

FR. ALFRED ROCHE

A Messenger of Peace
and Communion



Fr. Patrick Crasta, Capuchin

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**Fr Patrick Crasta OFM Cap.
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First Edition: March 2012

Second Edition: April 2016

Third Edition: November 2021

Copies: 500

Printed: Assisi Press, Jail Road, Mangaluru – 575 004.

For Private Circulation only

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FOREWORD

Brother Alfred Roche OFM Cap, was a multifaceted personality – a true son of St. Francis of Assisi, a zealous pastor, an inspiring preacher, a loving spiritual father, a selfless social worker and, most of all, a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ. All this is only because he never lived for himself; he was a priest for others – like a good pastor all the time concerned about the sheep, totally absorbed in mind and heart in the welfare of the sheep. Hence all his energy, all his talents, and all his gifts he kept at the disposal of his sheep. Providentially he was gifted with basic capacities of relating with people in a noble manner, speaking with a sense of conviction, listening with attention for hours together and thus, touching the hearts of one and all.

He was a great lover of children, a confident friend of youth, wise guide to couples and an enthusiastic collaborator with adults. The fact that he was a great ‘visionary’ and a dedicated missionary becomes crystal clear when one looks at the two main parishes: of Brahmavar and Lower Kasarkod now and compare them with the condition in which he took up the responsibility as the parish priest of these two parishes: Holy Family Church at Brahmavar in 1956 and St. Joseph’s Church at Lower Kasarkod in 1975. It is enough just to meet the senior parishioners of these two parishes who were young when Br. Alfred took charge of these parishes. Br. Patrick Crasta, the author of this book, has personally met some of them and has recorded their experiences with Br. Alfred. With certain conviction I too can bear personal witness to this

fact as I was a young boy hailing from Brahmavar parish when he reached there in 1956. The marvelous development in the Christian families of these two parishes speaks volumes of his selfless and zealous pastoral ministry.

The external achievements of Br. Alfred Roche have a strong internal foundation in his relationship with God. He was a God-centered personality, a person of deep prayer and a friar committed to live his religious life with all its observances. The success of his pastoral ministry is to be evaluated from this perspective. He was a religious convinced of his 'call' to live the Franciscan Capuchin Charism as a 'friar minor'; he considered himself as a chosen one of God to live and proclaim the divine message to people of God always remaining faithful to the teaching of the Church.

The Holy Trinity Province of Karnataka in particular, and the Capuchin Order in general, is privileged to have a 'friar minor' so exemplary and so simple, and would like to see that his cause be promoted and forwarded to the Holy See so that the Church one day solemnly acknowledges the wonderful witness to sanctity borne by this noble son of St. Francis of Assisi.

With some satisfaction we place before the public this short life story of Br. Alfred Roche and appreciate the hard work of Br. Patrick Crasta to substantiate the Biography with scientific data.

**Fr. Vincent Furtado, OFM Cap
Provincial Minister
Holy Trinity Province, Karnataka, India.**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is at the explicit request of our Provincial Minister, Rev. Br. Vincent Furtado, OFM Cap., and his Council that Br. Santa Lopes, OFM Cap., and I took special interest to make known the august person and generous mission of late Rev. Br. Alfred Roche, OFM Cap. Br. Santa Lopes was the first one who responded to the appeal of the Provincial and his Council in making the exemplary personality and dedicated pastoral service of Br. Alfred Roche in his book entitled: *Fr. Alfred Roche: A Capuchin after the Heart of Jesus*.

In this book Br. Santa states that he has tried to put down in black and white his personal experience with Br. Alfred: 'Though I have heard quite a few things about him...I do not venture to touch upon these areas of his life and mission.... Therefore, what I am going to share with you in the following pages, to put in the words of the beloved disciple, St. John, who says: "What I have seen with my eyes, what I have heard with my ears and what I have touched with my hands..." (1Jn 1, 1-2). For, like the beloved disciple, I had the privilege of living with him, moving with him, listening to him, working with him, and learning from his teaching and his life-pattern from the age of eight'. Thus, in his work Br. Santa has limited himself to his knowledge about and personal experience with Br. Alfred.

Mr. John Crasta, in his book entitled: *Fr. Alfred Roche: A Fatherly Figure*, while giving the historical setting and family background of Br. Alfred, depicts beautifully the person, spirituality, social service, and pastoral concern

of the good shepherd in different friaries and parishes where he rendered his precious service: Monte Mariano, Farangipet; Holy family Church and Friary, Brahmavar; St. Anne's Church Binaga; and St. Joseph's Church and Friary, Lower Kasarkod. He has tried to present the life and ministry of Br. Alfred chronologically, highlighting the important features of his exemplary life-pattern and dedicated pastoral endeavors.

I am very much indebted to Br. Santa Lopes and Mr. John Crasra, my brother. I have made use of a good amount of material from these two sources. Then, having given a little of the family background of Br. Alfred, in depicting his simple and God-centered person as well as his dedicated pastoral service, rendered in different places ever since his Priestly Ordination, I have added a number of testimonies that I have received from priests, religious and lay people with whom he lived and for whom he worked. I have been very lucky to meet Br. Eusebius OFM Cap., one of the four companions of Br. Alfred during his initial formation to the Capuchin way of life. Out of the four companions, Br. Eusebius is the only surviving member. Though elderly and sickly, he was very happy to share his personal experience about Br. Alfred when I met him in their novitiate at Pambanvillai, Nagarcoil, Tamilnadu. I am very much indebted to him and to all those who have given me their written testimonies, besides what they have orally shared with me.

I am very grateful to his Excellency Louis Paul D'Souza, the Bishop of Mangalore, and his Excellency, Derrick Fernandes, the Bishop of Karwar, for their words of encouragement. When I met his Excellency, Louis Paul D'Souza, the Bishop of Mangalore, his advice to me was:

“Fr. Patrick, I am very happy that Fr. Alfred’s Cause has been sent to Rome. It is very important that his person and his apostolate are made known to the people. The youth of today do not know him. Therefore, it is important that his simple, God-centered lifestyle and his dedicated and generous pastoral service are made known far and near”. When I paid a visit to his Excellency, Derrick Fernandes, the Bishop of Karwar, and explained to him the purpose of my visit, his immediate reply was: “Yes, Fr. Patrick I am very happy to know that Fr. Alfred’s Cause has been sent to Rome. I know him and his precious ministry at St. Joseph’s Parish, Lower Kasarkod, in our diocese. Please make his person and mission known to the people far and wide. Very many, especially the younger generation, does not know him. I would like to share this good news with our clergy in my next circular”.

These words of Bishop Louis Paul D’Souza and Bishop Derrick Fernandes were very encouraging and supportive. In the light of the advice given by them, these two above mentioned books were written and mine was the third book, describing the exemplary life and committed apostolate of Br. Alfred wherever he was sent by his superiors. The witness value of his prayer-centered life and self-sacrificing apostolate has constantly strengthened the faith of the faithful and has fostered a number of religious and priestly vocations. I am immensely grateful to all those who have given to me their testimonies. In fact, I have culled just a few lines from the rich material that they have given to me in English, Konkani, and Kannada. Soon there will be another volume containing these testimonies in their totality.

Following the guidance of both the Bishops, before

printing these books and writing different articles on the evangelical life and zealous apostolate of Br. Alfred, we printed his pictures with a short prayer in English, which was read and approved by Bishop Louis Paul D'Souza. This prayer has been translated and printed in Konkani and Kannada and has been distributed far and wide. It is prayed in different families and communities.

I am very grateful to Br. Vincent Furtado, OFM Cap., for his touching foreword to my book. I am immensely grateful to Mr. Adolph Roche, Br. Jossy Fernandes OFM Cap., and Br. Charles Furtado, OFM Cap., for going through the entire text and for doing the necessary corrections. My heartfelt thanks go to Miss Elisabeth Maier from Switzerland who has generously contributed towards the printing expenses of this book. I am indebted to Br. Maxim D'Silva OFM Cap., the manager of Assisi Press, Mangalore, for the pains that he has taken in giving a nice get-up for my book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick Crasta, a capuchin friar of the Holy Trinity Province, Karnataka, is one of the nephews of late Br. Alfred Roche, OFM Cap. He has been a teacher and formator ever since his Ordination to Priesthood in 1970. His teaching and formative ministry began with the postulants at Monte Mariano, Farangipet, with a licentiate in theology, from the then Papal Athenaeum, Pune, in the year 1970. After three years' service to the postulants, he was sent to pursue his higher studies and had a licentiate in the Sacred Scripture from Biblicum, Rome, in 1976. With this theological-biblical preparation he rendered his service at Deena Seva Ashram, Kengeri, Bangalore, as a lector and spiritual companion of the students of philosophy and theology. Once again he was encouraged to continue his studies and had his doctorate in biblical theology from the Gregorian University, Rome, in the year 1985. Besides, he has a diploma in spiritual accompaniment and counseling from Yuvaprachodini, Bangalore, and a diploma in spiritual accompaniment and guided retreats from FIP, Toronto, Canada.

Besides his teaching ministry in different Seminaries and Religious Institutes, and Preaching retreats to Seminarians, Religious and Diocesan Clergy, Br. Crasta has held different responsibilities in the Holy Trinity Province: Rector of the Capuchin Philosophate, Rector of

the Capuchin Theologate, Director of Shanthi Sadhana: FISI, Provincial Minister of the Holy Trinity Province (KGM). He was one of the four members of the General Commission on Formation of the Capuchin Order for eight years in Rome. He was a Visiting Professor at the Chair of Christianity at Manasagangotri (Uni. of Mysore) and Director of Research at Jnana Bharathi (Uni. of Bangalore). From 2004 he has been a Visiting Professor at the Antonianum University, Rome. Presently he is the assistant director and program-coordinator at Shanthi Sadhana: FISI, Bangalore. Inspiration from above and perspiration from below is the motto of Br. Crasta.

INTRODUCTION

“Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is for such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs” (Mt 19,14). The above verse highlights the attitude of Jesus towards children. Although He came for the salvation of the entire creation (cf. Rom 8,19-25), nevertheless He had a special love and concern towards children. He does not isolate Himself from them because they are noisy or naughty. He is not disturbed with their guileless ways of behaviour. On the contrary, He feels at home in their company. While the disciples, thinking that the children would disturb their Master and would hinder His mission, are trying to prevent them from coming closer to Him, He warmly welcomes them, and makes it very clear that the presence of the children would in no way cause any inconvenience to Him. Knowing very well their innocent and unsullied disposition, He says: “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. Whereby, He tells us that we, the so-called adults, need to become like them, if we have to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Fr. Alfred Roche, a Capuchin priest, was endowed with such an evangelical spirit. He was a lover of children and youth wherever he was posted and whatever task he was busy with. They were with him from dawn to dusk assisting him in his day-to-day apostolate: serving at the altar, singing during the liturgy, taking care of the sacristy, cleaning the church, maintaining the garden,

accompanying him during his visits to the sick and the afflicted, and even in taking care of the dogs which were his faithful defenders. Some of these children/youth literally lived with him in the parish precincts eating and drinking with him, studying and working with him. A couple of them were regularly his 'drivers'. Having received three pieces of surgery for hernia, he could not ride a bicycle when motor-vehicles were not used by the capuchins in the early fifties in the Indian context. So, a couple of them, strong and sturdy, regularly took him to the four corners of his parish as a pillion rider. These boys of high school level, coming from poor families, were encouraged and supported by him in their studies and all-round development. These and many other boys and girls, irrespective of caste and creed, were helped and sustained by him through his good-hearted friends and benefactors. Today, they have become the crème of society, working in different parts of the world and occupying leading positions in different countries.

CHAPTER 1

FAMILY BACKGROUND

1.1. Humble Origin:

Fr. Alfred Roche was born on the 3rd of April 1924 at Moodhadu Kudru, a small island in South Karnataka, belonging to St. Peter's Parish, Barkur, in the diocese of Mangalore. His baptismal name was Peter John. He was the youngest of the 5 children (Alphonso, Juliana, Louis, Cecilia and Peter) of Mr. Isaac Roche and Carmine Monteiro. Peter was born in a devout family wherein daily prayers took priority over all other exercises. "His father Isaac was a deeply religious man and prayers were recited at home daily without fail. The service of Isaac Roche, as a sacristan at St. Peter's church Barkur for 55 years, is unparalleled".¹ Though a farmer by profession, Isaac Roche could find time to go to the parish church daily and render his dedicated service as a sacristan for so many years. Going to the church was not an easy feature. He had to cross the Seetha river every day on a small canoe. It was nothing but his lively faith and spirit of prayer that gave him the grace of perseverance to render this service to his parish

Peter was a devout and prayerful boy. He tried to go to the church even on weekdays whenever it was

¹ Mr. Vally Roche, *Isaac Roche and Carmine Anastella Monteiro*, p.2. Mr. Vally Roche is one of the cousins of Fr. Alfred Roche. He is a retired engineer and builder, residing at Chaulikere, Barkur, South Karnataka.

possible. He was repeatedly elected secretary of the altar boys' society and took keen interest in helping and guiding the altar servers. He schooled at Pandeshwar (Moodhadu) up to the 5th standard and received his first Holy Communion in his own parish church dedicated to St. Peter at Barkur in the year 1931. Then, having completed the higher primary schooling in St. Antony's school at Sastan, he pursued his high school studies at Milagres High School, Kallianpur. For about one year and a half he stayed at Kallubai's house as a boarder, after which he moved into the school boarding. But, he could not complete his matriculation at St. Milagres High School, Kallianpur. It was during this period of uncertainty and search, when he was trying to know the plan of God, he felt the call of God to join the Capuchin Order. In fact, he completed his matriculation after joining the Capuchin Order.

Peter had keen interest in music. He could cultivate this God-given gift at Kallianpur under the masterly guidance Fr. Simon Tellis, a diocesan priest and well known musician, who trained very many parishioners and students in vocal and instrumental music. He was a celebrated educationist for several years in Milagres Parish and High School, Kallianpur. Peter was a member of the parish choir and daily participated in the holy Eucharist. This musical talent, that he developed as a high school student helped him throughout his life. In his pastoral ministry, he could build up beautiful choirs in all the parishes where he rendered his precious service. One of the means that he employed in building up friendly relationship with the youth and

in enriching the liturgical life of the faithful was music.

He was a sportsman. He played different games. Cricket was his favourite. He could freely relate to others and easily get in touch with others. Through music and games, he was in good contact with the youth. He became a good friend of many because of his simple, gentle and devout character. Though he was not a very brilliant student, nevertheless he was very much loved and appreciated by his school companions because of his mild and friendly nature.

It was while he was studying at Milagres High School, Kallianpur, that Peter came in contact with Fr. Philip Neri, OFM Cap., who had gone to his home parish at Kallianpur to say his first Holy Mass. This historic event of coming in contact with Fr. Philip Neri evoked in Peter the desire to become a Capuchin, son of St. Francis of Assisi. Thus, the seed of vocation - already sown in the heart of Peter by the all-loving Father and nourished in the God-fearing family context of Isaac Roche and Carmine Monteiro - slowly began to sprout, and he gradually decided to join the Capuchin Order. But, it was not so easy for Peter to take such a decisive step. Many relatives and well-wishers discouraged him from doing so, saying that the Capuchin way of life was very tough and that it would be impossible for him to put up with the hardships of the Capuchin Charism as he was a weak young man. Many of them advised him to join some diocese or some other religious Order. But Peter felt that the Lord was calling him to be His disciple, walking in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi. In the course of time

his good parents, though with great pain, supported him in responding to the call of the Master. "In 1942, Isaac Roche retired from his service in the parish due to ill health.... In 1943, he blessed his youngest son with tears in his eyes before Peter left for the seminary".² Thus, Peter joined the Franciscan Capuchin Order at Farangipet, Mangalore, in the year 1943.

1.2. Initial Formation:

When Peter sought admission into the Capuchin Order, Fr. Sylvester Renac, a French Capuchin, was the superior and director of the postulants at Monte Mariano, Frangipet. On February 3, 1944 he was vested in the humble capuchin habit with a new name: Alfred.³ Fr. Ambrose Rebello, an existentialist and a deep-rooted capuchin, was the novice master of Br. Alfred. At the end of the novitiate he made the first profession on 11th April 1945. He did his philosophical studies at St. Antony's Friary, Quilon, Kerala, where he made his final profession on 11th April 1949. Then, he pursued the theological studies at Amalashram, Trichy and at St. Joseph's Friary, Kotagiri, Nilgiris, Tamilnadu, where, with his four companions: Brs. Hyppolitus, Blaise, Eusebius, and Richard, he received the priestly Ordination on 11th April 1951. As a student, what kind of a person Br. Alfred was can be known from Fr. Eusebius, one of his companions: "Fr. Alfred Roche from Barkur was a man of prayer and a lover of silence. He prayed

² Mr. Vally Roche, *Isaac Roche and Carmine Anastella Monteiro*, p.2

³ Change of name during the first profession was an ordinary practice in the Capuchin Order (Religious Orders and Congregations) before the second Vatican Council. Accordingly, Peter John received the new name Alfred in the Capuchin Order.

always. He loved music and sang well. He never accused or criticized anyone. He always worked for unity and fraternity and never for division. I was the only Tamil in the batch and never had any difficulty with him. He was very charitable. He was a happy man who cracked many jokes and laughed. But his jokes were never vulgar".⁴ Fr. Eusebius was a well sought after Capuchin preacher in Tamilnadu. He preached more by his prayerful, poor, and humble life than by his words. Presently he is an elderly friar who is practically blind.

In this context, Sr. Egreida Crasta has something very important to add. First, she would like to share something that she had heard from her sister: "I had heard about Fr. Roche even before my joining the Ursuline Franciscan Congregation (UFC). As a seminarian Br. Alfred Roche had gone to Anagalli, to his sister, Juliana Rebello's house. My sister, Anna Furtado, is a neighbour to Juliana Rebello. This was what my sister had shared with my mother and with me: 'I saw this brother walking in the coconut grove. He was looking like a saint. He was reciting the rosary with down-cast eyes. Cecilia and his parents are really very fortunate people. He would be a wonderful priest'". Having shared what she had heard from her sister, Sr. Egreida now shares her own experience: "After his ordination when he used to come to his sister, Cecilia's house, people were highly

⁴ These are the words of Fr. Eusebius OFM Cap., one of the companions of Fr. Alfred all-through his initial formation to capuchin life. Out of the above mentioned four companions of Fr. Alfred, Fr. Eusebius is the only one surviving today. He is the senior most member of the Amala Annai province of the Capuchins in India. He is a member of the novitiate fraternity: Assisi Ashram, Pampanvillai, K. K. District, Tamilnadu. He is a man of prayer and simplicity of life.

praising him. They used to say that he was a very soft spoken person. Personally, I felt very happy on every occasion when I met him and listened to his loving and compassionate words. The formees, coming from St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasakod, where he was rendering his precious pastoral service, used to tell me that Fr. Roche was a holy priest".⁵

Mr. Isaac Roche, the dear dad of Fr. Alfred, did not have the joy of participating in the solemn liturgy of his son's sacerdotal ordination at Kotagiri, Tamil Nadu on 11 April 1951; nor did he have the privilege of assisting at the altar which he loved and served with great devotion for 55 years as a dedicated sacristan, when his son celebrated his first Eucharistic Sacrifice on the very same altar at St. Peter's Church, Barkur on 14 April 1951. Being elderly and sickly he had peacefully passed away in the year 1947. But, he had the joy of seeing his son as a seminarian, when he had come home from Kotagiri for a couple of days to see his ailing father before his beloved dad embraced sister death. His mother, Carmine Monteiro, had the joy of participating at the solemn Eucharistic Celebration of her son at Barkur and to receive the Eucharistic Lord from her own son, though she could not go to Kotagiri for the sacerdotal ordination of her son owing to ill her health. Similarly, one can imagine the happiness of Piad

⁵ Sr. Egreida Crasta, *Small History of Fr. Alfred Roche*, pp. 1-2. Sr. Egreida, as mentioned above, is a member of the Ursuline Franciscan Congregation. She is born and brought up at Kannada Kudru, which belongs to the Immaculate Conception Church, Ganguli. Fr. Alfred Roche's sister, Cecilia Crasta, Fr. Rudolf Crasta, SVD and my mother, lived at Kannada Kudru. Sr. Egreida is a retired teacher who presently lives in Christa Raja Convent, Naganahalli, in the diocese of Mysore.

Roche, Fr. Alfred's aunt, who had played an important role in the well-being and early formation of Fr. Alfred, when she saw her nephew returning to his home parish, as an ordained capuchin priest and celebrating the First Holy Eucharist with his dear and near ones.

14 April 1951 was a red letter day in the history of St. Peter's parish, Barkur, when, under the able leadership of Fr. Charles Nazareth, the then parish priest, and the wholehearted co-operation of the entire parish, Fr. Alfred celebrated his First Holy Mass in his home parish. Of course, one can imagine the enthusiastic note of the entire Roche family when they saw one of their own becoming the minister of the Word of God and the Eucharist. It was on this occasion that Adolph and I, two of the nephews of Fr. Alfred, received our First Holy Communion from our uncle. Drawing inspiration from the life-pattern of my dear uncle today I, the author of this book, am serving in the vineyard of the Lord as a Capuchin Friar Minor of the Holy Trinity Province, Karnataka, India.⁶ Adolph Roche is working and living with his family at Milano, Italy.

Fr. Alfred was the third priest from St. Peter's Parish, Barkur. Fr. William Piccardo was the first and Fr. Augustine Sequeira was the second to be ordained from this parish. Following their example many young men and women have responded to the call of the Master and have become ministers and consecrated messengers working in the vineyard of

⁶ Presently I am rendering my service as vice-rector, professor of the Sacred Scripture, and animator at the Darshan Institute of Theology, the Capuchin Theologate, at Kengeri, Bangalore.

the Lord, belonging to different Dioceses, various Religious Orders, Congregations, Societies, and Institutes in the country and beyond.

