB, Rector and Professor at Sacred Heart Theological College Shillong, passed away on January 21 at NEIGRIHMS (North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences) in Shillong, Meghalaya. He would have turned 63 on January 27.

Father James was under intense medical attention in the Critical Care Unit of NEIGRIHMS after being seriously hurt in a road accident on 14 January while travelling from Shillong to Guwahati in Assam.

Born at Thodupuzha in Kerala on 27 January 1955, James grew up in a devout family and felt at a young age the call to serve in the missions. His vocational journey began with his aspirantate in Shillong as he was sent to the North-East of India, a place known for missionary work among the tribals. He made his first religious profession as a Salesian of Don Bosco in Sunnyside - Shillong on 24 May 1976. That was followed, by studies in philosophy and the humanities (1976-79). His theological studies began in 1982 at Sacred Heart Theological College where he went on to obtain a Master's Degree in Missiology. A few years later he was sent to Rome where he obtained first a Master's Degree (1988) and later a Doctorate in Moral Theology at the Alfonsianum, Rome (1994) with the thesis "Towards Responsibility: A Study of Erik H Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development and Viktor E Frankl's theory of Logotherapy."

On his return James continued to serve the Church in Northeast India in various capacities. He was Registrar of the Sacred Heart Theological College from 1988 to 1992; and again from 1994 to 1995. He was Rector of Salesian College of Higher Education, Dimapur from 1995-2001. He became the president of the Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong in 2003, a post he held for three years. He was then appointed the Provincial Superior of the Salesian Province of Dimapur, Nagaland, from 2006 to 2012. A year later, he was appointed Director of Integrated Training for Laity and Religious and also, Rector at Mathias Institute, Mawlai. Since May this year, he was appointed Rector of Sacred Heart Theological College Shillong.

James spent most of his years as a priest in seminaries. He will always be remembered for his contribution to the formation of numerous religious and priests. As a teacher of moral theology, he was erudite and articulate, faithful to the Church teachings. His leadership capacity is evidenced from the many years he spent in leading communities and his 6-year term as provincial of the Salesians of Don Bosco in the Dimapur province, which has communities in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Over the years, his roles in formation and administration never prevented him from pastoral involvement. In the last few years he would visit the villages of Mawlai (near the seminary) to minister to the needs of the faithful.

Fr. James was a truly human person, a gentleman of finesse and politeness who exuded patience and prudence. He was a genuine Salesian known for his integrity, for whom 'commitment' and 'fidelity' were watchwords. He was a perfectionist and a very orderly person, which in some ways was a reflection of his inner spiritual perfection and orderliness.

His sudden and untimely death leaves a void at Sacred Heart Theological College, in the Salesian world, in the Poonthuruthil family, and in the hearts of his many confreres and friends in India and abroad. He will continue to live in their hearts and will be remembered fondly as a good friend and companion; a teacher and master of discernment; above all as a person who cared for all.

May he now enjoy the Lord's eternal peace and joy.