THE GROWTH OF PARISHES  

Upon the Cardinal's application to the Bombay Housing Board in May 1959, permission was granted for a temporary shed to be set up for the purpose "of offering prayers by the Roman Catholic Christians in the Colony." The shed, measuring 50' x 25' was erected and blessed on August 8, 1959. The parish of St. Joseph the Worker was established on May 1, 1960 with Fr. Macario Pereira as its first Parish Priest. Fr. Pereira at first resided at St. Andrew’s, Bandra and later at the Clergy Home, from where he served the new parish. The shed served as a place of worship as well as of education, for a Primary school was started in 1961 in which, besides lay teachers, two Sisters from Mt. Mary's Convent Bandra, also taught. In 1963, the shed was shifted to the present plot of land and the school received its name: Cardinal Gracias School.

A new period in the life of the parish was inaugurated from May 1, 1967 when the parish was officially handed over to the Norbertine Fathers. Fr. Luke van Helvert O. Praem. was the first Norbertine parish priest. Even before this date, more precisely on January 26, 1967, the construction of a new school had been undertaken, the ground floor and first floor of which were blessed by the Cardinal in 1968. In June 1969, the parish house was completed and church services were conducted in its small hall. In November 1969, the foundations were laid for a new church, and exactly one year later, on November 17, 1970 the new church was blessed by Cardinal Gracias in the
presence of the Lord Abbot of the Norbertine Fathers, Fr. M. van de Ven O. Praem. Among the special works of the Fathers is the development of “The Bandra East Community Centre”, directed especially to the socio-economic welfare of the slum dwellers, Christian and non-Christian, who fall within the boundaries of the parish.

ST. JOSEPH, Kurla (1968)

The parish of St. Joseph was erected on December 3, 1968. It was formed by detaching a portion of the Holy Cross parish, Kurla, that lies on either side of the Kurla Railway Station. Before 1968, the Fransalian Fathers, who had been entrusted with the development of this new Unit, resided at the Holy Cross Rectory and conducted operations from there. Fr. Peter J. Mendes MSFS was appointed the first Parish Priest of St. Joseph in 1968 and he functioned as such till 1973. During his tenure as Parish Priest, the foundation stone for a Fransalian House, School and Church, all in one structure, was laid on May 17, 1970 in an area of one-fourth of an acre, located in a predominantly mohammedan environment. The parish Primary School was started in June 1972. The three-in-one structure (Presbytery, School, Church) is nearing completion, with the Church on the ground floor, the School and Priests’ residence on the first and second floors. The building will also be used as a Recreation and Social Service Centre.

Topographically, the church building is situated on the periphery of the parish. Of the roughly 300 families that comprise the parish, some 200 families live on the eastern side of the Railway line, while the church is on the western side. Thus, Mass on Sundays is also celebrated at the Nehru Nagar Colony in eastern Kurla, which is some 20 minutes walking distance from the parish church.

OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY, Goregaon West (1969)

After Andheri, Goregaon West has registered the most prolific growth in population during the last two decades as housing colonies have sprouted, as if overnight, on the western side of the Swami Vivekananda Road (the old Ghodbunder Road), large areas of marshy land having to be reclaimed in the process. And among the newcomers who settled in these colonies were Catholics as well.
Already from June 1960, the date when the Diocesan Seminary opened in Goregaon East, the Fathers of the Seminary began to be involved with the Catholics on the westside. During the Vicarship of Fr. Filomeno D'Cruz at St. Thomas' Church, Goregaon East, Fr. Patrick Herne SJ started celebrating Mass at Motilal Nagar from October 1960. Mass was celebrated in the open air, except during the monsoons; attempts to secure alternate accommodation failed. Fr. Herne continued this practice from 1960 to 1963, and he was succeeded by Fr. John Plo SJ from 1965 to 1968.