1.3. Mission Field:

The mission field of Fr. Alfred was not very extensive geographically. But, his mission was very intensive.⁷ After his Priestly Ordination he began his humble service as the vice-master in the capuchin novitiate at Monte Mariano, Farangipet, in the diocese of Mangalore. Along with his responsible task as a formator, he rendered his pastoral ministry in the friary chapel. Then, as per requests, he extended his apostolate to the neighbouring parishes and religious communities. From Monte Mariano he was transferred to the Holy Family Church, Brahmavar, as the first capuchin parish priest, where he tirelessly laboured for 16 years and brought about an all-round development in the entire parish with his holistic outlook in life. From Holy Family Church, Brahmavar, he was transferred to St. Anne's Church, Binaga, in the then diocese of Belgaum (presently part of the diocese of Karwar). He could serve the faithful of St. Anne's Church, Binaga, and the neighboring people of other faiths only for three years, when, the then major superiors felt that his dedicated service was needed at St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod, Honnavar, in the then diocese of Belgaum (presently part of the diocese of Karwar).

⁷ He worked in the dioceses of Mangalore and Karwar, which was a part of the former diocese of Belgaum.

St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod, was another fertile soil in which he tried to plant his God-given gifts and talents. He spent his time and energy in faith-formation and giving a new shape to the life-pattern of the parishioners and people of good will, irrespective of caste and creed. After rendering praiseworthy service for 6 years, he returned to the novitiate house as the superior at Monte Mariano, in the diocese of Mangalore, where he had initiated his pastoral ministry as a newly ordained priest. From the novitiate house at Farangipet, once again, he was transferred to St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod, Honnavar, where he had gracefully labored 6 years, for another term of 6 years. Finally, as a retired friar, he was transferred to the Holy Family Friary and Church, Brahmavar, in the diocese of Mangalore, where he rendered his little service, conditioned by his limited energy and failing health.

CHAPTER 2

ST. FIDELIS FRIARY: MONTE MARIANO - FARANGIPET

Introduction:

An old chapel dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi and a dilapidated building, which once belonged to the Portuguese Franciscans, were standing on the little hillock, called Monte Mariano, at Farangipet. These buildings with the adjoining compound were given by the Bishop of Mangalore to the Capuchins to be the novitiate when they came to Farangipet in May 1930. The chapel was repaired and on its side the novitiate block was built. Until 1969, this was the only novitiate house of the Capuchins in India. Though it has been a formative unit of the Capuchins during the past years, nevertheless the friars have been rendering pastoral services in different parishes and religious institutes in the diocese of Mangalore and beyond.

2.1. Formative Work:

After his sacerdotal Ordination at St. Joseph's Friary, Kotagiri, Fr. Alfred's first appointment was at St. Fidelis Friary, Monte Mariano, Farangipet, where he arrived on 14 April 1952 and rendered his precious service as the assistant novice master for four years along with Frs. Diego Joseph, and Pacificus Menezes. He was fully convinced that, as a formator, he had an important role to play in molding and shaping the future capuchins in the Indian context. He knew

that the life witness of the formators had much to do in this important task entrusted to him. As the assistant novice master, he employed his God-given gifts and talents in **fashioning the inner attitudes of the Son of God** in the hearts of the young novices.⁸ His simple and austere lifestyle was a source of inspiration to the novices in order to imbibe the spirit of the poverello of Assisi, deeply rooted in the teaching and life-pattern of the Master, the Formator par excellence.

He was a born musician. As mentioned above he was in the parish choir before joining the Capuchin Order. With his melodious voice, well-cultivated under the baton of Fr. Francis Xavier Lobo, a master in Gregorian chant, he trained the novices in liturgical music. Thus, chanting of the psalms during the liturgical hours and singing the hymns during the Eucharistic celebrations fostered the spirit of prayer and devotion in the fraternity. His unassuming and gentle way of life was an open book not only to the confrères but also the people of Farangipet and of the surrounding villages.

2.2. Pastoral Ministry:

At Monte Mariano, while assisting the novice master in the work of formation, Fr. Alfred got initiated into the pastoral ministry. As the friary chapel was/is frequented by a good number of the faithful on Sundays and Feast days, he could easily come in contact with them and train some of them in liturgical music and form a beautiful choir. It was a God-given

⁸ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Vita Consecrata*, Vatican City, 1996, no. 66.

opportunity to the children and the youth to learn technically, with the notes, the liturgical music. Some of them could really develop their musical talent under his guidance and became leading musicians.

Besides, now and then, he went to assist some of the neighbouring parish priests. His liturgical service in the friary chapel and his ministry of the Word in the neighboring parishes were highly appreciated by the faithful and the diocesan clergy because his sermons were not bookish. They were not aimed at satisfying the intellectual curiosity. They were experience-bound and very much practice orientated.

The secret of his success in preaching consisted in the methodology that he employed since the very beginning of his priestly ministry. He was not a person who tried to have a look at the Sunday liturgical readings in the sacristy just before going to the altar for the Eucharistic celebration. His pedagogy was quite different. He read the liturgical texts of the following Sunday, one week in anticipation. The Sunday homily was the end product of the prayerful reflections and personal application of these scriptural passages during the course of the week. **It was a message more coming from the heart than the mind.** It was a food well-masticated, well-tasted, well-digested, and well-personalized. Since it was a food already tasted and personalized by him, he could present/offer it with personal conviction and deep faith. It touched the hearts of the faithful and had a lasting effect on them. People liked to listen to his preaching and tried to participate in the Holy Eucharist, devoutly celebrated by him.

CHAPTER 2

HOLY FAMILY CHURCH BRAHMAVAR

Introduction:

The Holy Family Parish, Brahmavar, in the diocese of Mangalore, became very problematic owing to the schism that broke out in 1887. In the little parish precincts there were different kinds of Christian groups. At times, in one and the same family, there were Catholics, Syrians, Jacobites, and later Yehova's Witnesses. So, great prudence and tact were needed to deal with these people. The priests of the diocese were working hard for reconciliation and reunion of the people of God at Brahmavar. But, the results were very meagre. Seeing the precarious condition and owing to some urgent pastoral needs, his Excellency, Basil S. Peres, Bishop of Mangalore, decided to entrust the Holy Family Parish at Brahmavar to the care of the Capuchin Friars on the 6th of April, 1956, when Rev. Fr. Cyril Andrade was the Commissary Provincial of the Capuchins in India. Swami Dayanand describes this scene very picturesquely: "It was a GOOD-SHEPHERD-SUNDAY that the Holy Family Parish, Brahmavar, welcomed a CAPUCHIN PRIEST as their parish priest. The GOOD-SHEPHERD-SUNDAY became a mile stone in the history of the parish as the new parish priest, Rev. Fr. Alfred Roche, gradually became 'a good shepherd' of our sheep at Holy Family Parish. Three great Capuchins, like three Kings of the East, reached our parish in the persons of Very Rev. Fr.

Cyril Andrade and Rev. Frs. Gregory Vas and Alfred Roche. The last, the shortest like Zacchaeus, took charge of the parish from Fr. Castelino, a diocesan priest.... Rev. Fr. Alfred Roche was the first capuchin parish priest, short in stature, deep in faith, and steady in his views and convictions, who took charge of this parish in a humble and simple way".⁹

It was in such a delicate situation that Fr. Alfred was sent by the major superiors to Brahmavar to be the first capuchin parish priest of the Holy Family Church and to be a messenger of reconciliation and reunion. He was formally appointed the parish priest of the Holy Family Church, with two other substations: Petre and Nilavar, on the 15th of April, 1956. As a young friar, Fr. Alfred was very much hesitant in taking up such a difficult and responsible task. But, trusting in the Lord and the encouragement of the superiors, he took up the challenge and began this new apostolate placing himself into the hands of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the Patrons of this parish.

3.1. Church Building-Completion:

Fr. Alfred worked arduously to foster the spirit of prayer and devotion among the faithful by way of ardent prayer and regular catechesis. He tried his level best to educate the children irrespective of caste and creed. He wholeheartedly fostered the spirit of peace and reunion in and through family visits and friendly meetings. With his brotherly and

⁹Swami Dayanand, Rev. Fr. Alfred Roche, OFM Cap., p.1. Swami Dayanand is a Capuchin priest, born and brought up in the Holy Family Parish, Brahmavar. He is a member of St. Fidelis Province, North India. He is the successor of Swami Augustine Deenabandhu at Kareilly Ashram, in the diocese of Bareilly. He has been rendering his precious service in this Ashram of Indian Spirituality for the last 25 years. He is the elder brother of our provincial minister, Very Rev. Fr. Vincent Furtado. He is sharing something from what he has seen with his own eyes.

un-assuming approach he succeeded in building up fraternal relationship with individuals and groups irrespective of caste and creed, rich and poor, young and old. His precious contribution has graphically been depicted by Daiji World in this way: "In fact, half a century ago the situation of Brahmavar was not like that of today. Poverty: economic, intellectual as well as spiritual unrest was very evident. With Fr. Alfred's arrival began a new chapter in the history of the parish and I must add, in the region as well. His maturity of faith, simplicity of life and generosity of heart won over the young and the old irrespective of caste and creed. His full-time availability (with a little table and a stool on the veranda, close to the bell tower) was the secret of his ministry.... People came to him spontaneously to pour out their joys and sorrows".¹⁰

As a zealous pastor, he immediately felt the need of a worthy habitation for the Lord and put his hand to complete the construction of the house of God. In fact, the foundation of the new church was laid when Fr. Alphonsus Sequeira was the parish priest and the construction work was continued during the time of Fr. Edwin Castelino. But, in spite of his hard labour, he was not able to complete the construction work of the church, owing to economic problems.

When Fr. Alfred took charge of the parish at Brahmavar, the façade of the church was half-done; the walls of the church were not plastered; the flooring was incomplete, it was frequently smeared

¹⁰ Extract from *barkuronline.com*

with cow dung. The new parish priest put his heart and soul in collecting funds from different sources. He contacted friends and benefactors who came to his rescue and helped him generously. He went to Mumbai and spent nearly a month knocking at the doors of friends and relatives to collect some amount. Thus, by the grace of God, the generous support of good-hearted benefactors, and the wholehearted collaboration of the parishioners, he could complete the church-building with a beautiful altar dedicated to the Holy Family, the patron of this parish. Further, the task of raising the lofty belfry, with its mighty foreign bell, goes to his credit. The beautiful church and the sonorous bell, with its melodious peal, were blessed on the 1st of April, 1961.¹¹

Owing to his different commitments in the parish and the various types of apostolic service in the neighboring parishes and religious institutes, the number of the friars gradually increased. Fr. Daniel D'Souza and Br. Odoric Goveas (later Fr. Devanand Goveas) were the first companions of Fr. Alfred and a capuchin fraternity was canonically constituted at Brahmavar on the 28th of February, 1960. When Fr. Daniel D'Souza was transferred, Fr. Apolinaris Pinto came to the Holy Family Friary, Brahmavar, in February, 1963. Seeing the inconvenience of the faithful at Petre, Fr. Apolinaris put in great efforts to build a beautiful church at Petre which was blessed by his Excellency, Basil

¹¹ Cf. Fr. Adolph of Mattakara and Fr. Fortunatus of Korlai, *For the History of the Indian Capuchin Province of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Coimbatore*, 1972, p.363.

D'Souza, Bishop of Mangalore. It became an independent parish and was handed over to the diocese of Mangalore on the 25th of May, 1968.¹²

Further, the good hearted pastor perceived the difficulties faced by the faithful from and around Nilavar to come to the Holy Family Church, Brahmavar, for Sunday Mass and other liturgical celebrations. He saw the hardships that the children were facing when they had to come for catechism and other devotional practices. Paying due attention to the distance and various inconveniences faced by them, he planned to construct a new chapel at Nilavar. Mr. Leo Rodrigues furnishes us with certain details about it: "When Fr. Alfred was the parish priest of the Holy Family Church, Brahmavar, perceiving the hardships of the faithful of Nilavar to come to the Holy Family Church, Brahmavar, he planned to build a chapel at Nilavar. When the construction work was going on, several times I did accompany Fr. Alfred on foot. This chapel, dedicated to St. Paul, was inaugurated in the year 1967.... Initially, on sundays, Fr. Alfred used to offer the holy Eucharist in the evening and used to stay there at night. The following morning he used to celebrate the holy Eucharist in the chapel. After having had the breakfast at Mr. Basil D'Souza's house he used to visit some of the families, and then return to Brahmavar".¹³ Thus, by

¹²Cf. Fr. Adolph of Mattakara and Fr. Fortunatus of Korlai, *For the History of the Indian Capuchin Province ...* p.364.

¹³ Mr. Leo Rodrigues, *Fr. Alfred Roche: What I have Seen with my Eyes*, pp.1-2. Leo Rodrigues is a parishner of Holy Family Church, Brahmavar. As he puts down in black and white, he was one of those who were staying with Fr. Alfred in the parish house and accompanying him on the bicycle since Fr. Alfred could not ride the bicycle owing to ill health. Even now he is an active member in the parish, working very hard for the well being of the parish.

the grace of God, strenuous efforts of the pastor, ardent desire of the faithful, and generous contribution of friends and benefactors, the new chapel, dedicated to St. Paul, was constructed at Nilavar. It was blessed by his Excellency, Basil D'Souza, Bishop of Mangalore, on the 10th of October, 1967.¹⁴ The new chapel gave a new identity to the faithful of Nilavar and of its neighborhood, facilitating the faithful in faith formation and community building.

With the increase in number of the friars, construction of a new friary at Brahmavar became a necessity. Once again, finding the economic sources for the new friary was not so easy. Thanks be to God, a simple and solid building of the Holy Family Friary was put up with the help of the generous benefactors of Fr. Theophilus Pereira, one of the members of the fraternity. The new friary was blessed by his Excellency, Basil D' Souza, Bishop of Mangalore, along with Rev. Fr. Berchmans, the then Provincial of the Indian Capuchin Province of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, on the 19th of December, 1966.

3.2. *Prayer and Devotion:*

Fr. Alfred was a kind and gentle pastor. He was a man of prayer and a liturgical minded pastor. He was a "torch bearer" wherever he went. As regards to his prayer life, Fr. Dominic Savio would like to share something from his personal experience: "After my priestly ordination in the year 1966, my

¹⁴ 6 Cf. Fr. Adolph of Mattakara and Fr. Fortunatus of Korlai, *For the History of the Indian Capuchin Province ...* p.364.

first appointment was at Holy Family Church as the assistant to Fr. Alfred Roche, who was the parish priest. I lived with him three years and knew him very intimately. As I observed him, he was a good, fervent, and enthusiastic pastor. He was always available for the pastoral needs of his parishioners.... By his preaching and catechesis he was deepening the faith of his parishioners.... His pastoral life has been an inspiration to me for my pastoral ministry".¹⁵ Sr. Hilaria too has something interesting to add: "Fr. Roche was very particular in keeping his monastic rules. But he was very kind and gentle, never raised his voice. He would get up early for his prayers and when we went for mass we could see him in his pew bent in prayer. He would spend some time in the confessional before Mass. The offering of Mass evoked devotion".¹⁶

In fact, he gave due importance to the Word of God and tried to catechize and instruct the children and the youth systematically. Swami Dayanand has something to say about the style of Fr. Alfred's preaching: "His preaching was concrete and existential - touching the life of everyone. The tone

¹⁵ Fr. Dominic Savio, *Fr. Alfred: A Good Pastor*, pp. 1-2. Fr. Dominic Savio is a Capuchin friar belonging to the Holy Trinity Province, Karnataka. After working three years with Fr. Alfred as the assistant, he succeeded Fr. Alfred as the parish priest of the Holy Family Church, Brahmavar. Presently, once again, he is rendering his precious pastoral service in the Holy Family Church, Brahmavar.

¹⁶ Sr. Hilaria Monteiro, *Some Reminiscences of Fr. Alfred Roche, OFM Cap : Popularly Known as "Amcho Piti Padriab"*, p.1 . Sr. Hilaria is one of the Sisters of Charity of Sts. Bartholomea Capitanio and Vincenza Gerosa who came to Brahmavar in July 1956 and whose convent was/is next door. She worked in close collaboration with Fr. Alfred for fourteen years. Presently she is at Snehalaya, Socio-Medical Relief Centre, Solur, Bangalore, 562 127.

of his preaching was firm, steady, deep and one that touched the heart. He never preached standing at the ambo. He stood in front of the altar, looking at everyone, even those standing at the entrance door.... As I recollect now, once, his preaching on the apostolic creed lasted for one year, a thorough catechism for all. The message was so clear and made so interesting that the parishioners were eagerly waiting to listen to the Sunday sermon. When the 'pitch' went high, there was a pin drop silence. Only those who were accustomed to his preaching could immediately understand why the 'pitch' was raised. He was a person who practiced what he preached. Therefore, the message went home immediately".¹⁷

He had a very creative and practical method in teaching and guiding the children. Sr. Bernardine D'Souza speaks of the pedagogy followed by Fr. Alfred: "When he was preaching the three days retreat to the High School students, practical points meant for their age were given. He would keep a "Question Box" in which students were free to put questions or doubts, written on slips of paper without their signature. When the sermon was on 'death', he would take the students to the cemetery where an impressive sermon was preached.... Every Saturday evening and on holidays, Fr. Alfred took special classes for two hours for the catholic boys of the parish who were attending other schools".¹⁸

¹⁷ Swami Dayanand, *Rev. Fr. Alfred Roche, ofm cap., p.1.*

¹⁸ Sr. Bernardine D'Souza, *Curé d'Ars of Brahmavar: Rev. Fr. Alfred OFM Cap, p. 4.* She is one of the Sisters of Charity of Sts. Bartholomea Capitanio and Vincenza Gerosa. She came to Brahmavar in June 1964 and worked nine years with Fr. Alfred when he was the pastor of the Holy Family Church at Brahmavar. She was very much involved in the school as well as the parish apostolate. Presently, she is at Stella Maris Convent, 23 Gayatri Devi Park Extn., Bangalore, 560 003.

This is how he accompanied the children and the youth on their spiritual journey.

Initially, Fr. Alfred's preaching-ministry was confined to the parish precincts. Since he was alone, he could not afford to leave the parish and take up the ministry of breaking the Word of God beyond the parish confines. But, when the number of the friars increased and when a capuchin fraternity was constituted at Holy Family parish, as there were many calls coming from different parishes and institutions, he did take up the preaching-ministry in different places, far and near. His well-meditated and experience-bound sermons and conferences were highly appreciated by people of every walk of life. They flocked enthusiastically to be enlightened in their Christian faith and strengthened in their sacerdotal/religious commitment.

In his pastoral ministry he sought the collaboration from the Sisters of Charity of Sts. Bartholomea Capitano and Vincenza Gerosa whose convent was/is next door and who have been assisting in the parish and teaching in the parish school since 1938. These sisters, in turn, loved their parish priest and gave him their wholehearted cooperation in every respect: in the spiritual, intellectual and social well-being and well-doing of the parishners. Sr. Hilaria Monteiro narrates something very touching regarding the cordial relationship between the pastor and the sisters: "Fr. Alfred and we, the sisters, were really like brother and sisters, working with such unity for the spread of the kingdom. Often, we used to have meetings to plan for pastoral

work. What is remarkable is that he talked and treated sisters with such respect that he never used the 'singular form' in speaking. He would discuss any change or new idea with sisters, especially with Sr. Judith who was helping in the sacristy work.... In one word, there wasn't any 'mine and thine'. It was always all 'ours'."¹⁹

What we see here is the right understanding and collaboration between the pastor and the community of sisters who worked hand in hand. The pastor respected them and involved them in planning and decision-making and the sisters wholeheartedly collaborated with him. Here, we see how meaningful the words of Pope Paul VI are: "I cannot hear you because your deeds speak louder than your words".²⁰ The mutual understanding between the parish priest and the community of the sisters as well as their reciprocal support set a beautiful example for the faithful. This spirit of fraternal collaboration brought about a family atmosphere in the entire parish, strengthening the fellow-feeling, prayer-life and faith-dimension of the parishners. As a result, one could notice greater peace, joy and harmony in the families.

As a gifted musician, Fr. Alfred, built up a beautiful parish-choir with the sisters and the parish youth, and trained the entire parish community in liturgical singing. This is what Sr. Hilaria Monteiro has to say about him: "Taking catechism and singing was his forte. He had a melodious voice which he used

¹⁹ Sr. Hilaria Monteiro, *Some Reminiscences of Fr. Alfred Roche, OFM Cap: Popularly Known as "Amcho Piti Padriab"*, p.1.

²⁰ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no.41.

fully for God's glory. He trained children in singing for every feast. The sisters never missed his choir practices".²¹ Yes, it was a unique experience to listen to the young and old, singing together in unison. I, too, can bear witness to this. In the words of St. John, the beloved disciple, it is something that I have seen with my own eyes, heard with my own ears, and touched with my own hands (cf. 1 Jn 1,1-3). For, as a high school student, from 1957 to 1959, I used to go to Brahmavar and stay with Fr. Alfred for about a fortnight every year. Participating in the weekly and Sunday liturgy, I used to make a comparison between the liturgical tone in my parish, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, Gangulli, and that of the Holy Family Church, Brahmavar. Time and again, I used to ask myself: why is it that the liturgical music and the liturgical celebrations at Holy Family Church are so lively and vibrant?

This liturgical renewal brought about an increase in the number of the faithful participating in the Eucharistic liturgy on Sundays as well as on week days. For, he always had a particular **theme**, based on the Word of God, that he developed for several Sundays and the faithful, who had been initiated into a particular theme, were keen in listening to him and learning from his deep, down-to-earth, and experience-bound preaching. Mrs Lilly D'Almedia has something wonderful to share with us: "While preaching, particularly when he was preaching on

²¹ Sr. Hilaria Monteiro, *Some Reminiscences of Fr. Alfred Roche, O.F.M. Cap : Popularly Known as "Amcho Piti Padriab"*, p.2.

the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, as our Lord was soaked with blood so Fr. Roche was getting soaked with perspiration. When he was preaching on the suffering of our Lord, tears were flowing from his eyes. He was a very kind and loving person. But, he was quite firm when he had to correct someone who was on the wrong path. On the Silver Jubilee of our wedding he prayed for us and blessed us. With his blessings we are living gracefully and joyfully".²²

That was one of the basic principles that he employed in catechizing the faithful. The well prepared homilies and the melodious singing of the pastor touched the minds as well as the hearts of the faithful and drew them like a magnet to him. As a result, one could see the active involvement of the people. They were not just passive spectators. They were active participants. At this juncture, it is important to mention what Daiji World has to say: "Music was in his nature. Composing hymns and songs and teaching music was his special hobby. So much so, he could train some of the parishners and could organize a band-set in the parish. The parish choir, composed of children, youth, as well as the Sisters of Charity, (specially Sr. Judith, "*vandane classichi chicher*", who was teaching the children of the first standard) was a special source of attraction. Neighbouring parishioners flocked to the Holy Family Church to listen to the beautiful

²² Mrs. Lilly D'Almeida, *Fr. Roche: Benefactor of the Poor*, pp.1-2. Mrs. Lilly D'Almeida is a parishioner of the Holy Family Parish, Brahmavar. She is a retired headmistress. Presently, she is the secretary of the SFO of the Brahmavar zone; she is a person deeply rooted in the Lord and taking a lot of interest in spreading the Franciscan charism.

parish choir as well as the down to earth sermons of Fr. Alfred who went from parish to parish preaching the Word of God to the religious and faithful especially to the youth”.²³ This is something praiseworthy.

3.3. *Sacrament of Reconciliation:*

The Sacrament Reconciliation is another area whereupon Fr. Alfred focused his attention. Today, the concept of sin has become very fluid and superficial. Some of the pastors, sad to say, give very little importance to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. They are not convinced of the real value of the Sacrament. Consequently, they think that sitting in the confessional is a waste of time and energy. As a result, we see very few of them making themselves available to offer the grace of reconciliation and healing to the faithful. Often, the excuse is: I am overburdened with my day-to-day tasks and I don't have time. Please, hold me excused!

Fr. Alfred did not belong to this category of priests. Being fully convinced of the real value of the sacrament of reconciliation in the healing process of the faithful and in rebuilding the broken relationships, both on the vertical and horizontal levels, he prepared the children, the youth and the adults by instructing them adequately. At this juncture let us listen to the personal experience of Sr. Lucy Rodrigues: “Every Saturday Fr. Alfred would sit in the confessional and wait for the children. No child would escape from his sight because he loved the little ones very tenderly. He

²³ Extract from *Barkuronline.com*

followed them very closely. He won the heart of the little ones. As for me, I could never hide anything from Father. All my inner secrets I used to reveal to him. If I were to hide anything, I would be disturbed; such was the holiness of this great person. Just looking at us, he would know from our face what we were".²⁴ He really was a divine physician. He could rightly grasp the fears, anxieties, and problems of those who approached him and guided them (young and old) on the right path. His frequent advice was: "Child, do not offend Jesus, because He loves you very much".²⁵

If one reads his small book entitled "*Niskalpon*" (chastity), one can know his frame of mind and his stand on this subject. Therefore, every morning, before the Eucharistic celebration, he made himself available to the faithful for the sacrament of reconciliation and facilitated them to be healed of their wounded relationships with God, with their fellowmen, and with themselves. This brought about a lot of change in the parish, bridging the relational gaps existing among the members of different families, neighbors, relatives and so on. Parish priests from the diocese of Mangalore and beyond invited him, time and again, to offer such opportunities of reconciliation and peace to their parishioners. Similarly, superiors of Religious Congregations and Institutes repeatedly summoned him to be a messenger of reconciliation, peace, and healing in their fraternities.

²⁴ Sr. Lucy Rodrigues, *God Man Fr. Alfred*, p.1 Sr. Lucy Rodrigues is from Holy Family Parish, Brahmavar. In her sharing she says that she was six years old when Fr. Alfred came to their parish as the parish priest. The whole family was very close to its kind and generous pastor. Sr. Lucy grew under the shadow of her beloved pastor, studied under his guidance and became a sister of the Sisters of Charity of Sts. Bartholomea Capitano and Vincenza Gerosa whose convent was/is next to the church compound. Presently, she is at Snehalya, Solur, Bangalore.

²⁵ Sr. Lucy Rodrigues, *God Man Fr. Alfred*, p.3.

3.4. *Spiritual Direction/Accompaniment:*

As mentioned above, drawing inspiration from the life-pattern of the Curé d’Ars, Fr. Alfred gave due importance to the sacrament of reconciliation, offering inspiring instructions and providing adequate opportunities to the faithful. Besides rendering his regular pastoral service in the confessional, he made himself available for spiritual accompaniment. As an experienced spiritual companion, he accompanied very many on their spiritual journey. Like the Curé d’Ars he welcomed priests, religious and lay people who came to him to pour out their pains and sorrows with a compassionate heart and spent hours together patiently listening to them. With his empathetic approach he comforted the afflicted, supported the abandoned, empowered the marginalized, and became their beloved spiritual companion on their strenuous life-journey. Sr. Elveera D’Costa would like to share her personal experience in this area: “I was a member of the community of the Sacred Heart convent, Brahmavar, when Fr. Alfred Roche was the parish priest. I was privileged to have him as my guru, learning things not just by preaching, but by the example of life. The fragrance of his saintliness spread around fast and many sought him in their trials and difficulties.... He never judged others, but excused their faults manifesting the mercy of Jesus.... His only axiom was to speak well of others. He did this not to win applause but to lead them to Christ. The young and old were his friends. His fatherly attitude towards me helped me to take him as my spiritual guide. I owe him much as a religious and I ask Jesus to grant me the

grace of living my consecration to the full....”²⁶

Sr. Gemma Pinto, too, has something very precious to share with us: “In my life-journey, as a religious, I had the opportunity to live with many sisters of my Congregation. After God, who is the Source of every grace, the influence of Fr. Alfred Roche, this holy friar, has been very great in my life.... I have seen the following gifts/virtues in Fr. Alfred: humility, simplicity, gentleness, forbearance, peace and love. In every situation of life, joyful and sorrowful, his forbearance was remarkable. He was a precious spiritual companion on my life-journey”.²⁷ In fact, there are many more witnesses of this sort. They will be made available in another context.

For such an evangelical apostolate, modelled after the ministry of the Good Shepherd, Fr. Alfred did not have, in our modern terms, a beautifully and technically set up ‘spiritual-direction-parlour’. This precious apostolate of **spiritual accompaniment** was rendered by him using two little stools and an old table placed at the end of corridor, close to the belfry. It was there that he welcomed with his smiling face every sort of people who came to meet him in his/her joys and sorrows. Sitting on one of those stools and leaning against the wall of the parish-office (which was all-in-one), he listened to

²⁶ Sr. Elveera D’Costa, *Fr. Alfred Roche, OFM Cap.*, p.1. Sr. Elveera D’Costa belongs to the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Sts. Bartholomea Capitanio and Vincenza Gerosa (.....)

²⁷ Sr. Gemma Pinto, *Fr. Alfred Roche, OFM Cap: My Experience*, p.1. Sr. Gemma Pinto is an elderly member of the Ursuline Franciscan Congregation. After rendering her precious service in different convents, presently she is at (...) Koppa, in the diocese of Cikmagaluru.

the directees/accompanied with fatherly love and concern. The shepherd always had time for his flock. People spontaneously came to him to pour out their joys and sorrows. People who came to him with a confused mind and a heavy heart, having spent a little time with him, returned to their respective homes very much consoled and comforted. His empathetic approach fostered trust and confidence in him; and his evocative questions enabled them to go deeper into their innermost being; his loving and compassionate listening gave them the rare opportunity to pour out their anxieties and preoccupations. Walking patiently with them and listening to their painful experiences he helped them to discern the plan of God in their life, accept it more and more willingly and carry it out more and more faithfully and spontaneously in their life. This complementary apostolate of discerning the will of God helped the young in responding to God's call and to make right choices and take proper decisions in life. His patient listening and compassionate approach enabled the sick and the afflicted to resign themselves to the will of God and accept the day-to-day cross with greater peace and joy.

3.5. *Holy Eucharist:*

"It is said", says Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, the preacher of the Papal Household for the last 30 years, "that two sacraments in particular 'make' the Church: baptism and Eucharist. But, whereas baptism makes the Church grow quantitatively, as it were, in size and number, the Eucharist makes her grow qualitatively, in strength, because it transforms her ever more deeply into the image of

Christ, her Head".²⁸ Fr. Alfred, son of the poverello of Assisi, was fully convinced of this particular teaching on the holy Eucharist. His life was centered on the Table of the Lord. One could perceive his Eucharistic devotion in the way that he celebrated the holy Mass and the quiet moments that he spent in the presence of the Eucharistic Lord. It is very important that we listen to what Fr. Desmond Rebello would like to share with us from his personal experience: "I perceived and experienced that Fr. Alfred was God's Temple. The way he used to relate to people...the regularity to his common prayers, the way he celebrated the Eucharist, made me feel that there was God's presence in him. Looking at him I got two images: One is the Holy Temple and the other is the Water flowing from it.... The gentle words that proceeded from his lips were like a living Stream of Water that, flowing from the Temple, touched and transformed people. Listening to him, I was attracted more to God and I became gradually aware of my heart's desire to become a Capuchin...."²⁹ Owing to his deep faith and personal devotion, the house of God, and particularly the altar and things connected with the Eucharistic celebration, were maintained spotlessly clean with the help of the Sisters of Charity.

Fostering Eucharistic piety among the faithful was one of his principal concerns. He began it with the

²⁸ Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, *The Eucharist: Our Sanctification*, Minnesota, 1995, p.16.

²⁹ Fr. Desmond Rebello, *Fr. Alfred Roche of Barkur – An Amazing Personality*, p.1. Fr. Desmond Rebello, OFM Cap is a member of the Holy Trinity Province, Karnataka. He is the Episcopal Vicar in the diocese of Mysore and a professor of Spiritual Theology, residing at Kripalaya, the Institute of Philosophy, at Bogadi, Mysore.

first communion children by catechizing them on the Holy Eucharist. With the help of the Sisters as well as the school teachers, he tried to explain to the children: What is the holy Eucharist? Who is really present in the little particle that one receives during the holy Mass? Why should one receive the Holy Communion frequently? How one should prepare oneself to participate in the Holy Mass and the reception of the Holy Eucharist in and through the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Very often the little catechism learnt before one's first Holy Communion gets evaporated in the course of time. Since there is a lack of a follow-up in the family context, children easily forget the little that they learn before their first Holy Communion. Fully aware of this danger, the good pastor was very particular about the Sunday catechism which gradually deepened their faith-dimension and prepared them for the sacrament of Confirmation. In addition to this, the frequent holy hours, with adequate explanation on the Blessed Sacrament, helped the young and the old in strengthening their faith and devotion.

3.6. *Family Rosary:*

Everyone knows the age-old adage: A family that prays together stays together. This proverb was repeated by the good pastor time and again. Knowing the limited intellectual as well as the spiritual depth of his sheep, the good pastor did not spare any effort in inculcating this Marian devotion in them with necessary instruction because he was convinced of the value of this Marian devotion which is very biblical. Therefore, after his

day-to-day apostolate, devoutly praying the rosary with the boys of the parish, who lived with him in the presbytery, was a daily feature. Thus, this practice of praying the family rosary gained ground in the entire parish.

Fr. Eusebius, one of Fr. Alfred's companions in the initial formation, a man of prayer and deep faith, has something very beautiful to share about his brother and friend. What I put down here is a part of what Fr. Eusebius shared with me when I had paid a visit to him: "Fr. Alfred Roche from Barkur was a man of prayer. His fidelity to the rosary was remarkable. He prayed the rosary even late at night. He was very happy in the company of children. I pray for him".³⁰ There is something more from what Fr. Eusebius shared with me. That very day, late in the evening, when I was spending a little time in the novitiate chapel, he was accompanied by Br. Peter, one of the novices, to the chapel because he is blind and he needs the help of someone when he has to move about. Br. Peter having accompanied Fr. Eusebius to the chapel, and having helped him to sit down on his chair, left the chapel. After some ejaculations in Tamil, which I did not fully understand, this is what he said in English: "Fr. Alfred, please, pray for me"! Fr. Alfred was very keen in spreading this Marian devotion, centered on the Word of God. It was prayed with special decorum in the month of May. Assisted by the pastor or the sisters, families from a specific zone of the parish came together and

³⁰ Fr. Eusebius is the senior most member of the Amala Annai Province of the Capuchins in India. He is a man of deep faith. He spends much of his time in silent prayer.

prayed the rosary as a community prayer. Such practices of coming together and praying together strengthened the interpersonal relationships among the different families of a particular zone. What is known as Basic Christian Communities (BCC) today, were already in vogue in the Holy Family Parish under the leadership of Fr. Alfred in the 1950s. Such practices of community-prayer had great witness-value among the people of other faiths, who began to say: See, how the Christians pray together as a community.

Such family and community devotions were not confined to the precincts of the parish. They had a wider repercussion. He inspired and encouraged such practices wherever he went. While substituting the parish priests in different dioceses, while preaching retreats in different parishes, religious communities, and schools, he had ample opportunities to spread such precious devotions. Besides, while animating the brothers and sisters of the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO) in different parishes, he did not leave any stone unturned in instilling in them this age-old Marian devotion which is very Franciscan.

3.7. *Spirit of poverty:*

What was the lifestyle of the parish priest? What kind of a presbytery and parish-office did he have? Fr. Alfred did not have a parish-office with up-to-date equipments. Next to the belfry there was/is a pretty large room which was three-in-one: In one corner of this room he had the parish-office consisting of a table and a chair. On the opposite corner of the same, there were two narrow benches on which he slept with a “jamakhana” (bed-sheet)

and a pillow, while the youngsters, who lived with him and helped him in his day-to-day apostolate, slept on the floor with a mat and a pillow. It is interesting to note how Daiji World describes this scene: “The parish house (which did not have special rooms for the Parish Priest, but only a hall with a little kitchen, and a verandah) was a kind of boarding house. Following the example of Jesus, he loved children. Children followed him wherever he went.... Several poor children from the parish were staying with him, as in a family, freely eating, helping in the kitchen, studying, playing cricket, watering the tiny garden, and helping him in the daily chores at the altar....”³¹ In fact, they felt quite at home with their pastor, forming, as if it were, a small family.

They were not small children. The majority of them were high school boys. They were of a great support to their good and kind pastor. While helping him in the church and the house, they were accompanying him during his visits to the sick and the aged. In fact, nearby visits were done walking with a couple of them. Distant families were visited sitting on the pillion of a bicycle, pedalled by one of those stalwarts living with him as there were no other means of travelling at that time. As a hernia patient, having undergone three surgeries, he could not pedal the bicycle. I am able to give all these details because I, too, was one of those who were accompanying him during such pastoral visits because I used to spend some days with him as a high school boy during the summer vacation.

³¹ Extract from *Barkuronline.com*

It was the spirit of poverty and simplicity, founded on the spirit of contemplative prayer, which was the secret of Fr. Alfred's success in his ministry wherever he went. He was satisfied with the minimum. Even the gifts, generously offered by his relatives, friends, and benefactors, were not used by him. Nor did they get heaped up in cupboards. Whenever he saw the poor and the needy, he joyfully parted with them these gifts. Looking at the Crucified Lord, and following the lifestyle and teaching of the poverello of Assisi, he said: "What more do I need. Let me be happy with the minimum". If not for this evangelical spirit of detachment and self-discipline, he would not have been able to help so many school children in their education, youngsters in their life-career, and senior citizens in their helplessness.

People, who came in contact with him, were touched by his spirit of simplicity, fraternity, and generosity. When the benefactors saw his life-pattern and his keen interest in the well-being and well-doing of the weak and the marginalized, they were generously lending the helping hand and were contributing their 'might' for the noble cause. They wholeheartedly collaborated with him in his preferential option for the downtrodden. In fact, it was in the school of the Master, sitting at His Feet that he had gradually acquired the evangelical spirit of simplicity, minority and self-denial. That's why he could always find the means to come to the rescue of the poor and the marginalized. Further, drawing inspiration from the lifestyle of St. Francis of Assisi, his founder and patron, he could teach: "In giving we receive".

3.8. *Education - Encouragement:*

Fr. Alfred was a very practical minded person. As a good and zealous pastor, he did not leave any stone unturned as far as faith-formation and spiritual growth of his flock was concerned. But, his apostolate was not just one-sided. Knowing very well that faith is built on nature, his approach was holistic. He tried to pay due attention to the growth of the entire human person: body, mind and soul. While zealously taking care of the spiritual life of his flock, and while economically helping the poor and the marginalized in their physical needs, knowing very well the importance of studies, he paid special attention to educate children and the youth. Sr. Bernardine has something very nice to share with us: “Fr. Alfred was very particular that every child in the parish had the opportunity to go to school. He would try to get help from his relatives and friends to educate the poor and clever children of his parish”.³² For, most of the parents, being poor and uneducated, were not in a position to encourage and motivate their children in studies.

It is interesting to note what concrete means he employed to educate the poor children and the youth. Being the manager of the Nirmala Higher Primary School of the Catholic Board of Education, and knowing very well the importance of learning he took special interest in encouraging the children and the youth to pursue their higher education. “Fr. Alfred”, says Sr. Hilaria Monteiro, “would visit the school every day, meet the children and see to

³² Sr. Bernardine D’Souza, *Curéd’Ars of Brahmavar: Rev. Fr. Alfred OFM Cap*, p.

their needs.... He was very keen in seeing that the children make progress in studies. After receiving the progress cards after every test, he would meet them class wise and take necessary action. He would see that poor but intelligent children go forward in studies. He would request one of his cousins to sponsor these children to keep in hostels and educate. In this way, some finished their graduation and more but never revealed who the sponsor was".³³ Thus, hundreds of children and youth were encouraged and supported by him in their studies through kind and good-hearted benefactors.

At this juncture, the testimony borne by Mr. Maxim Furtado does shed further light on this point: "Before Fr. Alfred's arrival in our parish, only a few had the privilege of climbing the high school steps. In collaboration with Fr. Simon Tellis, the head master of Milagres High School at Kallianpur, he arranged to send 14 girls from our parish and helped them to complete S.S.L.C. That is how he supported the poor parents in educating their children and laid the foundation for a new era. Today, they are working in different departments in different parts of our country and abroad".³⁴ These are some of the concrete steps that he took in motivating the children and youth and supporting the elders. These poor children and youth, that were

³³ Sr. Hilaria Monteiro, *Some Reminiscence of Fr. Alfred Roche, OFM Cap: Popularly Known as "Amcho Piti Padriab"*, p.3.

³⁴ Mr. Maxim Furtado, *A Short History about the Life-Pattern of Fr. Alfred*, p.1. Mr. Maxim Furtado is a retired teacher and a member of the SFO of the Udupi Zone. He belongs to the Holy Family Parish, Brahmavar. Being a teacher he knows the value of education very well.

helped by him years ago, have become highly qualified citizens today, well placed in India and abroad.

The elementary school at Handadi was in a dilapidated condition. Seeing the miserable state of the school building and paying due attention to the safety of the children, Fr. Alfred felt the urgent need of a solid building. As an 'Evangelical and Franciscan beggar' he extended his hands in the name of the Holy Family and received prompt support and economic help from 'men of goodwill'. As a result, within a short period of time he could put up the new school building with a stage. The new school building, with a pretty big well with plenty of water, gave a new identity to the children, the teachers and the school management. In this context, the testimony borne by Mr. M. Shivaram Shetty, speaks volumes: "Rev. Fr. Alfred Roche...was always a cheerful person. Yet, he was concerned about the people who suffered the harsh realities of life. He was ever ready to lend a helping hand to the underprivileged and neglected ones of the society. Poverty was rampant in and around Handadi. Owing to scarcity of food people went to bed with their empty stomachs. Children suffered from acute malnutrition. Having seen this dreadful situation he tried his level best to wipe out poverty, having recourse even to some foreign benefactors. Besides, he visited the poor and listened to their woes and worries and tenderly consoled them with his empathetic approach. Because of his endeavors, numerous children could get good education; several homeless got a roof over their head.... It is

nothing but an expression of his godliness".³⁵ This is a testimony borne by a member of another religion.

A High School for girls was a felt need at Brahmavar. Realizing its importance, the good pastor collaborated with the Sisters of Charity in acquiring a good plot of land just opposite to the parish church and succeeded in establishing the Nirmala Girls High School at Brahmavar. It was he who encouraged the Sisters and strenuously worked with them in purchasing the plot of land, obtaining all the necessary permissions from the government, and putting up the school building. Sr. Bernardine D'Souza, who was directly involved in the school project, bears witness to the pains taken by him: "Facing all sorts of oppositions caused by the neighboring school, Fr. Alfred succeeded in getting the permission to start the High School.... The first time, to get the grant-in-aid Fr. Alfred accompanied me with another sister to Mangalore D.D.P.I's office. If we hadn't succeeded in receiving the grant-in-aid by the 31st of March, the day on which the financial year ended, it would lapse. Due to Fr. Alfred's efforts, we got the bill signed at midnight. Then we were able to cash it. I am ever grateful to Fr. Alfred".³⁶ As pastor, he collaborated with the sisters wholeheartedly. Besides helping them in

³⁵ Mr. M. Shivaram Shetty, *Rev. Fr. Alfred Roche of Barkur*, p.1. The original text is in kannada. Mr. M. Shivaram Shetty is a retired Head Master of the Elementary School at Handadi within the territory of the Holy Family Parish, Brahmavar. As a Head Master he rendered wonderful service to the children and the society at large, collaborating with Fr. Alfred, the parish priest and the manager. Though he is a Hindu by religion, nevertheless, in life, like Mahatma Gandhiji, he is a man enlightened and guided by the evangelical values.