On November 15, 1968, Fr. Antonio D'Souza was appointed Priest-in-charge of Goregaon West, with a view to developing the future parish. He took up his residence in a small two-room flat; very soon afterwards, land was purchased nearby and the work of constructing a school building was commenced in March 1969. That very year the parish of Our Lady of the Rosary was separated from the parish of St. Thomas and canonically erected as such on October 7, with Fr. D'Souza as its first Parish Priest. Fr. Philip Lobo succeeded him as parish priest in June 1974. While the foundation stone of the church has been blessed and laid by Archbishop Simon Pimenta on October 7, 1980 its actual construction has not yet begun; Mass continues to be celebrated in the makeshift school hall.

**ST. JUDE, Mohili (1972)**

What is now the parish of St. Jude at Mohili was, till 1972, part of the larger parish of the Holy Cross, Kurla. Its early origins, however, go back a full twenty years when, from 1952, Sunday Mass was celebrated for the people of the area by priests from Kurla. This was in a small chapel, known as the "Mohili Chapel," built by a benefactor on his own land. On November 25, 1971 Fr. Mark Misquitta, then an Assistant at Holy Cross, was appointed Priest-in-charge of the Mohili area, with residence at Kurla. The emerging parish was placed under the patronage of St. Jude.

In June 1972, the old chapel was handed back to its owner and a new and bigger construction was built on land belonging to the Holy Cross Church, that was now donated to the new parish unit. This building served as a house of daily worship as well as a School. In October of the same year, the parish of St. Jude was separated from that of the Holy Cross, and established as an independent parish, with Fr. Misquitta as its first Parish Priest.
In 1973 a new Centre for Sunday Mass was opened towards the northeastern part of the young parish, as the parishioners of the area found it difficult to attended services at St. Jude's. This Centre eventually developed into the autonomous parish of St. Anthony at Saki Naka. Thus, within less than three years, the Mohili parish gave birth to another small parish at Saki Naka.

In 1976, Fr. Misquita shifted his residence from Kurla to St. Jude's, Mohili. While the parish school grew each year and there was a need to open new classes, it was not possible to construct a permanent structure for the school since the parish land had been included within the "Green Belt" by the Government. Now that the land has been released, after persistent representation, the parish will be able to have a church, a parish house, and an authorized school building.

INFANT JESUS, Jogeshwari (1974)

The humble beginnings of this parish can be traced to the month of October 1965 when Auxiliary Bishop William Gomes blessed a small shed at Prem Nagar in Jogeshwari and offered the first Mass there for the Catholics of the locality. On that occasion Bishop Gomes presented a beautiful statue of the Infant Jesus and this accounts for the fact that the future parish was called by the same name. Prior to this event, the Daughters of the Cross from Bandra used to visit the area every Sunday and render whatever medical and pastoral care was possible in the circumstances. It was largely through the efforts of these Sisters, inspired by Mother Anna Huberta, their Superior, that the above Centre was established.

In June 1967, Fr. Lazarus Sequeira was appointed Priest-in-charge of this unit with residence at St. Blase, Amboli. The following
June, the chapel and the school were shifted to Koliwada along the Western Express Highway. Here, in a cement-sheet shed, measuring 10' x 30', only, the church-cum-school functions till today. On March 7, 1974, this unit was canonically erected into a parish with Fr. Sequeira as its first Parish Priest. The parish was formed by readjusting the territorial boundaries of St. Blase, Amboli and of the Holy Family, Chakala. This “slum parish” first cared for by Fr. Sequeira, is now looked after by his successor, Fr. Vincent D’Souza, aided by Fr. Ajit Bandekar.

ST. ANTHONY, Saki Naka (1975)

In 1973 a new Centre for Sunday Mass was opened towards the north-eastern part of the parish of St. Jude, Mohili, as the parishioners of that area experienced some inconvenience in attending religious services at St. Jude’s. Mass was offered here on Sundays by Fr. Mark Misquitta, the Vicar of Mohili, in a class-room of St. Theresa’s High School (managed by Mr. A. Pereira of Kurla village) in Pereira wadi. Towards the end of the year, this Mass Centre was shifted about a hundred yards further north to a plot of land donated by a benefactor for the building of a chapel. The chapel that was built was the work of the local people themselves and was dedicated to St. Anthony. Pre-primary classes were begun here in June 1974. Fr. Misquitta appointed Sr. Annie Tauro of St. Catharine Convent, Juhu, to be in charge of the school, and he himself used to go there for Sunday Mass and to attend to school work twice a week.
In June 1975, St. Anthony's was erected into a separate parish with Fr. Agnel Castell as its first Parish Priest. His successor, Fr. Vincent Monteiro has not only extended the school and levelled the adjoining playing ground, but has also, in 1981, pleasingly extended and remodelled the existing little chapel to almost double its size.

**ST. PIUS X, Mulund (1976)**

Till late 1968, Mulund formed an outpost of the extensive parish of St. John the Baptist, Thana. The Catholic population was sparse and scattered on either side of the Central Railway line. Through the courtesy of the authorities of the Asbestos Cement Company at Mulund, situated about a furlong from the Railway Station, Mass was celebrated by the priests of Thana at the Sports Centre of the Company. There were at that time a few Catholic families in the Company's residential quarters.

The development of Mulund into an independent parish was undertaken from 1979 on by the enterprising and visionary Parish priest of Thana, Fr. Valerian Godinho. A fairly large plot of land was bought in the village of Nahur on the west side of the railway tracks; on this land Fr. Godinho planned to build a large Housing Colony, two Schools, a church and a parish house. By 1971, a building which housed the Primary school on the first floor, and a number of residential buildings of the proposed Colony had been erected. The number of Catholics in the Housing Colony of St. Pius X, as it was called, and in the neighbouring Housing Colonies, was large enough to justify a change: Mass was discontinued at the Sports Centre of the Asbestos Cement Company and was commenced on the premises of the Primary school of St. Pius X. The priests from Thana continued to serve the emerging parish community at Mulund.

On July 7, 1976, the new parish of Mulund, under the patronage of St. Pius X, was created by separating it from the parish of St. John the Baptist, Thana. Fr. F. X. Lobo, who had been appointed as Priest-in-charge in June 1974, became its first Parish Priest. The Housing Colony and two High Schools in Fr. Godinho's original plan have already come up. The parish church and parish house have still to see the light of day.
OUR LADY OF VELANKANNI, Irla (1978)

When St. Blase, Amboli was established as a parish in 1560—one of the earliest parishes on the island of Salsette—the little village of Irlêm fell within its boundaries. Irlêm (Irla) remained under the jurisdiction of the Vicar of Amboli for four hundred years, more exactly until 1967, when it was entrusted to the P.I.M.E. Fathers (The Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions of Milan, Italy). Fr. Bruno Venturin, PIME, the Priest-in-charge, succeeded in getting a chapel ready for worship on Easter day 1968. It was dedicated to OL of Velankanni.

The foundation stone of the present church was laid on January 12, 1975 by Auxiliary Bishop Winifred Menezes, and after completion, the church was blessed by Bishop Alphonsus Beretta PIME of the Diocese of Warangal, India, on September 12, 1976. On September 10, 1978, the decree establishing Irla as a full-fledged, independent parish was issued by Archbishop Pimenta, and Fr. R. Tiburtius Raj PIME (who succeeded Fr. Venturin in February 1977) became its first Parish Priest.

Representing a typical parish in the suburbs of Greater Bombay today, the parish of OL of Velankanni is a composite picture of East Indians, Goans, Mangaloreans, Malayalees, Tamilians and others. Further, the church is one of Bombay’s four Marian shrines which draws large crowds every Saturday for Novena services.

ST. VINCENT PALLOTTI, Marol (1981)

The northeastern end of the parish of St. John the Evangelist, Marol, along the Marol-Maroshi Road that leads into the Aarey Milk Colony, became the scene of active development as plans for Housing Colonies were approved by the Municipality in the
early 1960s. In 1969 the first families of “Blossom Society” moved into Marol. Soon, on the other side of the Marol-Maroshi road, the “Vijayanagar” Housing Colony rose from the ground, followed by “Bhavaninagar.” In the course of the last decade some 350 Catholic families have settled in these three residential complexes.