What I put down here is just a couple of sentences, culled out from a pretty long text written by him in Kannada.

³⁶ Sr. Bernardine D'Souza, *Curé d'Ars of Brahmavar: Rev. Fr. Alfred OFM Cap*, p. 3.

their spiritual life through regular conferences and sacraments, he worked for the progress of the school. "In 1968", adds Sr. Bernardine, "Nirmala High School secured cent per cent results in S.S.L.C. public exam.... On hearing this good news, Father hastened to the belfry and rang the bell for a long time.... Father's joy was so much that he wanted to share it with his parish family".³⁷ For, the entire parish was his family. Therefore, he rejoiced with those who were happy and mourned with those who were sorrowful. Nirmala High School is another contribution of Fr. Alfred to the people of Brahmavar, irrespective of caste or creed. During the course of years thousands of youngsters have been educated in this school, which has become the stepping stone for their career in life.

3.9. *Vocation Promotion:*

Fr. Alfred was a pastor who worked with the people and for the people. Following the example of the Good Shepherd, he was very much concerned about the well-being and well-doing of his flock. When he saw someone in need, he helped the needy; when he saw someone ill, he visited the sick; when he saw someone in trouble, he made every effort to comfort the afflicted. All those who came in contact with him saw his spirit of deep prayer and simplicity in his day-to-day life. This exemplary life-pattern and value system of the pastor attracted the attention of the people and fostered their faith-dimension and fraternal collaboration. It brought about a change in their value system and life-pattern.

³⁷Sr. Bernardine D'Souza, *Curé d' Ars of Brahmavar: Rev. Fr. Alfred OFM Cap*, pp.4-5.

The youth from the parish as well as from the neighboring parishes and institutions, where he was going for ministry, began to seek inspiration and guidance from him. As an experienced spiritual director/companion he walked with them and facilitated them in discerning the plan of God in their life. Thus, drawing inspiration from his life and assisted by him in discerning the will of God, a number of young men and women decided to join religious orders, congregations, institutes and dioceses. Let us pay attention to what Fr. Dominic Savio would like to say from his personal experience: "Fr. Alfred Roche was my vocation promoter. His soft talk, brown habit, white cord, a long rosary with big beads hanging from the chord, and hair cut like crown, attracted me to join the capuchin order".³⁸ At this juncture Mr. Maxim Furtato would like to say something which is very enlightening: "Fr. Alfred was the spiritual guide of our family. After God, he was the one who inspired and guided Fr. Rocky and Fr. Vincent in becoming capuchin friars. From our family many have been called to work in the vineyard of the Lord and Fr. Alfred has played an important role in enlightening and encouraging all of them".³⁹

³⁸ 30 Fr. Dominic Savio, *Fr Alfred: A Good Pastor*, p.1.

³⁹ Mr. Maxim Furtado, *A Shrot History about the Life-Pattern Fr. Alfred*, p.2. Mr. Maxim Furtado, is a retired teacher and, as mentioned above, is a member of the SFO. From his family there are many vocations for consecrated life. His sister, Sr. M. Lionnel, is a Carmalite nun. His two brothers: Fr. Rocky and Vincent are Capuchins. Fr. Rocky Furtado is the guru at Jyothiniketan Ashram, Kareilly, in the diocese of Bareilly. He is known as Swami Dayanand. Fr. Vincent Furtado is the Minister Provincial of the Holy Trinity Province, Karnataka. One of his sons, Charles, too is a Capuchin. He is the dean of studies and one of the staff members at the Darshan Institute of Theology of the Capuchins in Bangalore. One of his daughters, Sr. Maria Sundari, is a Dominican nun.

Fr. Alfred's ministry of vocation promotion was not limited to the Capuchin Order alone. As an experienced spiritual companion, having discerned the seed of vocation in the youth, he directed boys and girls to different Dioceses and Religious Congregations and Institutes, having helped them to know the plan of God and carry it out faithfully. There are several instances where we see him personally accompanying the candidates to different congregations. Late Mother Severine bears witness to this: "Personally I met Fr. Alfred Roche at Holy Rosary Convent when he brought a candidate, Agnes Lopez, to our congregation. He told me that he brought this simple girl to us. Then we moved to the chapel and prayed for her. Later we spent some time in the parlour. I was taken up by his simplicity and holy life".⁴⁰

How he was accompanying the seminarians and how enthusiastic he was, when someone from the parish had to be ordained, can be learnt from the testimony of Sr. Bernardine: "When his parishioner, who had joined a diocese in North India, had to be ordained, Father announced the good news to his parish family. He asked everyone to pray for the would-be-ordained young seminarian. He asked a box to be kept in every family to make sacrifices and put a grain of wheat in the box in the name of every member of the family. As the ordination day was approaching, the boxes were collected. Host

⁴⁰ Mother Severine Barrows, *A Few Things about Fr. Alfred Roche: A Saintly Priest*, p.1. Mother Severine Barrows was a member of the Ursuline Franciscan Congregation who expired on the She was an educationist for several years who became the General of the Congregation. These lines are culled out from a pretty long message written by her about Fr. Alfred Roche.

and particles were prepared for the First Mass by grinding the collected wheat".⁴¹ This is how he was fostering the family spirit and the involvement of everyone in the parish.

There are several who have drawn inspiration from his lifestyle and spiritual guidance. I am happy to say that I am one of those. As mentioned above, my cousin Adolph Roche and I had the privilege of receiving the First Holy Communion from his hands on the day of his First Holy Mass in his home parish, dedicated to St. Peter the apostle, at Barkur, in the diocese of Mangalore. That was a unique experience in my life because of the special preparations that I had,⁴² and the way how the celebrations were held in the parish church and in the parental home of Fr. Alfred at Pandeshwar Kudru. Even today that touching scene is before my eyes. As I grew up I had a desire to be a priest though I did not know anything about priesthood. During the Sunday Mass, looking at the parish priest at the altar⁴³, I used to imagine: "Can I become like him one day"! But, I never expressed my desire to anyone till I finished my SSLC grade. I was a dreamer for a long time.

⁴¹ Sr. Bernardine D'Souza, *Curé d'Ars of Brahmavar: Rev. Fr. Alfred O.F.M. Cap*, p. 5.

⁴² I was supposed to receive the First Holy Communion in my own home parish dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Mother Mary at Gangulli, in the diocese of Mangalore, along with the other children of the parish. As a preparation, I underwent the catechism course along with the other children of the parish. But, knowing that the sacerdotal Ordination of Fr. Alfred, my uncle, was very close, my First Holy Communion was postponed. Then, a few days prior to the day of my First Holy Communion, I had an additional course on catechism through my granny, Josphine Monteiro, my mom's aunt, who was a teacher.

⁴³ Our parish priests were members of the diocesan clergy. But, they were very devout and exemplary priests. I was touched by their good example.

As a high school boy, I had a deep desire to spend some time with Fr. Alfred and when I was a student of 9th, 10th and 11th class I used to go to Holy Family Church, Brahmavar, and spend a few days with Fr. Alfred. I used to join the boys who were living with him in the parish house and help him in different ways. At the same time I used to observe him closely and appreciate his life-pattern very much.⁴⁴ I believe that he too was noticing something in me. But, neither did he ask me what my plans were; nor did he coax me any way.⁴⁵ But, after the SSLC exams, when I myself expressed my desire to be a capuchin, he was very happy, and placed before me the real facts (challenges) of capuchin life, saying: "Patrick, capuchin life may be difficult for you. We have to get up at midnight to pray the office of reading and we have regular fasts".⁴⁶ But, I was not discouraged by that. On the contrary, my spontaneous reply was: "Uncle, I shall try".

Returning home I revealed this secret to my parents. Initially the responses were different from different members of my family, although none of them categorically opposed my option. My mom was

⁴⁴ *I am a very fortunate person. I had three uncle priests in my family: Fr. Alfred Roche (my mom's brother) a capuchin, Fr. Juze D'Souza and Fr. Antony D'Souza (my dad's cousins) two diocesan priests, belonging to the Archdiocese of Mumbai. Fr. Juze was ordained in 1960, the year that I joined the Capuchin Order. As a seminarian he used to write to me often. All three of them have been called by the compassionate Father for the eternal reward.*

⁴⁵ *On the contrary, once, when I was spending a few days at the Holy Family Friary, Brahmavar, Fr. Daniel D'Souza of happy memory, who was one of the community members, and who later became my vice-novice master, did ask me: "Piti (that was the short form that was used to call me at that time) are you planning to be like your uncle, a Capuchin"?*

⁴⁶ *Gradually I realized the wisdom behind such an advice. He did not pressurize me in any way. He wanted that I should take a personal decision, having deliberated over the real facts of Capuchin life*

very sad when she came to know that I was planning to be a capuchin because she knew something of the hardships of the capuchin life in the pre-Vatican context.⁴⁷ But, gradually the atmosphere got changed, and I joined the capuchin Order in the year 1960. Having gracefully completed my initial formation, when, on the day of my sacerdotal Ordination in my own home parish at Gangulli, I had to say a few words in the presence of his Excellency, Basil D'Souza, the then Bishop of Mangalore, this was what I said: "Ten years ago when I wanted to join the Capuchin Order Fr. Alfred, my uncle, had told me that capuchin life would be difficult for me and my reply was: "Uncle I shall try". "Today I would like to say: Still I am trying". This is the story of my vocation in which, after God, Fr. Alfred has played a very important role. Like me, there are several who have been helped and guided by him. Therefore, when we meet these priests and religious, who had been encouraged and supported by him, they gratefully say: "Fr. Alfred had been my vocation promoter. I drew inspiration and guidance from him. After God, I am indebted to him very much in being what I am today".

Is there something that we can learn from this "fisherman"? Today, different Religious Orders, Congregations, Institutes and Dioceses employ different means for "fishing" / promoting vocations: distributing leaflets and handouts, organizing

⁴⁷ *She would have preferred, if I were to be a diocesan priest. But, later on she realized the real value of my option, and I can say that she was the most happy person among all my relatives.*

camps, using modern media of communication, such as, telephone, internet, power-point and the like. Living and working in the ultra-modern world, there is nothing wrong in using the modern means of communication in promoting vocations. Yet, we know that there is no better way of vocation promotion than the life-pattern of the religious/priests, bearing authentic witness to their respective charism. Fr. Alfred did/could not have recourse to such means of vocation promotion. His life-bound preaching and simple life-pattern were sufficient to draw the attention of the youth who, came to their esteemed pastor to seek inspiration and guidance.

It is exactly like Bernad of Quintavalle, inspired and enlightened by the lifestyle of St. Francis of Assisi, coming to St. Francis for further help in discerning his vocation.⁴⁸ As an experienced spiritual director/companion, he did spend time in listening to their life-story with great interest. Empathetically listening to them and patiently walking with them, he facilitated them to discern the will of God and gradually arrive at a personal decision. Thus, he fostered vocations for every walk of life, especially for the priestly and religious life. Young men and women who joined different Religious Orders, Congregations, Institutes, and Dioceses, during his stewardship and later, were many. The seed of vocation, implanted by the Gardener of gardeners and nurtured by His minister, began to slowly sprout, grow, and bear plentiful fruit in the course of time. That is why

⁴⁸ Cf. *St. Bonaventure of Bagnoreggio, Major Life, 3.3, in Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol 2: The Founder, New York-London-Manila, 2000, p. 543.*

the Servant of God, John Paul II, says: “People today put more trust in witness than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories”.⁴⁹

3.10. *Job Facilities:*

Being a poor locality and the level of education being very low, job opportunities for the youth were very rare. Finding adequate jobs for the people was part and parcel of the ministry of the pastor. This is what Sr. Bernardine D’Souza, who had worked with him for nine years, writes: “Fr. Alfred had great love for the poor.... He was striving for job facilities. I know a few families who had low income and were facing hard days. Today they are well to do, flourishing. All, because of Fr. Alfred”.⁵⁰

People knew that he had been helping several individuals to find decent jobs through his relatives, friends, and benefactors. They approached him time and again to be their mediator in finding good jobs for them. They knew that his letter/words of recommendation were highly respected. That is how they moved to bigger towns and cities, such as Mangalore, Bangalore, Mumbai and other cities, and could find good jobs in schools, factories, workshops, and hospitals and other places of work. Sr. Lucy Rodrigues tells us how he was accompanying them: “Every family he visited and spent time in praying for the family. If anyone had to go to a distant place in search of a job, he would

⁴⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter: Redemptoris Missio*, Vatican City, 1990, no 42; cf. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Vatican City, 1975, no, 41.

⁵⁰ Sr. Bernardine D’Souza, *Curé d’Ars of Brahmavar: Rev. Fr. Alfred O.F.M. Cap*, p. 5.

visit the family, pray and bless the person, giving him/her all the necessary directions".⁵¹ This moving from their village-homes and living and moving with people of different language, culture, and race helped them to widen their horizon and broaden their vision.

We know that finding an appropriate job is not an easy joke. Yet, it is not enough to get a job. After getting a job in a factory, school, workshop, office and some other place, one has to live in a big town with the limited salary. It is not so easy to find a proper place to stay unless one has someone to accommodate and do the needful. Many, who went to Mumbai, were finding very hard to find a little place to stay. In such a situation how the foresighted and practical minded pastor tried to help the parishners can be known from the sharing of Mr. Maxim Furtado: "Seeing that some of the parishioners/youngsters who had gone to Mumbai did not have a proper place to stay, Fr. Alfred provided them with a place/room so that they could live with the minimum expenses and could save something from their earnings".⁵² This small project, thanks be to God, gradually developed into a pretty big organization in the course of time.

Being an excellent musician he formed a small parish orchestra principally with mouth organs, flutes, and side-drums. It was a beauty to see the elementary and high school boys rhythmically playing these instruments and entertaining the young and old on different occasions. Having

⁵¹ Sr. Lucy Rodrigues, *God Man Fr. Alfred*, p. 2.

⁵² Mr. Maxim Furtado, *A Short History about the Life-Pattern Fr. Alfred*, p.2

perceived the musical talents of some of the parish youth, the good pastor purchased the necessary musical instruments and gradually trained some of them and formed a formal band-set which was named: Holy Family Band, Brahmavar. As the musicians got the necessary training and practice, the Holy Family Band became well known and was booked by different parish priests on the occasions of different feasts and processions. Similarly, people from the parish and neighboring parishes booked it for weddings, funerals and other celebrations. Thus, while encouraging the youth and fostering their God-given gifts and talents, the good pastor tried to show them different ways and means of earning their livelihood. In addition to this, he gave a special coaching to some of the members of another already existing band-set: Jyothi Band, Brahmavar. These musicians were men of experience, playing different instruments for years. But, they could not read the musical notes and interpret them accordingly. Fr. Alfred gave a helping hand to them and Jyothi Band became one of the leading band-sets in the zone.⁵³

3.11. Comforting the Afflicted:

The good hearted pastor visited his flock systematically though travelling was not easy for him owing to his health condition. In addition to these regular visits from family to family whereby he learnt the tone of life and the atmosphere prevailing in every family, when he came to know that a particular family was facing some odd/unfortunate situation, he was there to be with the

⁵³ For further details cf. page no 14

family members and comfort them. When someone was severely ill, he made all the necessary arrangements to take the patient to a nearby hospital. In extraordinary cases, he personally accompanied the sick to the hospital. In this context Mr. Leo Rodrigues bears a beautiful testimony: "When Fr. Alfred came to our parish I was 12 years old. I believe that it will not be a mistake if I say that I have been with him from that day till his funeral rite.... He had a special concern towards the poor and the sick.... He has taken a lot of pain and made many sacrifices for the sake of the poor and needy. When someone was sick he was personally visiting the sick. In certain cases he was accompanying the sick to the hospital. I would like to share my own experience. I was one of those staying with him day and night. I was helping him in every respect. One night I had severe diarrhea and vomiting. He immediately informed my dear ones and not only took me to Goretti Hospital but also practically stayed with me till I was out of danger. I have several instances of this sort to show how he was coming to the rescue of the sick and afflicted".⁵⁴ Since he personally knew the hospital authorities, doctors and nurses, the patients received special care and attention. Besides the special reduction in payment that was given to every patient of Fr. Alfred, there had been cases wherein free treatment was given to the patients because of his recommendation.

Sr. Bernardine D'Souza would like to place before us a very important fact to show how close he was

⁵⁴Mr. Leo Rodrigues, *Fr. Alfred Roche: What I have Seen with my Eyes*, pp.1-2.

to the sick and afflicted: “Fr. Alfred had lived for others. Eva Mendonça, a seven year old girl from the orphanage, was seriously ill. Doctors diagnosed her with tetanus. She was admitted to an isolated ward at Udupi C.S.I hospital. Doctors had given up hopes. No one was allowed to visit Eva. Fr. Alfred visited her, instructed her, taught her to make her confession, and gave her the First Communion and Confirmation. The child died in his arms. Eva had no father. Her mother was far away in Bombay. A procession on the road was taken while the High School girls carried her coffin”.⁵⁵ Here, we see the zeal of the pastor in preparing the child to meet the risen Lord in and through the sacraments of baptism, reconciliation, the Holy Communion, and Confirmation.

Heavy downpour of rain and inundations were not rare in certain areas of the Holy Family parish. When there were heavy floods and inundations, the kind hearted pastor was there with a boat to know the actual situation of the flock and to take the necessary steps in helping them. The testimony of Mrs. Lilly D’Almeida sheds light on this: “There are many things that can be told about Fr. Roche. But I briefly refer to a few. He was a man of deep prayer. He had an extraordinary love for the poor, e.g., when there were floods, even risking his own life, he was visiting the houses and giving the necessary help to the victims of flood. While walking through the paddy fields covered with water, he had fallen into pits more than once”.⁵⁶ He

⁵⁵ Sr. Bernardine D’Souza, *Curé d’Ars of Brahmavar: Rev. Fr. Alfred O.F.M. Cap*, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁶ Mrs. Lilly D’Almeida, *Fr. Roche, Benefactor of the Poor*, p.1

was there to encourage the discouraged and rescue them from every danger. In the case of deaths, specially sudden and painful deaths of young people, he was there to pray for the departed and console the mourning parents and other members of the family. These and other similar compassionate and kind gestures of the pastor touched the hearts of the flock and strengthened their faith and trust in the Pastor par excellence.

3.12. *Substituting the Parish Priests:*

In addition to the generous service that he was rendering in different parishes by way of preaching retreats and hearing confessions, time and again substituting the parish priests was another type of ministry rendered by Fr. Alfred. He offered this service generously. During such occasions, when he was living in different parishes, the faithful had the opportunity to personally come in contact with him. Such were the God-given occasions to them to come to know him more closely. They could see his value-system and life-pattern. They could observe his deep faith in God. They could learn the spirit of Franciscan poverty and simplicity in his life. They could notice that he was satisfied and happy with the minimum because of his spirit of detachment. They gradually realized that his spirit of self-denial and detachment was the secret of his outgoing love towards the poor and the needy.

The parish priests were immensely happy and were grateful to him for his faithful and kind hearted service. When he was in their parish, they were sure that, by the grace of God, everything would go on gracefully and peacefully. They knew that,

being a man of deep prayer and practical experience, his presence would be a source of inspiration and guidance to each and everyone. They were sure that he would take the maximum care of everything with great love and devotion. Consequently, they repeatedly invited him to come and help them in their pastoral needs.

These were the God-given opportunities for the faithful, in different parishes, to come to know Fr. Alfred. In the words of John, the beloved disciple, they could see with their eyes; they could hear with their ears; and they could touch with their hands (cf. 1 Jn 1,1-3). They learnt not only from his sermons and conferences but also from the witness-value of his life. As the seniors drew inspiration from his teaching and life-pattern, so also the juniors got the necessary help and guidance in choosing their way of life. Youngsters (both boys and girls) came to seek enlightenment and support in discerning God's will and choosing their vocation in life. He lovingly and patiently walked with them and offered the necessary assistance to them. Thus, wherever he went, he became a vocation-promoter not only to the Capuchin Order but also to different Congregations, especially the Sisters of Charity who were his generous collaborators ever since he began his apostolate at Brahmavar.

3.13. *Ecumenism:*

As it has been already mentioned above, it was owing to certain conflicts and divisions that had cropped up at Brahmavar that the Bishop of Mangalore decided to hand over the Holy Family Parish to the Capuchins in the year 1956. It was in

such a confused and conflict situation that Fr. Alfred was transferred from Monte Mariano, Farangipet, to Holy Family Church, Brahmavar. Knowing very well the God-given gifts and talents of Fr. Alfred, the Major Superiors appointed him as the first Capuchin parish priest of the Holy Family Parish at Brahmavar with two substations: Petre and Nilavar, on the 15th of April, 1956.

It is evident that it was not a bed of roses to take up the responsibility of a parish priest in such a difficult situation. The position of Fr. Alfred was like that of Ananias who was asked by the Lord to go and help Saul in the process of transforming him into Paul (cf. Acts 9,10-19). Humanly speaking, he might have asked himself: Am I the right person to go to the Holy Family Church, Brahmavar, and be the first capuchin parish priest in such a ruptured situation? Without doubt, as a junior priest, he might have initially had such doubts and fears. Being a man of God he tried to discern the will of God in prayer and fraternal communion. He spent time in the presence of the Lord and poured out his fears and anxieties before Him. He shared his doubts and hesitations in fraternal dialogue with his spiritual director/companion. Thus, having duly discerned the will of God, he said '*fiat*' (let your will be done) to the demanding mission ahead of him.