In 1974 the Sisters Adorers acquired a plot of land a little north of Blossom Society where they opened a House for themselves and a Hostel for working girls. The Catholic residents of this portion of the parish continued to attend religious services and to participate in the activities of St. John the Evangelist Church until June 1980 when a former piggery-cum-poultry shed, standing on the plot of land belonging to the Sisters, was reconditioned and began to be used for Sunday Mass. From June to September of 1980 the Fathers of St. Pius College (Seminary), Goregaon celebrated Sunday Mass in the shed for the residents of the three Colonies.

In September 1980 this portion of the parish of Marol was entrusted to the Society of the Catholic Apostolate, commonly known as the Pallottine Fathers. Thus were the Pallottines introduced into the Archdiocese. On August 15, 1981 the new parish, under the patronage of St. Vincent Pallotti, was formally erected with a Mass celebrated by Auxiliary Bishop Ferdinand Fonseca.

The shed continues to serve as a place for Sunday worship (weekday Masses are celebrated in the Convent next door) and as a Community Centre. There are plans to build the parish church in the near future on an adjacent plot of land.

**Parish Units**

This term has been given to parishes-in-the-making. A “parish unit” begins to function when a Priest-in-charge is appointed for it; it develops for all practical purposes as an independent unit, though it has not as yet acquired the status of a parish. During the period under consideration (1928-1981) six parish units have been set up.
ST. JUDE, Malad (Parish Unit since 1971)

This parish-in-the-making is roughly bounded by Industrial Estates to its north and south and extends from Ghodbunder Road on the west of the Malad Railway Station to the Western Express Highway and beyond on the east. It is largely composed of people who have migrated into the area during the last thirty years. The Catholics officially belonged to the parish of St. Thomas, Goregaon East, but they found that attending religious services whether at St. Thomas or at OL of Lourdes at Orlem (Malad West) was a matter of some inconvenience.

In 1962 through the initiative of a couple of Legionaries of Mary, Mass was begun to be offered for the benefit of the residents of the area in the Patel's house which belonged to Mr. Manuel Dominic Gomes along Daftary Road. The first Mass was celebrated here in March 1962, the month dedicated to St. Joseph. For two years the priests from St. Thomas Church, Goregaon provided this service. Then from 1964 to 1970, Fr. Patrick Herne SJ of the St. Pius College (Seminary), Goregaon, helped out, celebrating Sunday Mass regularly in Malad East, first in the Patel's house and then in St. Joseph's School at Pushpa Park.

From 1970, Fr. Paul Sah, then an Assistant at St. Thomas Church, was appointed Priest-in-charge of this unit. He took up residence in a flat on Daftary Road in 1971 and dedicated the parish unit to St. Jude (prior to this it was commonly referred to as the St. Joseph's unit). In 1972, the ground floor of "Jawahar Kunj" was rented and used for religious services; it was converted into a little chapel and has functioned as such till today. Fr. German Lemos succeeded Fr. Sah in 1973. From June 1974, the parish unit was handed over to the Salesian Fathers. Fr. P.D. Thomas SDB was the first Salesian Priest-in-charge (1974-75), succeeded by Fr. Richard D'Souza SDB who attends to the unit while residing at Don Bosco's, Borivli.

INFANT JESUS, Pantnagar (Parish Unit since 1971)

Lying immediately to the east of the Ghatkopar Railway Station is Pantnagar, one of the more recently populated areas of the suburbs — the result of intense migration. By 1970 more than 500 Catholic families had settled in this area between the Railway
lines and the Eastern Express Highway, which then fell within the parish boundaries of Our Lady of Fatima Church, Kiroli. The distance and the difficulty in getting to the parish church at Kiroli, experienced especially by the children, women and the aged (the pedestrian over-bridge had not been built then), first led the Pannagar Catholics to approach the Kiroli Capuchin Fathers for Sunday Mass in Pannagar itself. Their request was favourably answered by the Kiroli Fathers; but this arrangement did not adequately satisfy all the spiritual needs of the growing population. Hence, the existing Pannagar Welfare Association, representing the Catholics of the area, next approached His Eminence Valerian Cardinal Gracias for a priest exclusively for themselves. Thus on May 24, 1971, Fr. Juze D'Souza, appointed Priest-in-charge of this new Parish Unit, was officially introduced to the Pannagar Catholics by the Vicar of Kiroli at a Mass celebrated in the Public Park.

Residing first at the Holy Trinity Church Rectory at Powai, Fr. Juze then moved to a flat in the Maharashtra Housing Board's colony in Pannagar where he resided till 1977. Within the first year of his ministry, he set up a primary school in a rented and improvised structure and named it after St. Dominic Savio, the patron of Youth. Simultaneously, the various religious services of a parish were offered to the Catholics of Pannagar, even though there was no suitable accommodation. Amongst the devotions fostered, special mention must be made of the devotion to the Infant Jesus of Prague, to whom the Parish Unit is dedicated. In 1973, the Little Sisters of Jesus (of Charles, de Foucauld) came to Pannagar and set up their first house in Bombay: a mud-wall house. A plot of land for the building of a School-cum-Prayer Hall was secured in 1977, construction work begun immediately, and the whole project is nearing completion.
Today, the Panth Nagar Catholic community is still a Parish Unit.Yet, through the indefatigable labours of Fr. Juze (transferred to Worli in June 1981), the community can be proud of a High School (its first SSC batch of students was sent up in 1981) and a Special School for mentally retarded children (inaugurated on August 20, 1980).

**HOLY FAMILY, Tilak Nagar (Parish Unit since 1971)**

The parish unit of the Holy Family at Tilak Nagar is another instance of the enormous intra-migration of Catholics within the Archdiocese of Bombay. Situated between the Central Railway line on the west and the Eastern Express Highway on the east, the Holy Family unit is surrounded by the parish unit of the Infant Jesus (Panth Nagar) and the parishes of St. Anthony (Mankhurd), OL of Perpetual Succour (Chembur) and OL of Fatima (Kirol). It had its origin in January 1971, when Fr. Apollinaris D’Silva was appointed Priest-in-charge of the Tilak Nagar area in response to the request of the Holy Family Welfare Association, a voluntary body of Catholics. Soon after his arrival, a plot of land was acquired at Pestom Sagar, where under his inspiration and guidance, there have developed in the course of the last ten years, a High School, a Parish House, and a Prayer Hall that is still to be completed. Besides, two big Co-operative Housing Societies have come up at Pestom Sagar and Chedananagar under his sponsorship.

All evidence seems to indicate that this future parish presently counting some 7,000 Catholics will continue to grow keeping in step with the development of the many “Nagars” within its boundaries.

**ST. FRANCIS XAVIER, Parksite (Parish Unit since 1974)**

Shortly after the Bombay-Agra Road leaves Kurla it runs almost parallel to the Ghatkopar hills before it enters Thane District after Mulund. The eastern slope of these hills have, in the course of the last twenty years or so, been occupied by squatter colonies, for the most part unauthorised and illegal. People have been forced to settle down on such land since poverty makes it unable for them to find accommodation in other parts of the city. Catholics, too, form part of this movement of people who are generally immigrants into Bombay from other parts of the country.
One such settlement is that at Parksite, a couple of kilometers before Vikhroli, that once fell within the parish of St. Joseph, Vikhroli. As far back as 1960 a Cross was planted in an open space belonging to the Municipality. Those residing in the vicinity used to meet regularly to pray the Rosary. As often as a priest was available, Mass was offered there — which was about three or four times a year. A couple of attempts were made by the Catholics of Parksite to erect a temporary shed over the Cross, but they failed. The shed was promptly demolished by the Municipality.

The religious needs of the Parksite Catholics were satisfied with more regularity when Fr. Anthony S. D’Souza, an Assistant at St. Joseph’s, was appointed Priest-in-charge of Parksite with residence at Vikhroli. This arrangement lasted from June 1974 to May 1976. For a year after that the priests of St. Anthony’s Church, Vakola, took Parksite under their wing. A modest two-room flat was then purchased in Parksite itself, and Fr. Francis Miranda was appointed Priest-in-charge in July 1977. He took up his residence there and erected a shed to serve as a chapel-cum-community hall. Fr. Ronald Sequeira succeeded him in June 1979 and he extended the shed, utilizing all the available space, enclosing a part of it to serve as a Sanctuary, a Sacristy, and a Store-room.