What were the actual circumstances in which Fr. Alfred arrived at Brahmavar can be learnt from the report of Sr. Hilaria Monteiro: "Brahmavar was a unique place with what we call the Schismatics. It was almost a taboo to deal with them.... There were

three kinds of church people in a family sometimes, i.e. Catholics, Syrians and Jacobites (Padroado) and later 'Yehovas witness' was added to it. So, a great tact was needed to deal with them. Fr. Alfred never hurt their feelings. He dealt with them in such a way that they were attracted to the Catholic Church and many families came back".⁵⁷ It was his deep spirit of faith in the Lord and his spirit of obedience to the superiors that helped him to accept such a challenging apostolate with great optimism. It was the gift of faith that gave him the true light and inner vitality to go ahead in spite of some odd situations. Thus, we can see how the grace of God was operating in and through this simple and good-hearted friar.

Being humble by nature and kind at heart, he could easily meet and greet people of different Christian denominations and their spiritual leaders. He could approach them without much difficulty and hold a dialogue with them, not so much on a head-level but on a **heart-level**. He knew that they were more hurt on the heart-level than on the head-level. Therefore, his approach was not so much on an academic or dogmatic level. It was on a fraternal and familial level. What Mr. Maxim Furtado would like to share from his life experience is very inspiring: "Fr. Alfred worked very hard to bring back the separated brethren at Brahmavar with his loving and fraternal approach. The bitterness that was growing among the members of the different denominations got gradually diminished and a

⁵⁷ Sr. Hilaria Monteiro, *Some Reminiscence of Fr. Alfred Roche, OFM Cap: Popularly Known as "Amcho Piti Padriab"*, p.2.

spirit of love and respect began to grow”.⁵⁸ It was in an atmosphere of openness and sincere sharing of God-experience that a more fraternal relationship was built up between the Catholics and the members of other Christian denominations in and around Brahmavar. It is praiseworthy to say that he had the grace of keeping himself calm and cool, even in the most irritable circumstances. As a result, tensions were gradually healed; open accusations and conflicts were slowly lessened; and fraternal feeling and sharing began to gain ground. In the words of St. Francis of Assisi, nauseating and repelling “lepers” gradually became pleasing and attractive friends.⁵⁹

It was in such an atmosphere of brotherly love and sisterly concern that so many reconciliations and reunions took place. Members of different families and relatives belonging to different Christian denominations, who could not look into the eyes of one another, could **greet** (exchange brotherly words of peace joy and harmony), **meet** (find opportunities to come together), **seat** (to find time to sit together and share one’s joys and sorrows) and **eat** together (eating relationship is the deepest human relationship) without much difficulty. Several individuals as well as entire families that had separated themselves from the Catholic Church returned to the Catholic fold under his leadership. At this juncture Fr. Remigius Sequeira has something very enlightening and enriching: “My

⁵⁸ Mr. Maxim Furtado, *A Shrot History about the Life-Pattern Fr. Alfred*, p.3

⁵⁹ Cf. “Testament”, nos 1-3 in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol 1: The Saint, New York-London-Manila, 1999, p. 124*

acquaintance with Fr. Alfred Roche dates back to the year 1949, when we were students of theology at the Friary, Kotagiri.... Later I found him as the superior and parish priest of Brahmavar, and still later as the superior and parish priest at St. Joseph's Friary, Lower Kasarkod, Uttara Kannada. To describe the personal qualities of Fr. Alfred, I would like to say that he was a humble and obedient friar. There was nothing showy and glamorous about him. Above all, he proved himself an effective pastor, dealing with his flock with much patience and pastoral discretion. The people of Brahmavar as well as of Kasarkod loved him. He brought about reconciliation between the factitious communities at Brahmavar. His reputation among the flock was praiseworthy. I would sum up the qualities of Fr. Alfred as a humble, patient, and peace-loving friar".⁶⁰ Here we can see what a dynamic role a compassionate and good hearted pastor can play. Thus, ecumenism, about which we speak and write so much today, was an integral part of Fr. Alfred's ministry much prior to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. Of course, it does not mean that it was his invention. No, he was only a messenger, a herald of the Lord. He did it being enlightened and empowered by the Spirit of the Master, the Bridge Builder (cf. Jn 1,51).

These are some of the reasons for which the parishners and the people of goodwill had humbly

⁶⁰ Fr. Remigius Sequeira, Fr. Alfred Roche, OFM Cap. p.1. Fr. Remigius is one of the senior capuchin friars of the Holy Trinity Province, Karnataka. He had been the provincial minister of the Holy Trinity Province (KGM) and a formator for long. Presently, he is a lecturer and spiritual director/companion at Kripalaya, the Capuchin Philosophate at Bogadi, Mysore.

requested the Capuchin Major Superiors to extend his ministry at Brahmavar when, in the year 1966, after ten years of dedicated service, he was supposed to be transferred from Brahmavar. History bears witness to the fact that, discerning the plan of God and realizing the local need, particularly in the area of ecumenism and Christian unity, Fr. Alfred's pastoral ministry was extended and he continued working with and for the people of Brahmavar till 1969 as the pastor, and then, as the superior of the capuchin fraternity till 1972.

3.14. *Interreligious Dialogue:*

In the post-Vatican context, interreligious dialogue is a very widely used expression. Different committees/organizations are set in different parts of the world; several efforts have been made to organize various sorts of meetings/seminars in different cultural contexts; and very many scholarly papers have been read and books have been written to make an in-depth study of different religions of the world to underscore the common features that unite us as children of the one and the same Divinity and to bridge the relational gaps existing between the members of various religions for centuries. The main purpose of such strenuous efforts is to show the **common origin** and **final destiny** of every human being, to whatsoever religion he/she may belong. One of such important meetings was held at the Portiuncula, in Assisi, at the brotherly invitation of the Servant of God, the late Pope John Paul II, in the year 1986. As we know very well, several heads of different religions, coming from various parts of the world arrived, lived, shared their God-experience and prayed for universal

brotherhood, unity and peace. A similar meeting was held once again on... under the leadership of Pope Benedict the XVI so that we may be able to appreciate and uphold the divine and human values found in every religion and that all may work for peace, joy and prosperity of every child of God.

Independently of all these things mentioned above, drawing inspiration from the life-pattern and teaching of the poverello of Assisi, called the universal brother and patron of ecology, informal interreligious dialogue of greeting, visiting, sharing one's joys and sorrows, helping one another in need, and working with the people of different faiths was part and parcel of Fr. Alfred's pedagogy of evangelization, although, technically speaking, he might not have organized big meetings nor conducted many seminars. While focusing his attention on the flock of his parish, he did not distance himself from the members of other religions living in his parish precincts. He built up cordial relationship with them through the children coming to the school. According to one of the fundamental sociological principles, the school-children became the launching pad for contacting and visiting their parents, irrespective of caste and creed. These friendly visits to the families through the children built up cordial relationships with the members of the families and gradually swept away certain misunderstandings and prejudices that were prevailing for years and fostered a harmonious atmosphere in the entire parish and around. At this juncture Sr. Lucy Rodrigues has something very touching to share: "In Brahmavar we had people of many faiths.... Fr. Roche established cordial

relationship with all. He was popularly known as 'Amcho Padryab' (our Father). He did his level best to bring about communion, brotherhood and mutual understanding among all, with the desire to form one flock and one Shepherd. His 19 years of service is commendable".⁶¹

Being kind at heart he could easily build up fraternal and cordial relationship with every category of people that worked with him. Heads of different associations in the parish, teachers and others working in different capacities in the schools bear witness to this. M. Shivram Shetty has something very revealing to share with us: "Fr. Alfred Roche was born at Barkur in a family of name and fame. He always had a smile on his face and was always concerned about the poor and the suffering. When he came to Brahmavar, there were deep rooted prejudices among us against the members of other religions. We were not ready to extend a helping hand to one another. In such a situation, Fr. Alfred came to the rescue of everyone in need without making any distinction of caste and creed, male and female. He tried to educate every child, with a preferential option for the poor. He worked hard to uplift them and was considered to be a saintly figure by all".⁶²

What kind of brotherly and harmonious relationship he had built up with the people of other religions can be further substantiated in and through the sentiments expressed by the members of other religions on three occasions:

⁶¹ Sr. Lucy Rodrigues, *Man God Fr. Alfred*, p. 2.

⁶² Mr. M. Shivaram Shetty, *Rev. Fr. Alfred Roche from Barkur*, p.1

- a. The Interreligious Meeting that was organized by the *Geleyara Balaga* (Friends Club) on 25th June 1972 and the words of appreciation as well as sorrow expressed in the *Mâna Patra* (address): “Dear Fr. Alfred, You had been the foundation stone of our Friend’s Club. We know that you will soon leave for Honnavar. With grateful hearts, we would like to express our heartfelt sentiments in and through this address.... You came to Brahmavar as the parish priest of the Holy Family Church. But your generous service was not confined to the Christians alone.... Your love and concern towards the poor and the afflicted are exceptional. This suffering humanity that has received constant help from your generous hands, will never forget you.... Therefore, we feel proud to enumerate some of your important contributions to the people of Brahmavar.... On the occasion of your departure from Brahmavar this is our humble request: You have obtained a permanent place in our hearts. Please do not forget us, the people of Brahmavar”.⁶³ This is a grateful tribute from the people of Brahmavar for the yeoman service rendered by Fr. Alfred during his praiseworthy apostolate of sixteen years: thirteen years as the parish priest of the Holy Family Parish and later on three years as the superior of the Holy Family Friary.

⁶³ "Geleyara Balaga (Frinds' Club) Brahmavar, S.K., *Mâna Patra* (Address) 25/6/1972, p. 1. In this address the important works done by Fr. Alfred and the yeoman service rendered by him are beautifully narrated: his efforts in completing the church building, in building the new altar, in getting a sonorous foreign bell, in constructing a mighty belfry, in acquiring the land and in getting the necessary permission to start the Nirmala High School along with the sisters, in putting up a new building for the school at Handadi, and in building the new church at Nilavar.

- b. A number of people, from every community, came to meet him and say good-bye to him before he left for Binaga, Karwar, and many accompanied him to Binaga, though with a heavy heart.
- c. The sorrowful sentiments expressed on the occasion of his funeral. After the requiem mass at St. Peter's Church, Barkur (his birth parish) the mortal remains of the departed pastor were brought in procession through the little town of Brahmavar. Those who took part in the procession were not only the parishioners of the Holy Family parish, but also the members of every religion. The prayerful profession was headed by the expert musicians of the Jyothi Band, trained under his baton. Besides, the large number of people assembled on either side of the road to have a last *darshan* (glance) at their loving and respected guru. No doubt, they used to call him *namma gurugalu* (our guru). Then, the prayerful 'hymns' that were broadcast by the Hindu Brethren as the mortal remains of Fr. Alfred, their guru, were brought in procession from St. Peter's Church, Barkur, to Holy Family Church, Brahmavar, with the heart-soothing chorus that was repeated in Kannada, the local language: "*Nimage shanthi labhisali*" (May you receive peace; may you enjoy peace).

Further, the number of the faithful and devotees, irrespective of cast and creed, that came to pay their last homage to the moral remains of Fr. Alfred, that were laid, during

the course of the day, in the Holy Family Church, was a clear expression of their love and respect towards their esteemed guru. The funeral mass, officiated by his Lordship Aloysius D'Souza, Bishop of Mangalore, along with Fr. Vincent Furtado, the then Provincial Minister of the Holy Trinity Province (KGM), Frs. Juze d'Souza and Antony D'Souza, and a vast number of priests, was celebrated on the open ground in front of the Holy Family Church since the space in the church was not sufficient enough to accommodate the entire crowd. Usually, the mortal remains of the capuchin friars are interred in their proper cemetery on the friary premises. In the case of Fr. Alfred, an exception was made by the then provincial minister, Fr. Vincent Furtado in consultation with his definitory, at the repeated request made by the parish council with the parishioners of Holy Family Church, Brahmavar. So, the mortal remains of Fr. Alfred, commonly known as "amcho padriab" (our father), "Roche padriab" (Fr. Roche), "namma gurugalu" (our guru) were interred in the parish cemetery at Brahmavar. But, it is important to note that the then superior and parish priest, Fr. Cornelius Monteiro, and the faithful of the Holy Family Church have given him the most important place, just below the big crucifix, in the centre of the cemetery. Their love and respect towards their departed pastor can be further seen the way in which they have beautifully built up the grave with costly marble

stones and the way how they have maintained it with much love and care.

Several devotees, from far and near, come to the grave and thank the Lord for giving them such a dedicated and holy pastor. They bring flowers, light candles and place their prayers and petitions into the hands of the heavenly Father in and through him. Praised be to the Lord, the number of the devotees coming to the grave of Fr. Alfred is increasing day by day! Let me conclude this section in the words from Daiji Word: "His simplicity of life with generosity of heart was the spring-board in building up relationships and fostering friendship with the young and old, rich and poor. People of every category came to him for spiritual enlightenment and guidance.... May he intercede for us in becoming more and more committed and dedicated children of the same Merciful and Compassionate Father Whose faithful and generous son he was".⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Extract from *Barkuronline.com*

CHAPTER 4

ST. ANNE'S CHURCH - BINAGA

Introduction:

When North Kanara formed a part of the diocese of Belgaum, his Excellency, Rev. Dr. Ignatius Lobo, the then Bishop of Belgaum, had invited the Capuchins of the Holy Trinity Province (KGM) to render a helping hand in the work of evangelization and pastoral ministry and Capuchins began to work at Samsi, Kodani, Molkod, Gundibala and Binaga. After his praiseworthy service at the Holy Family Church, Brahmavar, for sixteen years Fr. Alfred was transferred to Binaga, in the diocese of Belgaum (today diocese of Karwar). Three friars with a good number of parishioners accompanied him to St. Anne's Church, Binaga on the 18th of July 1972, where he became the first capuchin parish priest. It was a small parish with two sub-stations: Chendia and Amadalli.

In fact, it is reported that many of those who had accompanied him to Binaga, really shed tears, seeing the poor condition of the new parish where their beloved pastor had to live and work. But, Fr. Alfred was not discouraged. It was a new challenge for him to toil with and for the simple people and to bring up the quality of the new flock that was entrusted to his care. So, he worked with similar zeal and zest for an all-round development and formation of the faithful and the children of God at large. Though this transfer was a big

loss for the people of Brahmavar, irrespective of caste and creed, nevertheless this loss became a source of gain and grace to the people of Binaga.

Fr. Alfred's stay at Binaga was of a shorter duration. He served in this parish, dedicated to St. Anne, only for three years. Yet, his contribution was very remarkable. Thirty eight years ago when he arrived at Binaga it was a small village with poor and uneducated parishioners, surrounded with people of other faiths. The faithful at Binaga appreciated his simple and outgoing personality and they loved him very much. The new pastor, with the fund of knowledge and experience that he had already acquired in the former parish at Brahmavar, tried to concentrate on faith-formation and social transformation. As they were very open and receptive, he could instruct and guide them easily.

4.1. Prayer Life:

As far as prayer life is concerned Fr. Alfred found a fertile soil in the parish of St. Anne, at Binaga. Making capital of the situation, the new pastor, once again, set his focus on prayer and catechesis. He held regular catechetical classes for the children and the youth laying special emphasis on daily prayer. He made them realize that a family that prays together, stays together. Reminding them how good the Lord is and how He takes care of all of us in our day-to-day life, he gradually fostered the spirit of gratitude towards Him. Thus, he created in them a greater love and interest in prayer. As a result, the tone of prayer life slowly changed in different families. Praying the family rosary became a common feature. Members of the family, who were just wasting their time outside the house till late at

night, began to return to their homes quite early in order to be with the family members and pray with them. The hymns taught by the pastor became part and parcel of the family prayer.

4.2. Liturgical Life:

The pastor focused his attention on the liturgical life. There was a small choir which he gracefully revived giving it a new physiognomy. With his musical talent, he began to teach them hymns in vernacular as they were mostly habituated to sing in Latin. As the choir members were mostly senior citizens, he revitalized the parish choir by bringing in the children and the youth. Some of the children and youth who were only 'Sunday Christians' began to come to the church during the weekdays and actively participate in the Eucharistic liturgy. It was a real joy for the pastor to see the active participation of the children and youth in singing and their whole hearted participation in the Eucharistic celebrations.

His well pondered over and down-to-earth homilies, always based on the Word of God, were highly appreciated by the faithful. He had the gift to present even a deep/profound message in simple terms coupled with biblical quotations and examples from practical life. As mentioned already, his homilies were the end product of long prayerful reflections on the Word of God. He was fully convinced of the advice of St. Francis who said: "The preacher must first draw from secret prayers what he will later pour out in holy sermons; he must first glow hot within before he speaks words that are in themselves cold" (2Cel.163). Before preaching to others he frequently asked himself: What does this mean to

me today? What importance do I give to this reality in my personal life?

4.3 Education - Encouragement:

Along with prayer and faith-formation, social uplifting through education was given prime importance. He knew what had to be done concretely. Going house-to-house, the pastor found out how many children were not going to school. He rightly motivated the parents to send the children to school. Children who were just whiling away their time at home or spending their time in grazing the cattle began to go to school. He provided clothing and study-material to the children with the help of good hearted and generous friends and benefactors. He organized week-end classes to give them extra coaching. The children and youth were growing spiritually, intellectually and culturally. One could see a joyful and harmonious atmosphere growing in the families. Within three years, one could see the wonderful changes taking place in the parish as well as in the two substations.

4.4. Job Facilities:

As there were very few factories, workshops and job facilities in the vicinity, finding an adequate job was a great problem. So, job-oriented training for the youth was the focal point at Binaga. It was not easy to offer such training since such technical institutes/colleges were not in the neighbourhood. Therefore, sending the youth to distant towns was the only option. So, once again the pastor had to become the mediator to contact different individuals/agencies/factories and get good jobs for the youth who had some preparation/qualification.

As the youth (male and female) went out of the little village, their horizon got widened and their vision got broadened. When they returned home for holidays, they brought new ideas, new lifestyle, new language, and new culture which gradually enriched the thought-pattern and value system of the people. Families began to make progress economically and socially. Due importance was given by the good hearted pastor to family apostolate. He personally visited the families time and again. These pastoral and paternal visits helped him to be in constant touch with his flock and also to bring about timely healing, when he saw some tensions and wounded relationships among the members of the family or among the families.

Thus, although his stay at Binaga was of a short duration, nevertheless his loving and dedicated service left an indelible stamp in the minds and hearts of the people of Binaga. They cherish his memory as a **loving father** who taught them to pray with filial trust and devotion; they nourish his memory as an **experienced teacher** who encouraged and supported the poor and weak students to pursue their studies and stand on their own feet in society; they are immensely grateful to their **wise spiritual director (companion)** who accompanied the young and the old on their life-journey and facilitated them to discern the will of God and carry it out faithfully; they remember their **dedicated social worker** who encouraged and empowered the marginalized that they might find their identity as the children of the same loving and compassionate Father.

CHAPTER 5

ST. JOSEPH'S CHURCH LOWER KASARKOD

Introduction:

In the year 1975 the parish of St. Joseph at Lower Kasarkod, Honnavar, was permanently entrusted to the pastoral care of the Capuchins of the Holy Trinity Province (KGM) with the understanding that they would also look after the pastoral care of the faithful at Samsi, Kodani, Molkod, Gundibala and Binaga. It was in this context that a call came to the good-hearted pastor from his Major Superiors to proceed to St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod, Honnavar, in the same diocese of Belgaum (today, diocese of Karwar), to take up the responsibility of a bigger parish. He took charge of St. Joseph's parish on the 30th of April, 1975 and also became the superior of the "Honnavar Fraternity".

This term "Honnavar Fraternity" needs a little explanation. The above mentioned five places were small mission stations, just developing. It was not possible to set formal fraternities in all these places. Therefore, according to the directives given by Very Rev. Fr. Paschal Rywalski, OFM Cap., the then General Minister, the friars from the above mentioned places, had to come together for their monthly meetings to one of these places. Geographically, the parish of St. Joseph at Lower

Kasarkod, Honnavar, was/is situated close to the national highway no 17. Travelling and communication were/are quite easy. So, it became the central place for any fraternal gathering. All important meetings were held at St. Joseph's church, Lower Kasarkod, and Fr. Alfred, being the parish priest of St. Joseph's church, had the privilege of hosting such meetings and welcoming all the friars coming from these mission stations. That is the origin of the term "Honnavar Fraternity"

5.1. Sacerdotal Silver Jubilee:

It is interesting to note that Fr. Alfred had the joy of celebrating his Sacerdotal Silver Jubilee at St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod within one year after his taking charge of St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod. Although 11th April 1976 was the actual day of the jubilee, nevertheless for practical reasons the festive celebrations were held on the church grounds on 30th April 1976. The solemn Eucharistic liturgy, organized on an open air stage, well decked by the zealous parish youth, was celebrated with twenty concelebrants accompanied by the melodious hymns sung by the parish choir under the able baton of Fr. Archie Lewis, capuchin. The liturgical and cultural celebrations well prepared by the enthusiastic parishioners and friends, were attended by hundreds of relatives and friends of Fr. Alfred coming from far and near, many capuchin confrères, religious and the diocesan clergy. The Jyothi Band of Brahmavar, embellished under the guidance of Fr. Alfred, added further splendour to the entire celebration.

It is important to remember one expression used by Fr. Remigius Sequeira, the then Provincial of

the KGM Province of the Capuchins, on that occasion. Summing up the life and ministry of Fr. Alfred, using a Latin expression, he said: “Dilectus Deo et hominibus” (beloved/dear to God and men). Then, Fr. A.J. Rego in his article, published in the diocesan bulletin, wrote: “In his priestly and parochial ministry, Fr. Alfred has always and everywhere won the hearts of all by his suave, humble and gentle ways and by his delicate love for the poor, the sick, the handicapped and the underprivileged”. These words of the provincial superior and a member of the diocesan clergy speak volumes about the august personality of Fr. Alfred.

Later, in 1976, North Kanara became the new diocese of Karwar and the earlier agreement was slightly altered. The parishes of Samsi and Binaga were ceded to the diocese in 1981 and the friars continued to work in the following four parishes: Lower Kasarkod, Gundibala, Kodani and Molkod. In the year 1986 the parishes of Gundibala, Kodani and Molkod were also ceded to the diocese, retaining only St. Joseph’s Church, Lower Kasarkod, for the friars.

5.2. Liturgical Reform:

Fr. Alfred succeeded Fr. Kurian Therady - an intelligent and dynamic pastor. He wanted to put into practice the liturgical reforms proposed by the Second Vatican Council. He started celebrating the holy Eucharist facing the people; introduced offertory procession; started preaching from the floor and not from the pulpit, and so on. These changes introduced by the parish priest caused a lot of misunderstanding and confusion in the

parish, splitting it into different groups. According to some, Fr. Kurian had failed in instructing and giving due explanation to the faithful before introducing the liturgical changes in the parish. This lack of right information and instruction about the liturgical reforms advocated and encouraged by the Second Vatican Council, became the bone of contention for some unfortunate conflicts and divisions in the parish.

Fr. Alfred saw some disturbing elements as he took up the responsibility of St. Joseph's church, Lower Kasarkod. He saw that the atmosphere in the parish was not peaceful. He saw a lot of conflict-situations in different sections of the parish. He realized that some of the liturgical changes introduced by Fr. Kurian, his predecessor, were not rightly understood and accepted by good many of the parishioners. In such a situation, he did not go to let down his predecessor nor to condemn the parishioners. As a cool-headed pastor, he took time to make a personal study of the entire situation.

The first step that he took in repairing the little misunderstanding was that he made a personal study of the documents in consultation with the experts, and rightly enlightened the faithful on the theological significance and practical application of the liturgical reforms proposed by the Second Vatican Council. That is how he cleared the doubts and misunderstandings that were in the minds of the parishioners. Some of them who were thinking that the liturgical changes proposed by Fr. Kurian were heretical/harmful, gradually realized that they were not so. They gradually realized that it was

lack of proper instruction that had given room for such misunderstandings. As a result, the faithful willingly accepted the liturgical reforms introduced in the parish. The wounds slowly got healed and they participated in the liturgical celebrations more and more actively. Such openness, on the part of the faithful, to learn and personalize the message of the Word of God, and their eagerness to receive the grace of the sacraments more frequently, offered a fertile soil to the new pastor to implant and nurture the Gospel values with a Franciscan Capuchin blend.

5.3. Family Atmosphere:

The humble and simple fatherly figure of the pastor fostered trust and confidence in all. Young and old were drawn towards him and felt at home in his company. **Putha** (child/son) was the endearing term that he frequently used: "His serene voice and adorable character" writes Fr. Santa Lopes, "reminds me of St. Francis of Assisi who was like 'a mother to her children'. Fr. Alfred Roche was a true follower of St. Francis of Assisi. Lovingly he addressed the youngsters as 'PUTA' (child). In his approach he was a mother to all!"⁶⁵ While addressing children and youth, irrespective of male and female, he used this term.

⁶⁵ Fr. Santa Lopes, *Fr. Alfred Roche: A Capuchin after the Heart of Jesus* Assisi Press, Mangalore, 2010, p.10. Fr. Santa Lopes is a parishioner of St. Joseph's Parish, Lower Kasarkod. He is a Capuchin priest rendering his service as Prefect of Studies and Treasurer at Kripalaya, the Institute of Philosophy of the Capuchins at Bogadi, Mysore-6. He was just 8 years old when Fr. Alfred came to St. Joseph's Parish, Lower Kasarkod. What he has put down in this booklet is something that he has seen and learnt from his personal contact with Fr. Alfred.

He had a special way of encouraging and instilling genuine interest in the children and the youth. He used to give them different titles though some of them did not understand the real significance of those titles/names given to them. Fr. Santa Lopes bears witness to this: "One thing, which I observed very much, was that he called children by various names, like doctor, engineer, musician, violinist, lawyer, judge, secretary and others. Though one did not have a violin or did not see a violin, he named him a violinist. To be frank, though I did not have an office or files in my hands, and though I found it difficult to pronounce the word 'secretary', he called me his secretary. Oh! I was very proud of my title, whenever he called me secretary before others. Thank you, Fr. Roche for that title! Though you called me your secretary I did not do much at that time, because I was small".⁶⁶ Today, we see these dreams getting fulfilled. The youth of St. Joseph's parish, Lower Kasarkod, climbing the rungs of excellence in different fields and occupying important positions in the Church and society both on the national and international levels.

In turn, Fr. Alfred was called **Roche Bap** (Roche Father) by the young and the old. In fact, he was more known by his family/surname (Roche) than his proper name (Alfred). In this context, once again it is good to know what Fr. Santa Lopes writes: "First of all, my memories go back to the situation when the people of Lower Kasarkod lovingly called him with due respect 'Roche Bap', here 'Bap' in

⁶⁶ Fr. Santa Lopes, *Fr. Alfred Roche: A Capuchin after the Heart of Jesus*, p.11.

the Konkani language means father. Yes, he was first and foremost a loving father to all without distinction – whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated and the like. His life resembled very much that of his patron Holy Father Francis”.⁶⁷ As a result, the parish house became a little home to the children and the youth.

One may ask: What were they doing there? They were not just chatting. Nor were they whiling away their time. Some of them learnt to read and write; others learnt instrumental music; others practised liturgical hymns; and some others helped their good pastor in the daily chores. “We were eight children”, says Mr. Mathias Juze Dias, “And my parents were very poor. I was living with Roche Bap in the parish house. Since he was not able to pedal the bicycle owing to the operations that he had undergone, I was taking him on the bicycle even up to the Holy Rosary Convent and St. Ignatius Hospital for mass. As far as sick calls were concerned, he was ready at any time. If it was at night, he would get up, visit the sick with the help of a torch, anoint them, and give them the viaticum. I was accompanying him very happily”.⁶⁸ This is how he assisted and comforted the sick and dying, and consoled the dear and near ones of those in pain.

These boys were very happy to stay with their generous pastor. As they tried to help their guru,

⁶⁷ Fr. Santa Lopes, *Fr. Alfred Roche: A Capuchin after the Heart of Jesus*, p.6.

⁶⁸ Mr. Mathias Juze Dias is one of those who spent much of his time in the presbytery studying something and helping Fr. Alfred in different ways along with other boys who were rendering their generous service to Fr. Alfred.. What he shares here is something from his personal experience.

they received a holistic formation. As they were helped intellectually, culturally, and economically so they were formed spiritually. It was something very remarkable to see them praying with their good shepherd and singing beautiful hymns taught by him. “Fr. Roche was the one who taught us how to pray. Very often he used to take us before the Blessed Sacrament for a short adoration in order to pray for different intentions. One of them was to get the necessary help to build the new church”.⁶⁹ This is how the God-centered pastor prayed with them and taught them how to pray.

When he went for some celebrations among his relatives and friends, he never went alone. It was a wonderful scene to see him accompanied by some of these boys like bodyguards. Why was he taking them? Was it just for some entertainment? No. He did not take them just for some entertainment. He had a specific purpose in doing so. Since the life-pattern and the social standard of the faithful in the parish were traditional and outmoded, he wanted to offer them opportunities to see the lifestyle and learn the social customs different from those prevailing in his parish and in the neighborhood.

5.4. Faith Formation:

This homely atmosphere and contacts with the children and the youth helped him to build up fraternal interpersonal relationships with one and all. The children and youth became the spring-board to come in contact the elders who came to know their kind and generous pastor through their

⁶⁹ Mr. Mathias Juze Dias, from what he shared with me orally.

children. His prayerful and simple lifestyle drew their attention; his compassionate approach built up greater trust and confidence in him. According to Mary Fernandes, "Fr. Alfred was not only a priest but also he was a 'priest of all priests' In fact, he was the one who was responsible in building a true church. In terms of faith-formation, he was the one who sowed the seed of faith in the people of Lower Kasarkod. Today, if this parish has grown in terms of faith, it is because of Fr. Roche and Fr. Roche only. He turned every stone to make this parish a lively one. He was truly a loving saint in our midst".⁷⁰ Sr. Leena Dias wants to corroborate the spirit of simplicity, humility and prayer of Fr. Alfred from her experience: "I learnt from my foster father, Fr. Alfred Roche, simplicity and humility in life, generosity towards the poor, prayerfulness, and love of God and love of neighbor. Today, I am a sister of Charity because of him. Now I feel his absence a lot in my life. He always supported me in my life-journey. I believe that he is in heaven and also on earth in spirit. From 1975 to 1996 my father (Fr. Roche) played an important role in my life and in the life of my family. Dear Fr. Roche, with sincere heart, I say a BIG THANK YOU".⁷¹

⁷⁰Mrs. Mary P. Fernandes, *A Witness - That's True*, pp. 1-2. Mrs. Mary Fernandes is a parishioner of St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod, who knows Fr. Alfred very well being an active member in the parish choir. She is the sister of Fr. Salvatore Fernandes, OFM Cap.

⁷¹ Sr. Leena Dias, *Dear Fr. Alfred Roche: You are Precious in my Life*, p.2. Sr. Leena Dias is the sister of Mr. Mathias Juze Dias, from St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod. She had discontinued her studies and was working in a tile factory. It was Fr. Alfred who encouraged her to continue her studies and supported her economically. He put her in the boarding, run by the Sisters of Charity of Sts. Bartholomea Capitanio and Vincenza Gerosa. Thus, she completed her high school studies in the parish school at Brahmavar. During her studies she was in contact with the sisters of charity. Having completed her studies she joined the same congregation and presently, she is at Prem Sadan Convent, Chikkakammanahalli, Bangalore, 83.

Fathima Minin Fernandes would like to add something more to what is said above: "Fr. Alfred's life was like that of St. Francis of Assisi. He was a simple and humble minister of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. He lived for others.... As the disciple of the Lord, he was a wonderful example for all of us".⁷² The testimony of Lawrence Lopes is very touching: "I used to go to the church only on Sundays. But, when Fr. Roche came to our parish, I started to participate in the Holy Eucharist every morning. I do not miss any novena and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Now my age is 81. I continue going for daily Mass because of Fr. Roche. He helped me and my family in many ways. Today, I and my family are happy because of his blessings".⁷³

People flocked around their shepherd and frankly poured out the profound desires of their hearts. There was neither a strict time table nor any previous appointment. He welcomed them with love and respect. He was both a father and a mother to them. As an empathetic spiritual director/companion, he spent his precious time listening to them, understanding their joys and sorrows, discerning the will of God in their life, and guiding them with a fatherly touch to fulfill the will/design of God in their life.

⁷² Mrs. Fathima Minin Fernandes, *Fr. Alfred Roche: 'Roche Bap'*, p. 1. Mrs. Fathima is a parishioner of St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod. She has been very much touched by the life-pattern and mission of Fr. Alfred.

⁷³ Mr. Lawrence Lopes, *I am Lawrence Lopes*, p.1. Mr. Lawrence Lopes is one of the parishioners of St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod. In and through the testimony borne by him, one can know what an impact Fr. Alfred had on him and his family.

In this context, we have a beautiful lesson to learn: The integration of human and divine relationships. This horizontal relationship of love, trust and confidence gradually became the stepping stone for building up their relationship on the vertical level, for strengthening the faith of the people. They began to realize how good the Lord is. Their trust and confidence in the Lord increased; prayer-life got deepened in the families; the number of the faithful participating in the day-to-day Eucharistic liturgy increased; those, who were rarely stepping into the church compound, began to be regular for the Sunday Mass; the 'out-standing christians', who were passive spectators, became active participants in the liturgy; people for whom sacraments did not mean much for years, began to approach the sacraments more frequently; individuals who were wont to speak ill of the pastors became close friends of the new pastor.

5.4.1. Word of God - Instruction:

In such an atmosphere, faith-formation became quite easy. They were keenly interested to listen to him and learn from him. His 'well-chewed' sermons, based on the Word of God, pierced not only their minds but also their hearts. So much so, those who were habitually entering the church after the sermon changed their timings. They did not want to miss the down-to-earth sermons of their pastor who, they realized that following the admonition of St. Francis of Assisi, his founder and patron, was talking to the Lord before talking about the Lord. They knew that his sermons were not some superficial stories but they were profound

prayerful reflections based on the Word of God well digested before delivering them to the faithful.

The Word of God was given due importance in faith-formation. The testimony of Mr. Ruzar Juze Fernandes sheds further light on this: “Roche Bap has done a lot of good in our parish. He has deepened our faith with the help of the Word of God. His well-prepared sermons touched the core of our heart and many began to say: What a saintly priest! His simple explanation of certain biblical passages, which were very difficult for us to understand, created in us a certain love for the Word of God and we began to read the Word of God which we had never done before. This has brought about a lot of change in our families”.⁷⁴

Regarding the central place that was given by Fr. Alfred for the faith-formation of his parishners, Mr. Juze Sajião Fernandes and Mrs. Alpy Bogla have something more to add: “Roche Bap was a loving and an exemplary priest. The Lord told Francis of Assisi to repair the broken church and he repaired it. In the same way, God sent Roche Bap to repair our church which was old and small. Besides, he enlightened our darkened minds with the Word of God and fostered in us the spirit of prayer and adoration. Thus, with his instructions and guidance

⁷⁴Mr. Ruzar Juze Fernandes is one of the parishioners of St. Joseph’s Parish, Lower Kasarkod. When I personally met him and asked him whether he would like to share something about Fr. Alfred from his personal contact with him, he said: “Frather, I have so many things to share”. This text is just a bit of what he shared with me orally.

we have become like the seed that has fallen on the good ground".⁷⁵

Bloom where you are planted. This was the philosophy of life of Fr. Alfred. When he was sent to a place with a particular mission/responsibility he focused his total attention on that particular project entrusted to his care. He used the God-given gifts and talents to carry out the responsibilities placed on his shoulders to the best of his capacities. That does not mean that he was not available for any service outside the parish precincts. Knowing very well the quality of his preaching, time and again, he was invited to break the Word of God in different parishes, schools, colleges, seminaries, formation houses and religious institutes. Those who listened to him, and came in contact with him, were touched by the depth of his God-experience, compassionate attitude, and fatherly approach. His sermons/conferences, totally based on the Word of God and personal experience in life, were very much sought after by every category of people. Wherever he went, his simple and devout life-pattern touched the pastors, religious, and laity who took inspiration and guidance from him. Witness-value in his day-to-day life was the secret of his success wherever he went. For, he firmly believed the words of Pope Paul VI: "I can't hear you because your deeds speak louder than your words".⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Mr. Juze Sajião Fernandes and Mrs. Alpy Bogla are devout parishioners of St. Joseph's Parish, Lower Kasarkod. They are immensely grateful to God for having sent Fr. Alfred to their parish as their pastor. While thanking the Lord, the Source of every grace and blessing, they also thank their good-hearted and saintly pastor for the inspiration and guidance that they have received from him in their spiritual as well as their material needs.

⁷⁶ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no, 41.

5.4.2. Liturgical Music:

Along with teaching and preaching liturgical music was another means used by Fr. Alfred in deepening the faith of the parishners. He knew very well the Latin saying: *Quis cantat bis orat* (he who sings prayers twice). Music was the melody of his heart. As a qualified music master, he composed beautiful hymns. Wherever he went, he paid a lot of attention to train the parish choir. In this context, training the choir did not mean just making its members professional singers. No. The purpose was quite different. It was to teach the faithful of the parish to sing with devotion; to help them to sing not only with their lips, but also **with their mind and with their heart**. He taught them to sing with unction. The final goal was to involve the entire parish/congregation in and through the members of the choir so that everyone actively participates in the Eucharistic liturgy and returns home duly enriched and empowered by the power of the Word of God. It was a joy to listen to the entire congregation singing and praying together as one family.

This spirit of prayer and devotion initiated and cultivated in and through the liturgical singing did not remain within the four walls of the church. It was borne by the faithful and penetrated into their respective homes. Thus, it spread far and wide in the parish. It had its repercussion on their personal prayer life as well as the prayer life of the family. Evening prayer with the members of the family, which was not found in some of the families, became a common feature all over the parish. One could hear many of those beautiful hymns, taught

by the pastor, being sung as part and parcel of the family prayer. Thus, family prayer brought together the members of different families and the wise saying: “A family that prays together, stays together”, became a lived-experience, bringing in peace joy and harmony from family to family.

5.4.3. Family Rosary:

Praying the rosary, a devout practice, initiated in the family context, was never given up by Fr. Alfred. As a capuchin friar, he made every effort to foster this Marian devotion, which is thoroughly biblical, wherever he went. In the parish context, taking with him the cook and other inmates and praying the rosary with them was part of his daily apostolate. Thus, it was easy for him to spread this Marian devotion, practiced by him with the inmates, throughout the parish. Every family began to pray the angelus, creed, and rosary. Let us listen to what Fr. Santa Lopes has to say about this Marian devotion, gaining ground in the entire parish: “He instilled in us the devotion of the rosary. To promulgate this devotion, he also distributed rosaries, holy medals, holy pictures and so on. I know that there are a few people who still treasure those rosaries and medals as a remembrance of their beloved and holy person of Fr. Roche”.⁷⁷

Along with the liturgical music and devotional hymns, he taught them some amicable songs to build up their interpersonal rapport with the members of the family. One of his favorite songs was: “Ha kitlo boro amcho bapui, ha kitli bori

⁷⁷ Fr. Santa Lopes, *Fr. Alfred Roche: A Capuchin after the Heart of Jesus*, pp.14-15.

amchi avoi ...” (Oh! How good is our father, how good is our mother...). He taught such songs to the children and youth to emphasize the place of their parents in their life. It was to foster genuine love and respect towards the parents. The central message was this: As we try to love and adore our heavenly Father in and through our life of prayer, so we must love and respect our parents, who are His representatives. After the celestial Father, they are responsible for all that we are and all that we have. Consequently, we should never offend or pain them. We should always show certain concern towards them, especially when they are sick or elderly. We should go out of our way in helping and serving them. The happiness and blessings of the parents are very precious.

5.4.4. Holy Eucharist:

Fr. Alfred gave ample importance to the sacrament of the holy Eucharist. In fact, the Holy Eucharist was the centre of his life and mission. He firmly believed in the words of the Lord: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day” (Jn 6,54). Realizing the real significance of the Bread of Life in the life of a priest, and being fully aware of the words of the poverello of Assisi: “Behold, each day He humbles Himself as when He came from the royal throne into the virgin’s womb; each day He Himself comes to us, appearing humbly; each day He comes down from the bosom of the Father upon the altar in the hands of a priest”,⁷⁸ as a minister of

⁷⁸ “Admonition 1.16-18”, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Vol. 1: *The Saint*, New York-London-Manila, 1999, p.129.

the Sacrament of the Eucharist, he duly prepared himself for the daily celebration of this Fountain of grace. His lifestyle was not 'from the bed to the altar'. He was a self-disciplined person and he had a well set schedule for himself, according to which there was time set aside for the Lord, for the people of God, and for himself. According to the testimony of Sr. Hilaria Monteiro: "Fr. Roche was very particular in keeping his monastic rules.... He would get up early for his prayers.... The offering of mass what evoked devotion".⁷⁹ What we learn from the above testimony is that every day he rose quite early in the morning and spent time in silent meditation before and after the Morning Prayer as an immediate preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist.

It is said: "He preached what is lived, he proclaimed what he practised, and he announced what he performed". It is very true. For, **doing is an expression of our being**. This is what one could see in the day-to-day apostolate of Fr. Alfred. What kind of a person he was, and what place he had given to the holy Mass in his life, could be known at the altar, the way in which he celebrated Mass. It was not just fulfilling a law or performing a ritual. It was a moment of meeting the Lord, prayerfully conversing with Him and dining with Him at the table set by Him. It was a table of relationship (cf. Jn 13,21-30). He was fully aware what kind of Food he was receiving from Him during every Eucharistic celebration.

⁷⁹ Sr. Hilaria Monteiro, *Some Reminiscence of Fr. Alfred Roche, OFM Cap: Popularly Known as "Amcho Piti Padriab"*, p.1.

As a good shepherd he tried to inculcate a similar spirit in the hearts and minds of his flock. He encouraged the young and old to participate at the Eucharistic table as frequently as possible. This is how Fr. Santa Lopes bears witness to this fact: "Every Thursday, he kept an hour of holy Adoration. This devotion kindled in us a taste to be in union with Jesus, to make Jesus our friend. He taught us short and beautiful hymns to adore Jesus in the holy Eucharist. During each holy hour, he gave a brief reflection on the Word of God, which was special nourishment for our souls. During the time of adoration, he prayed specially for the vocations for the priesthood and religious life. Thus an hour of prayer became an hour of power in our lives".⁸⁰ The special instruction that the holy pastor gave during the holy Hour on the holy Eucharist, based on the Word of God, was a special source of enlightenment and enrichment to one and all. It evoked in them a special love for the holy Eucharist and they began to participate in the holy Mass more frequently and more devoutly. Besides, they began to pay frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament and quietly spend some time in prayer.