GOOD SHEPHERD, Andheri (Parish Unit since 1976)

Over the past fifteen years, the stretch of land between Ghodbunder Road (now Swami Vivekananda Road) on the east and Seven Bungalows on the west has witnessed an enormous growth in population, as marshy land was reclaimed (centuries ago Versova was an island cut off from Salsette island by a creek) and Housing Colonies mushroomed as if overnight. According to a conservative estimate by the Municipal authorities, the number of housing units built in Andheri West alone has crossed the 50,000 mark during the last two decades. Catholics who migrated into this area,
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along with thousands of others, belonged either to St. Blase’s parish, Amboli or to the parish of OL of Health, Versova.

“Four Bungalows” is the name of a section of this fast-developing stretch (the name seems to hark back to a time when this area was distinguished by only four prominent bungalows) that lies fairly mid-way between the churches of St. Blase to the east and OL of Health to the west. Here the Sisters of the Good Shepherd purchased a Villa with grounds attached in 1968. They converted the Villa into a Convent and a Hostel for working girls.

As the Sisters were thinking of selling off the major portion of their property, the Archdiocese planned to purchase it and to develop it as the centre of a new parish that would serve the needs of the Catholics of the area. A part of Amboli parish and a part of the Versova parish were marked out as the components of the future new parish and entrusted to Fr. Donald Rodrigues, who was appointed Priest-in-charge with residence in a little outhouse on the grounds of the Convent. Already from then on the future parish began to be called by the name of “Good Shepherd” because of its association with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. The chapel of the Hostel (since closed down) began to be used for daily Mass and other religious services, and continues to be so used till today. Plans are afoot for the construction of a new church.

CHRIST THE KING, Oshivara (Parish Unit from 1976-1978)

Though this is neither a full-fledged parish nor a parish unit, Oshivara, which lies west of the Western Railway lines after the Jogeshwari Station on the way to Goregaon, once had a Priest-in-charge residing there, and could have one once again in the near future. The village of Oshivara, which forms the nucleus of this unit, has always been and still is, under the jurisdiction of the Vicar of St. Blase, Amboli. Around the middle of the 1960s, the Jesuit Fathers of “Vinayalaya” at Chakala, finding that the people of Oshivara were being neglected spiritually (Oshivara is three kilometers from St. Blase church) started celebrating Sunday Mass in the house of Mr. Stanny D’Souza in Oshivara.

Already during the period of the Jesuit ministry there, the people of Oshivara began to think in terms of a church of their own. These thoughts materialized when Fr. Lazarus Sequeira
was appointed in 1967 as Priest-in-charge, not only of the Oshivara unit but also of the parish unit at Jogeshwari East along the Highway. By 1970-71, with the cooperation and labour of the people of Oshivara, Fr. Sequeira was able to put up a modest building, consisting of a long hall, a sacristy and a room for a priest. The chapel was blessed by Auxiliary Bishop Longinus Pereira and dedicated to Christ the Good Shepherd. This name was changed to “Christ the King” however, when another parish unit was started in 1976 on the grounds of the Good Shepherd Sisters at Four Bungalows, Andheri.

Fr. Sequeira continued to reside at St. Blase, Amboli and to function as Priest-in-charge even during the three years, from 1973-1976, when a group of Jesuits took up residence in the room behind the chapel. The group consisted of a Jesuit priest and a few Scholastics who moved into Oshivara because they wanted to experience the simple life of the people there. When they were not attending Philosophy courses at St. Pius College, Goregaon, the Scholastics assisted the Jesuit Father in attending to the spiritual and other needs of the people. This experiment was terminated in May 1976.

Appointed Priest-in-charge of Oshivara in June 1976, Fr. Servulo Vaz, took up his residence in Oshivara for a year; he was succeeded by Fr. Joe Gonsalves in June 1977 who lived in Oshivara also for a year. After that Oshivara stopped having a resident priest and the unit reverted to becoming a sub-centre of St. Blase, Amboli. From June 1980, Oshivara was entrusted to the Fathers of St. Pius College, Goregaon, with Fr. John D’Mello as acting Priest-in-charge.