5.5. Education - Encouragement:

While laying due emphasis on the spiritual growth of his people, Fr. Alfred did not neglect the other areas of life. While inspiring and enlightening the faithful spiritually he simultaneously focused his attention on the intellectual formation of the

⁸⁰ Fr. Santa Lopes, *Fr. Alfred Roche: A Capuchin after the Heart of Jesus*, p.14.

children and youth, updating and adapting his approach according to the times and circumstances. With his holistic approach in life, he rightly instructed and animated the parents who did not know the real value of education; he made the necessary provision for the education of the children, who were not going to school owing to economic poverty by encouraging and supporting the parents through his generous friends and benefactors; youngsters, who had discontinued their studies due to their negligence or economic reasons, were duly advised and guided to resume their studies. Let us pay attention to what Sr. Leena Dias has to say in this respect: "In my life, Fr. Alfred Roche played an important role for which I am very grateful to him. In 1975 I had just finished my 7th standard and started to go to the nearby tile factory for work. Like other girls, I, too, hadn't any desire to continue my studies. Since my sisters were working, I also wanted to do the same. That very year, Fr. Alfred Roche, a holy and simple priest, came to our parish as the new parish priest. He called me and my elder brother, Mathias, and told him that he should send me to Brahmavar where he was the parish priest for several years and knew the sisters very well who were actively involved in the running of the parish school. He told us that the sisters were running a boarding and that he would make the necessary arrangements in the boarding so that I might continue my studies. I simply said yes to this. He sent nine others along with me. But, only I survived".⁸¹

⁸¹ Sr. Leena Dias, *Dear Fr. Alfred Roche: You are Precious in my Life* p.1.

There were many youngsters, like Sr. Leena, who had given up their studies and were just whiling away their time or working in a tile factory or in a small shop. They were rightly motivated and helped to continue their studies. Today, the very same individuals, who had received such psychological encouragement and economic support, have become priests, religious, leading parishioners and distinguished personalities working in different parts of the country and abroad. It is very comforting to listen to **these individuals** who, with a profound spirit of gratitude, say: “It is because of the constant guidance and support of Fr. Roche I am what I am today! After God I am immensely indebted to him”!

Further, it is very touching to see the **parents**, like Jacki Costa Fernandes and Jajvin Fernandes, pouring out their grateful sentiments with tears in their eyes: “Mine is a big family. It was “Roche Bap” who helped me in educating my children. If not for his help, I do not know what would have been the condition of my family. I have not seen such goodness in any priest. It was he who sent my children to school; it was he who paid the school fees; it was he who supplied the books and clothing. I cannot forget the help received from him and I cannot retribute it. When he was transferred, I wept very much. Owing to poverty, I could not go for his funeral”.⁸²

⁸² Mr. Jacki Costa Fernandes and Mrs. Jajvin Fernandes is another couple from St. Joseph’s Parish, Lower Kasarkod. Both of them are ever grateful to Fr. Alfred for the help and guidance that they have received from their good hearted pastor. While the husband and wife were expressing their sentiments, tears were flowing from their eyes.

Lawrence Lopes too has something very important to share with us: “I have five sons and one daughter. My family was very poor and I was not able to educate my children because of poverty. At that time Fr. Roche came to our parish. He visited my house and understood the actual situation. He helped me to educate my children. When my children were sick he himself used to take them to the hospital. Today, they are working and standing on their own feet.... Today, we are happy because of Fr. Roche’s blessings. He was a faithful person, loving person. He specially loved and cared for the poor”.⁸³ There are several parents who have expressed their heartfelt gratitude towards Fr. Alfred for the economic help that they received from him for the education of their children.

5.6. ‘Shanthi Dal’:

Fr. Alfred started his mission in the church precincts by focusing his attention on faith-formation. While strengthening the spiritual life of the parishners he paid due attention to the intellectual-formation of the children and youth, the future of the parish and society at large. His mission did not stop there. He perceived the broken-relationships and fights among the members of different families and the struggles that were going on in and around the families in the parish precincts. What the actual situation was, can be known from the words of Mr. Francis Rodrigues: “What I put down in writing is from my personal experience with Fr. Alfred, while I was the sacristan in our parish for ten years.

⁸³Mr. Lawrence Lopes, *I am Lawrence Lopes*, p.1.

Prior to the arrival of Fr. Roche to our parish at Lower Kasarkod, dedicated to St. Joseph, there was a lot of poverty, jealousy, superstition, divisions, and fights among the members of different families. Time and again people had to go to the police station and waste their time and money. Faithful from the neighbouring parishes were afraid to come to our parish even on feast days. After Fr. Roche's arrival we could see the change, the transformation taking place in different areas: spiritual, intellectual, moral, and social, in our parish. Thus, within a few years, our parish became one of the most leading parishes in the entire diocese of Karwar. The credit goes to Fr. Roche".⁸⁴ During his regular visits to the families, he learnt that the atmosphere was really detrimental to family life as well as for the well-being of the entire parish.

As a wise pastor, instead of handling the cases unilaterally and imposing his ideas on the people, he took the parishioners into confidence and worked with them entrusting certain responsibilities to them. He knew that, being sons and daughters of the soil, they were in a better position to understand and solve these problems. He formed a peace committee. In the words of Fr. Santa Lopes: "Fr. Roche was a great peace lover. He spread the message of peace everywhere. To achieve the objects of peace in the parish, he formed a 'Shanthi Dal' (an army of peace). With the help of this group, he was able to settle every dispute in

⁸⁴ Francis Rodrigues, *My Personal Experience with Fr. Roche*, p.1. Mr. Francis Rodrigues, as he himself says, was the sacristan and close collaborator of Fr. Roche. He used to be in the church precincts day and night. He is a devout and dedicated parishioner of St. Joseph's Parish, Lower Kasarkod, Honnavar.

the family context and every misunderstanding and quarrel in the parish milieu".⁸⁵ All social problems were handled with great prudence and delicacy with the active involvement of the members of the 'Shanti Dal'. Thus, within a short span of time, better understanding and harmony began to gain ground in the entire parish.

The 'Shanti Dal' did play an important role in bringing about peace and brotherhood in many families and in the parish at large. But, these extraordinary results were not achieved just by human intelligence or human efforts. It was the divine grace operating and touching the hearts of these people who were in constant conflict among themselves. Every meeting was begun with a prayer of petition and every session ended with a prayer of thanksgiving. For, he firmly believed in the words of Jesus: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst". As a result, no dispute or fight was too difficult to be dealt with.

Besides, before holding such important meetings, the pastor spent time in personal prayer in the presence of the Lord, seeking enlightenment and guidance from above. That was the secret of his serene comportment. The inner peace and tranquility that was emanating/vibrating from his person touched everyone. As a result, even hot tempered and emotionally tensed people lost their temper when they came in his presence and looked at his grace-filled countenance. Minin Fernandes

⁸⁵ Fr. Santa Lopes, *Fr. Alfred Roche: A Capuchin after the Heart of Jesus*, p.13

narrates a scene to confirm this: “In our area there used to be a boat race on the feast of St. John Baptist. People from different villages/ places used to compete in this boat race. Once, the youth from Lower Kasarkod won in the competition. But, there was some conflict among the youth and some of the young men from Lower Kasarkod seized one boat and caught one of the young men and locked him in a room. Fr. Roche was happy when he got the news that the youth from his parish had won in the competition and had got the prize. But, he did not know anything about the tragic story of the young man kept under lock. When he, as the parish priest, was accused of such a drastic act by some, he did not open his mouth. He listened to the accusers humbly and patiently. When they left the place, he met the parishioners and got all the necessary data. Then, he asked the parish youth to release the young man, kept under lock, and requested them not to take part in that competition any more”.⁸⁶

5.7. Shelter for the Poor:

Our friars working in different parishes did pay due attention to the social uplift of the people along with faith-formation and education. Seeing the poor living condition of some families at Lower Kasarkod, Fr. Alfred made a special project called “Help for Homes” and tried to knock at the door of some of his friends and well wishers. In fact, seeing his sincere efforts to help the poor and the

⁸⁶ Mr. Minin C. Fernandes, *Fr. Roche: Messenger of Peace*, p.1-2. Mr. Minin Fernandes is a parishioner of St. Joseph’s Church, Lower Kasarkod. He is one of the members of the SFO Fraternity of the parish.

marginalized, he was helped by the General Curia of the Capuchins and other benefactors. As a result, several poor families were helped to have a decent roof over their head. One can know the feelings of Mr. Jacki Ruzar Rodrigues, one of such beneficiaries: "I was a very poor handicapped young man without much education. At a particular juncture I was really desperate. I came and shared my misery with Roche Bap and he helped me build a small house. I did not have a proper job. Knowing my helpless situation, Roche Bap, the good hearted father, provided for me Rs. 45,000.00 and thus helped me to buy a rickshaw. I have received many things from him and through him. I can never forget him. I have a crucifix received from him. I preserve it as a precious treasure".⁸⁷

Similarly, there are very many who had been helped in building or rebuilding their simple abodes. Assis Augustine Fernandes and Bemodthin Fernandes have something very noteworthy to share: "Fr. Roche was an extremely good father (bhari mogacho Padriab). He did many good things in our parish. He had helped us to repair our house. We cannot forget his love and concern towards our family. We daily pray for him".⁸⁸ Thus, with the help of the General Curia of the Capuchins and

⁸⁷Mr. Jacki Ruzar Rodrigues is a devout young man belonging to the parish of St. Joseph, Lower, Kasarkod. Presently he is rendering his dedicated and generous service as the sacristan in his own parish.

⁸⁸Mr. Assis Augustine Fernandes and Mrs. Bemodthin Fernandes belong to St. Joseph's Parish, Lower, Kasarkod. This is another devout and dedicated couple that is indebted to Fr. Roche for what he has been to them and for all that he has done for them. What I put down here is only a small part of what they shared with me.

several relatives, friends, and benefactors, he could come to the rescue of the poor and the downtrodden. It is important to note that the help was not given only to the Christian families. This help was given to the needy, irrespective of caste and creed. Mr. Mathias Juze Dias bears witness to this: "Fr. Roche's generous heart and hands were opened to everybody. So, many Hindus and "Kharvis" were helped by him. They have been loving him and admiring him, considering him as a man of God".⁸⁹ Thus, his dream, in coming to the rescue of some of the unfortunate families and providing them a decent abode, came true.

In extraordinary situations, when people suffered from some natural calamities, he was there to sympathize with them and help them. With his personal efforts he saved them from such tragic circumstances. Mary Fernandes explains to us how close he was with those who were in such difficulties: "Fr. Roche was so concerned with every member of his parish that he personally visited all the people, asked about their welfare, and soothed their difficulties and sorrows. In times of floods his efforts were exceptional. He helped everyone in need.... He worked very hard for the upliftment of the people of Kasarkod".⁹⁰

Having a decent dwelling place of their own gave them an identity, gave them a personality, and they

⁸⁹Mr. Mathias Juze Dias, from his personal sharing with me. He makes special mention of the "Kharvis". They are a group of Hindus who were traditionally known as fishermen. Some of them were very poor and Fr. Alfred was regularly helping them. Therefore, they loved him and respected him .

⁹⁰ Mrs. Mary P. Fernandes, *A Witness -That's True*, pp.3-4.

could walk with their heads up in society. Men and women, who were suffering from inferiority complex and regularly having recourse to liquors to forget their pain, shame, and misery, gave up such drinks and bad habits and began to save something from their daily wages, however meagere they might have been. Individuals, who were loitering about aimlessly and whiling away their time, began to show keen interest in work and earn something more. One could see a new orientation in life; one could notice a broad smile on their face; one could perceive bright light in their eyes; one could see them wearing clean clothes. One could see their children happy and graceful; one could observe them going to school regularly; one could see them putting in great efforts in their studies. When we meet and spend a few moments with some of these senior citizens, they pour out their sentiments of deep gratitude towards their beloved pastor who became the stepping stone for the present harmony, progress and development in their families. In the same way, if we spend a few minutes with the youth of today, they too say likewise. They pour out their deep sentiments of indebtedness to their guru who guided and led them on the right path animating them spiritually, intellectually, morally and socially so that they could become what they are today in their family contexts and society at large.

5.8. Comforting the Sick:

Another great asset of Fr. Alfred was his preferential option for the sick and aged. He visited the sick and the aged time and again in their homes.

He spent time with them offering them the moral support and courage to endure their suffering patiently. He helped them financially. In times of grave illness, he made the necessary arrangements to shift the patients even to distant hospitals. Please, lend your ears to what Mr. Jacki Ruzar Rodrigues has to say: "When I was small, my father had to undergo an operation at Fr. Muller's hospital, Mangalore. It was Fr. Alfred who helped us economically. He supplied food for my father and mother from Monte Mariano, Farangipet, where he was the superior at that time. When I was in the hospital with typhoid, once again, it was he, who came to see me and economically supported me. I am immensely grateful to him. I cannot forget him".⁹¹ The testimony of Raymond Juze Fernandes and Preschilla Fernandes will certainly consolidate this point: "Roche Bap was a saintly priest who brought about so much of change in our parish. He loved us and he was a father to us. He saved the life of my son, Samuel, who was very ill. When he was in the danger of death, he baptized my son to liberate him from the stain of sin. He helped us when my son had to undergo two operations. One of them was a plastic surgery without which my son would not have been able to speak properly. Besides the help that he personally gave me, he gave me letters of recommendation to receive help from charitable institutes without which I was not able to meet all the expenses. Later, when my son was able to work, he helped him to buy a rickshaw.

⁹¹ Mr. Jacki Ruzar Rodrigues is expressing his sentiments of gratitude for all that his parents and he have received in and through the instrumentality of Fr. Alfred.

Today he is earning our livelihood as a rickshaw driver. He has helped several people in their various needs".⁹²

As mentioned above, very often he used to accompany the patients to the hospital. When he was not able to accompany them, he would give a ring to the respective hospital authorities, specially St. Ignatius Hospital, Honnavar; Fr. Muller's Hospital, Kankanady; Goretti Hospital, Kallianpur or send a letter of recommendation to a particular doctor or nurse. He could do so because he had personal contact with many doctors and nurses who loved and respected him very much. Sr. Lucy Rodrigues, (the then Matron) in Father Muller's Hospital, was one of them. Knowing very well the different departments as well as the doctors in the hospital, she did the needful with great care and attention, knowing that the particular patient had been sent by Fr. Alfred.

5.9. New Church - Construction:

While building up the spiritual, intellectual and social life in the parish context, the foresighted pastor realized that the parish church was very old and was not spacious enough to accommodate the faithful for the ordinary liturgical celebrations. He felt he need to provide a more worthy temple to the Lord in collaboration with the faithful who were gradually getting re-generated and vitalized by the Spirit of the Lord (cf. Jn.3.3.)

⁹²Mr. Raymond Juze Fernandes and Mrs. Preschilla Fernandes are members of St. Joseph's Parish, Lower Kasarkod. What I have put down here is a little part of what both of them shared with me with a profound spirit of gratitude. They, along with their son, Samuel, cherish the memory of Fr. Alfred and thank God for the person of Fr. Alfred and for all the help that they received through him.

This new project was begun **in the name of the Lord**. As mentioned in one of the testimonies borne by Mr. Mathias Juze Dias, the good pastor initiated this project placing it, first and foremost, in the hands of the Lord. He began to pray for the success of this project with the faithful. He regularly assembled the children and the youth before the Blessed Sacrament to invoke the blessing of the Lord. All of them, young and old, continually prayed so that they might be able to have a more spacious temple of the Lord.

It was in such an atmosphere of trust in the Lord and the intercession of St. Joseph that he presented the church-project to different friends and benefactors. One could see the grace of God operating. Inspired and guided by the Spirit of the Lord, good hearted benefactors came forward and generously contributed their might. Then, with the wholehearted collaboration and voluntary service (serthi) of the parishioners, he succeeded in putting up a simple but monumental church. There was a deep sense of belongingness among the parishners. From the script of Fr. Santa Lopes, one can get a clear idea about it: "Our parish was like a family. We called our parish 'amche kutam' (our family). There was a deep sense of belongingness.... The construction of the church of St. Joseph, Lower Kasarkod, would be a beautiful example for this. It was the hard labour of all the parishioners under the guidance of the shepherd, Fr. Roche. Young and old, men and women, short and tall, thin and stout, rich and poor, all felt that they were part of this church. Fr. Roche united us all into a large

family. In this family, we experienced the kingdom of God".⁹³

The foundation of the new church was laid on the 2nd May, 1977 by his Excellency Ignatius Lobo, the then Bishop of Belgaum, and after its graceful completion, it was blessed by him on the 30th of April, 1979. It was one of the most spacious churches in the diocese of Belgaum. It is important to note the two captions that one can read at the entrance of the church: One just above the main door: **Shanthi** (peace) and the other above this caption: **Come let us adore Him**. The mighty belfry, with its magnificent bell from Padua, Italy, gave a new identity to the parish dedicated to St. Joseph, the worker.

The inauguration of the new church was, of course, a historical event. It was a day of celebration and jubilation for everyone. There were bishops and pastors, priests and religious, men and women, young and old, even of other religions, coming from far and near. After that the blessing of the new church and the solemn celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy, with the melodious singing of the parish choir, got over, it was time for a cultural celebration with songs, dances, speeches, vote of thanks. All the honoured guests appreciated the marvellous work done by Fr. Alfred and applauded as loudly as possible, accompanied by the rhythmic music of the Gloria-Jyothi Band, Brahmavar.

When the time came for the beloved parish priest to say a few words, having thanked the Almighty God, the Source of every grace and blessing, he

⁹³ Fr. Santa Lopes, *Fr. Alfred Roche: A Capuchin after the Heart of Jesus*, p.11.

said: “My dear people, all of you say that I built the church. But I say boldly that it is not I who built the church, it is you who built it. It is you, young and old, who worked day and night without minding the heat of the midday sun; without minding your rest and recreation. It is a fruit of your faithful and generous labour”. There was pin drop silence. He looked at the parishners and they looked at him. Once again he whispered the same thing: “It’s you who built the church and not I”. Was the pastor just acting out something or was he sincere when he said this?

He was not just dramatizing the event. He was very serious about it when he made that observation. It was nothing but an expression of his simplicity, sincerity, and honesty. He knew very well how much the parishioners were interested and how much they were involved in the construction work of the church and how generously they had contributed their might, especially in terms of manual labour. At this juncture, it is very important that I place before you the precious testimony of Fr. Alopolaris Pinto, the senior most member of our province dedicated to the most Holy Trinity: “Fr. Alfred was a very simple and humble man, no show, very sincere, man of the heart. I have fought with many. But I do not remember to have fought with him”.⁹⁴ Fr.

⁹⁴ Fr. Apolaris Pinto celebrated his 100th birthday on the 22nd of May, 2011. He was one of the members of the Holy Family Friary, Brahmavar, when Fr. Alfred was the parish priest and superior of the fraternity. Fr. Apolaris was one of the zealous friars who collaborated with Fr. Alfred in the parish apostolate and he was the one who labored strenuously in building the new church at Petre, which was a substation of the Holy Family Church, Brahmavar, at that time. On the 12th of October 2011 the heavenly Father called him to his eternal reward.

Apolinaris lived with Fr. Alfred for many years, when he was one of the members of the Holy Family Friary, Brahmavar. He generously collaborated with Fr. Alfred, who was the superior and parish priest. What he shares here is from his lived-experience.

When the members of a family build a house, they have a certain fulfillment in life, a sense of achievement in life. It is not rare that we hear such beautiful expression: Thank God, now we have our own house. Children feel extremely happy about it and feel proud to say to their colleagues: "My mom and dad have built a beautiful house. I want to show you my room and all the toys that I have". Similarly, constructing a new church means getting a new identity to the entire parish and one can hear the faithful joyfully and gracefully saying: "We had a small church which was very old. Our parish priest is a wonderful person. By the grace of God and with his arduous efforts, we have been able to build a magnificent new church. We feel so happy when we enter into our church. It helps us very much to pray". Actually, such were the sentiments of the faithful of St. Joseph's Parish, Lower Kasarkod. They were very happy because the spacious and magnificent new church gave them a new identity in the entire diocese. Besides, the new church helped them to pray well. So, they thanked the Loving and Compassionate Father for the timely help that He provided them through the generous benefactors and thanked their selfless and foresighted pastor who was behind the whole scene.

5.10. Capuchin Fraternity:

Fr. Alfred came from St. Anne's Church, Binaga, Karwar, to St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod, Honnavar, as the parish priest and his attention was primarily focused on the parishners, using the God-given gifts and talents to carry out the responsibilities placed on his shoulders at the best of his capacities. As a parish priest, he used his spiritual, intellectual, physical and psychological energy for the well-being and well-doing of the faithful entrusted to his care although time and again he extended his service to the people of other faiths according to the needs and circumstances.

Initially, Fr. Alfred was alone at St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod. As it has been already explained, the "Honnavar Fraternity", of which he was the superior, had a special physiognomy. St. Joseph's Church, being situated very close to the national high way, it was easy for the friars, dispersed in five other places, to come together for their spiritual renewal as well as fraternal gatherings. But, in the course of time, other friars were gradually sent to St. Joseph's parish for pastoral reasons, and so, St. Joseph's parish presbytery/house gradually became St. Joseph's Friary, Lower Kasarkod, of which Fr. Alfred became the first superior.

Thereafter, he had a two-fold office: He was the superior of the fraternity as well as the parish priest. This experience was similar to that he had at Holy Family Church, Brahmavar, where he was alone (as a friar) at the beginning, and then, in the course of time, other friars had joined him when the parish house became a capuchin friary. With the fund of

knowledge and experience that he already had as the superior of the fraternity at the Holy Family Friary, Brahmavar, he could easily render his fraternal service for the spiritual growth and physical health of his confreres. He was aware of the teaching of the Post-Synodal Document: *Vita Consecrata*, which says: “But It should be recognized that those who exercise authority cannot renounce their obligation as those first responsible for the community, as guides for their brothers and sisters in the spiritual and apostolic life”.⁹⁵ So, he set aside a good amount of time in order to be with the friars so as to know their views and their expectations. He tried to take them into confidence and involve them in the decision-making process, and shared his responsibilities with different confrères according to their God-given gifts and talents. As a result, all the friars felt that they were accepted and respected members of the fraternity and wholeheartedly collaborated with him

⁹⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Vita Consecrata*, no. 43.

CHAPTER 6

ST. FIDELIS FRIARY: MONTE MARIANO - FARANGIPET

Introduction:

After twenty five years of dedicated and praiseworthy ministry in the parish context (1956-81), Fr. Alfred was once again transferred to the novitiate-house at Monte Mariano, Farangipet, where he had initiated his sacerdotal ministry assisting the novice master and rendering his humble service in the friary chapel for five years (1951-1956). In 1981 in the month of June, he returned to the same place as the superior of the novitiate-fraternity where he had begun his ministry as a newly ordained capuchin. The faithful of St. Joseph's parish at Kasarkod and the people around were very much saddened at the transfer of their beloved pastor. He, too, experienced a certain amount of pain when he was preparing himself to part with the faithful of St. Joseph's parish, whom he loved and served for six years with a fatherly and motherly heart. Yet, as a son of St. Francis of Assisi, he accepted the transfer as the will of God and left for Monte Mariano, Farangipet, with a peaceful heart, and assumed the office of superior of the novitiate-fraternity, trusting in the providence of God.

6.1. Spirit of Brotherhood:

As the superior of the formation fraternity, his focus was to animate the young novices along with the novice master and the other members of the

fraternity so that they may be duly initiated into the Franciscan Capuchin Charism. The spirit of brotherhood being one of the central characteristics of the life and teaching of the poverello of Assisi, as the superior his interest was to foster a loving and fraternal atmosphere in the novitiate fraternity which is composed of friars with different responsibilities: "The formation fraternity is composed of the entire group of brothers - perpetually and temporarily professed - since all are engaged on a journey of continuous formation, though at different levels and with different tasks. It is also indispensable that each brother in the circumscription should feel responsibly involved in formation".⁹⁶ Being the local superior of the novitiate fraternity, he knew that it was his prime duty to strengthen fraternal relationships in the novitiate house. Therefore, he took the confrères into confidence and tried to foster the spirit of fraternal collaboration in the work of formation and administration in the fraternity.

The spirit of team-work, which he tried to foster in the fraternity, was a wonderful lesson to the young minds. They saw how he was able to appreciate the gifts and talents of each confrère; how he succeeded in involving each and everyone of them in the decision-making process; and how he entrusted different responsibilities to each one of them according to the God-given graces. In such an atmosphere of **fraternal interdependence**, each one of them felt that he was loved and respected,

⁹⁶ Convention on Post-Novitiate, *Formation for Capuchin-Franciscan Life in the Post-Novitiate*, Rome, 2004, no.3.3.

and each one tried to contribute the maximum according to their God-given gifts and talents to the betterment of the fraternity. This fraternal collaboration built up a peaceful and joyful atmosphere in the entire fraternity.

6.2. *Spirit of Prayer:*

The novitiate is the cradle of one's spiritual life wherein the basics of a particular charism of a religious family are imparted to the novices, along with the general characteristics of Christian spirituality.⁹⁷ Fr. Alfred was already the assistant novice master for four years and he knew the central place that had to be given to the contemplative dimension, in the process of initiating the novices into the capuchin way of life. Therefore, in consultation with the novice master and other members of the fraternity, his primary concern was to create a healthy atmosphere of silence and recollection in the entire novitiate fraternity. He took these precautions because he was convinced that such measures were sine qua non to create a healthy climate in the novitiate fraternity. He was fully aware that without such an atmosphere, the novices were not able to imbibe and personalize the values imparted by the master along with his collaborators. Further, his personal life of prayer was a source of inspiration and encouragement to the young minds. "He was a compassionate pastor - a man of deep prayer - very kind hearted to all. He had a very strong

⁹⁷ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Vita Consecrata*, nos. 65-66.

faith in God in all circumstances. He saw God's hand in every situation".⁹⁸ What he was trying to practise and inculcate into the hearts of the faithful in the parish context, he continued to do with greater fidelity and generosity in the novitiate milieu.

6.3. *Spirit of Poverty and Simplicity:*

Formation is a very delicate task in every context. Very few friars/members in a circumscription opt to take up some responsibility in formation. They prefer to be away from the formative units because life in a formative fraternity is very challenging. The life-pattern of every member of the formative fraternity counts very much. It is not enough, for instance, that the formators (at different levels of formation) give excellent conferences/lectures on Franciscan poverty and simplicity, and try to impart the basic values according to the Franciscan Capuchin Charism to the formees. If they are not consistent in what they teach and what they practise, their conferences and their teaching have very little educative and formative value. There needs to be, first and foremost, a certain consistency between what they say/teach and what they do/practise. This is a universal principle which is valid in every educative and formative unit, big or small.

This statement may sound very drastic to some ears. But, it is very existential. As the teaching and life-pattern of the parents are fundamental in the

⁹⁸ Sr. Patrick Rebello, *Fr. Alfred Roche – As Known to Me*, p.1. Sr. Patrick Rebello is a Bethany Sister working in St. Antony's Parish at Padukone, in the diocese of Mangalore. Though she was born and brought up in the Parish dedicated to the Holy Family at Omzoor, she knew Fr. Alfred very well. She was in the boarding run by the Sisters of Charity at Brahmavar.

home context, so the teaching and good example of the educators and formators are sine qua non in the educative and formative centres. If not, they perceive certain inconsistency between what is said and what is done. Some of them get confused and gradually begin to criticize the teachers/educators/formators.

Is there a way to get out of this puzzle? Yes, it is very simple. We, the teachers, educators, and formators need to ask the very same question that was asked by the Lord, **the Prime Teacher, Formator par excellence**, to his own disciples: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is But who do you say that I am" (Mt 16,13-15)? Besides, we need to put ourselves in His presence and ask: Master, who am I in your presence? Am I a dedicated teacher according to your will? Am I a loyal educator according to your governing grace? Am I a committed formator according to your design? Such questions will help us to get out of such a puzzle.

Fr. Alfred was one of those who, putting himself in the presence of the Lord, asked these questions to himself. He tried to follow this pedagogy taught by the divine Master. As the superior of the novitiate fraternity, time and again, placing himself in the presence of the Lord he asked: Master, what kind of a superior am I? As a leader what kind of animation am I giving? This attitude of self-questioning enabled him to grow in the spirit of poverty and simplicity, looking at the Master in swaddling clothes in the manger, and quasi naked on the cross. It was his closeness to the Lord and

Master Who had, as St. Paul says: Had emptied Himself so as to fill up our emptiness (cf. Phi.2, 5-7), that gradually taught him the wisdom of the cross. As he came closer and closer to the poor and simple Lord, he began to appreciate the spirit of poverty and simplicity. As he became more and more attached to the Lord, detachment from material goods became easier and easier to him. He was happy with the minimum. In fact, **this is spiritual maturity**. The superior, the formator, and the elder brother should be the first one to set such a good example before the novices and the formees. It encourages the formees, the juniors and gives them a tremendous push in their life.

6.4. *Option for and with the Poor:*

During his pastoral service in Holy Family parish at Brahmavar, his apostolic service in St. Anne's parish at Binaga, his mission work in St. Joseph's parish at Lower Kasarkod, along with faith formation and education, option for and with the poor was the focal point of Fr. Alfred's pastoral endeavors. Wherever he went, he was very close to the poor and the marginalized. His compassionate heart could not bear the suffering of the poor in wealth as well as in health. He visited them; listened to their trials and anxieties; sympathized with them; and tried to help them according to their needs: to the sick he tried to find adequate treatment; to those who were economically poor, he tried to support through his friends and benefactors. Things that were given to him as gifts, he gave to the poor.

But, what he could do to those marginalized was

comparatively less than what he did earlier in the parish context because at Monte Mariano, Farangipet, he was the superior of a novitiate fraternity. Yet, he continued to do what he did in other places, though he could not afford to dedicate so much time and energy for the poor and the needy as he was doing earlier. The friary parlour became the central place for such apostolate: He welcomed different categories of people and helped them according to their need:

6.4.1. *Spiritually and Psychologically Poor:*

As an experienced spiritual guide (companion), he spent good amount of time with those (priests, religious and lay people) that were discouraged and disappointed in life. He listened to them with love and care and gradually facilitated them to discern the plan of God and learn to accept their cross of day-to-day life in a spirit of resignation. Those who came to him very much disturbed and broken down returned to their respective places much peaceful and joyful. Thus, the change, the transformation that was taking place in them, had its positive repercussion on the other members of the fraternities or families.

6.4.2. *Physically Poor:* These were the sick and invalid who did not have anybody to take care of them in their physical ailments owing to many reasons. They were not in a position to have any adequate medical treatment. In such a helpless situation, they were going to the friary seeking help and support from someone. What they needed the most was a sympathetic person who would patiently listen to them and would lovingly assist them. Fr. Alfred

was one of those who made himself available and spent some time with these patients and they found a beautiful shelter under his paternal mantel. They could easily pour out their pains and sorrows. Being in contact with many doctors and nurses, and having very good rapport with some important persons involved in the administrative jobs in different hospitals in and around Mangalore, he could put in a word and get the necessary treatment with the minimum expenses. Besides, he personally visited these patients in the hospitals and instilled in them a better hope of recovery.

6.4.3. *Economically poor:*

These are those unfortunate individuals/families that had to face certain trying situations in life: Ordinary farmers who had suffered great losses owing to draught, pestilence or untimely rains; families wherein he found a lot of suffering of the elderly and children owing to excessive drinking of alcohol and similar bad habits of the heads of the families; individuals and families suffering great loss in their business; families facing severe difficulties in making both ends meet owing to the sudden death of the bread winner of the family and so on.

When he came across such cases, he tried to come to their rescue in different ways: First of all, he brought such cases to the notice of the members of his fraternity which came forward to contribute something for these unfortunate people. But, the fraternity alone was not able to help them totally. Therefore, according to his usual method, he began to knock at the doors of his friends and benefactors

who promptly responded and generously contributed to this noble cause. That is how Fr. Alfred could carry on his generous apostolate of the marginalized in spite of his various duties as the superior of a house of formation.

Besides helping them materially, he personally visited these families and spent some time with them. The testimony of Sr. Patrick Rebello sheds further light on this point: “Fr. Alfred was a lover of the poor. He often visited them in their homes and was always ready to help them in their needs unmindful of any odd circumstances. He had a special love for the orphan children and the children who stay in the orphanages and helped them financially”.⁹⁹ These frequent visits and spending a little time with them were a great source of comfort to them. This paternal approach of Fr. Alfred was highly appreciated by this weaker section of society. They considered it their special privilege. What we see here is not only the option for the poor but also **option with the poor** which is much deeper than the option for the poor. In one’s option for the poor, one can offer that service even being in one’s friary/house/office. But, one’s option with the poor, demands something much more than that. It is a ‘being with’, feeling with, and working with someone. It is based on the **theology of incarnation**, following the example of the Son of God, Who became the Son of man in order to be with the sons and daughters of men.

6.5. Pastoral Zeal: Being the superior of the fraternity of the novitiate, he had to concentrate on the

⁹⁹ Sr. Patrick Rebello, *Fr. Alfred – As Known to Me*, p.1.

members of the fraternity. He had to see to the spiritual as well as material needs of every brother. While doing justice to this duty, time and again, he went to different religious institutes and formation houses to preach retreats and to give monthly recollections. Simplicity of his life and down-to-earth conferences, centered on the Word of God, touched the hearts of the formees as well as the formators. This was the secret of his fruitful apostolate of the Word of God wherever he went.

Now and then, he substituted the parish priests. Time and again, he was invited to preach retreats in different parishes and schools. These were special occasions to come in contact with the young and old, rich and poor. Seeing his spirit of humility and transparency, every category of people approached him and poured out the joys and sorrows of their life. He made use of every opportunity to enlighten them and to foster vocations for consecrated life and priesthood.

Secular Franciscan Order (SFO) being very close to his heart, he frequently assisted the zonal and regional assistants of SFO in animating its members as well as the office bearers in the dioceses of Mangalore, Karwar, and beyond. His animation, God-centered and experience-bound was very much appreciated by the SFO members. After six years of loving and humble service rendered to the novitiate-fraternity, different parishes, SFO fraternities, and various institutes far and near, he was once again transferred to St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod, where he had already rendered his dedicated service from 1974-80.

CHAPTER 7

ST. JOSEPH'S CHURCH - LOWER KASARKOD

Introduction:

Fr. Alfred, too, was happy to return to St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod, where he had already worked for six years. There was a great sense of rejoicing among the faithful of St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod, and the people around, when they got the news that 'Roche Bap' would return to Lower Kasarkod. The young and old were counting the days and were getting ready to welcome into their midst the one, who had loved them and had given them a new identity. Finally, at his arrival in Lower Kasarkod on the 1st of June, 1987, everyone, irrespective of caste and creed, thanked God for the special blessing conferred upon them in the person of Fr. Alfred.

Knowing already the aspirations and priorities of the people, it was easy for him to build up and consolidate the spiritual edifice that was already founded on solid Rock. It was a joy to see the all-round development in the parish. The seed, planted and sprouted during his pastoral service of six years, was watered, manured and nurtured by his successors. They had become healthy plants slowly beginning to flower and bear much fruit: He could see the active participation of the faithful in the liturgy; he could observe the active

involvement of the rich and the poor in every parish activity; he could notice the youth getting more and more qualified; he could perceive an atmosphere of peace and harmony prevailing in the families. While thanking the Lord, the Author of every grace and blessing, he helped them to get further consolidated in the evangelical spirit, specially paying attention to three areas of life:

7.1. *Vocation Promotion:*

One of the golden proverbs in Latin (*dicta aurea*) says: *Qualis pater talis filius* (As the father, so is the son). How true this saying is can be known in St. Joseph's parish, Lower Kasarkod. One could see: the spirit of prayer in the families and active participation of the faithful in the Eucharistic liturgy; the intellectual, cultural and economic growth in the parish and beyond; peace and harmony in the families and the like. This was taking place because of the life-pattern and animation of their pastor, inspired and guided by the Spirit of the Lord. Fr. Alfred, as the parish priest of St. Joseph's Church, was really the **spiritual father**, the divine messenger, sent by God, for the spiritual rebirth (cf. Jn.3.3) and w/holistic growth of the parishners. Engrafted into the Vine, he was constantly absorbing the vital sap from the Tree of Life (cf. Jn.15.1-11). His empathetic approach enabled him to empathize with those in need. Let us listen to what Sr. Lucy Rodrigues has to say: "He was a divine physician. Whenever I was guilty of the fault, he would rightly advise me and lead me on the right path. Before I could open my mouth, he would know what I wanted to say. His look was sufficient for me. He often told me: 'Child, do not offend Jesus because he loves you

very much".¹⁰⁰ He was able to enter not only into their minds but also their hearts and feel for them. He was able to assume their pains and sorrows and comfort them.

Being enlightened by the Divine Light and empowered by the Divine Energy, he could share his personal experience with his flock and enrich them day by day. Many young men and women were moved by his authentic religious personality; they were touched by his priestly ministry; they were impressed by his transparent transactions; they were taken up by his collegial administration. Some of them were those who had given up their studies and were working in nearby factories and small shops. It was their good and generous pastor who had rightly motivated them and had helped them to resume their studies. Being with him and learning from him, they wanted to walk in his footsteps and become consecrated people and /or ordained ministers. Sr. Leena Dias likes to explain to us how Fr. Alfred was her vocation promoter "After my SSLC, he sent me to Capitanio, Mangalore.... His wish was that I would be a Sister of Charity and I, too, had a deep desire to be a nun. He himself accompanied me to the convent. Fr. Roche had taken the sole responsibility of my life. On the 9th of September 1984, the members of my family and my foster father, Fr. Roche, were very happy when I made my profession. In my home town, he arranged a Eucharistic celebration and felicitation. He did the same in 1989 when I made my final profession....

¹⁰⁰ Sr. Lucy Rodrigues, *God Man Fr. Alfred*, p.3.

He always filled me with courage, faith and love.... I did not celebrate my silver jubilee in 2009 because my parents and Fr. Roche were in heaven".¹⁰¹

Many young men and women came to him to seek his guidance in discerning the plan of God in their life. As an experienced spiritual director (companion) he spent time with them in listening to them and facilitating them **to arrive at a personal decision**, being docile to the inspiration and guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, the Supreme Spiritual Director (Companion). Thus, the Lord used this humble and fragile minister in touching the hearts and minds of many precisely because of his fidelity and generosity in the service of the flock entrusted to his care. This is how the soil of St. Joseph's parish became a fertile ground for consecrated life and priestly ministry, producing beautiful and plentiful vocations for the priestly and consecrated life, belonging to different religious Orders, Congregations and Dioceses. Let us praise the Lord, the Author of every grace and blessing, the Gardener, Who employed Fr. Alfred to do the timely pruning of these plants so that they may produce plentiful fruit (cf. Jn.15.1-3).

7.2. *Comforting the Afflicted:*

As a spiritual director (companion) he helped the young and old in discerning the plan of God in their life and patiently walked with them in fulfilling the plan of God in their day-to-day life. While listening to them he could come to know the pains and trials that they were undergoing. Being a

¹⁰¹ Sr. Leena Dias, *Dear Fr. Alfred Roche: You are Precious in my Life*, pp. 1-2.

practical minded man he tried to come to their rescue at the earliest. Defni Joseph Ridrigues bears witness to this: “When I was small Fr. Roche was our parish priest. I used to get prize in catechism every year.... When I was 17 years old a tree fell on my back. I had a fracture on my back bone. I was admitted to Manipal Hospital and the doctors were discussing about my operation. Fr. Roche came to visit me and I wept bitterly in his presence. With the help of his loving words and prayers I came home safely without any operation. I was healed with the help of a few tablets”.¹⁰² What is put down by Defni Rodrigues may sound strange to the ears of some of us. It may seem to be an exaggeration. But, he is sharing his personal experience and he firmly believes that it is a miraculous healing in and through the prayers of Fr. Roche. There are other experiences falling in line with this.

7.3. “Job-Bureau”:

The practical minded pastor saw that job-opportunities were very limited in and around Lower Kasarkod. As the youth got more and more qualified, he tried to find adequate jobs for them in bigger towns through his personal contacts. Most of them were those who were encouraged and supported by him in their studies since the very beginning. Others were those who had discontinued their studies and were doing ordinary household duties or working in tile or brick factories in the

¹⁰² Mr. Defni Joseph Rodrigues, *My Testimony*, p.1. Mr. Defni Rodrigues is one of the active members of St. Joseph’s Church, Lower Kasarkod. This is one of the four experiences that he has put down in his script on Fr. Alfred Roche. He bears witness to the fact that God’s grace was flowing in and through Fr. Roche.

neighborhood. It was he who, had rightly motivated them and had given them timely help to resume their studies.

Now that they were sufficiently educated, they could stand on their own feet. He rightly prepared their minds and put them in contact with some of his own relations and friends who could offer some adequate jobs for them. Yet, there were some who were scared to leave their little village and go to faraway places. He tried to get some decent jobs for them in the vicinity by helping them to buy a rickshaw, to put up a small shop, or to find an ordinary job in the neighborhood in and through the help of the religious sisters. He helped others by introducing them to different agencies with which he had personal contact. To some elderly people, who were not able to leave their homes and take up some jobs in distant places, he helped through his generous friends and benefactors so that they could also have their daily bread. Thus, knowing very well that *idleness is the workshop of the devil*, he took keen interest and worked hard in finding appropriate jobs and keeping everybody happy and graceful.

These efforts of the good shepherd, inspired and guided by the Spirit of the Lord, bore wonderful fruits. Jobless and aimless youth, loitering about desperately without a particular target in life, went to different towns and cities and found decent jobs according to their abilities and began to earn their daily bread. They became earning members. This gave them a **new identity**. They felt that they, too, could achieve something in their life and could

stand on their own feet. As a result, they were no more the 'parasites' sucking the sap of the 'parental tree' and creating unnecessary tensions, confusions, and quarrels in the family circles and around. On the contrary, they began to save something from their earnings and began to send some amount to their parents and gradually became little 'milking cows' of different families, encouraging and supporting their parents. Thus, the very same sons, and at times even daughters, who were agents of desolation, became sources of consolation and comfort. As a result, alcoholism and vandalism that was previously gaining ground got gradually uprooted and an atmosphere of peace and brotherhood began to prevail in the entire parish.

When these young men and women came home on holidays, their relatives, neighbours, and friends could notice a marked change in them. This change was seen not only in the way they dressed. No, it was something beyond: Their friends were different; their priorities were different; their vision of life was different. Having met people from different corners of the country and beyond, having worked with people of different qualifications, and having lived and worked with people of various levels, no more pessimism prevailed in their thinking, planning, and doing. They were young men and women duly enlightened, enriched, and empowered.

What was the physiognomy of this 'Job-Bureau'? One may really be curious to know how many machines, personnel, and vehicles might have been employed by the pastor so as to duly equip his bureau so that he might offer an efficient service to

the people. The answer is simple. There was no office; nor was there any personnel, machine, vehicle employed by the generous pastor. The beautiful results were the end product of his prayer-life and spirit of hard work. He began everything invoking the Name of the Triune God, the Fountainhead of every grace and blessing, continued everything trusting in His paternal care and protection, and achieved everything with the co-operation of men and women of goodwill. Of course, one cannot forget the role of St. Joseph, the patron of every worker, towards whom he had a special devotion. Following his example, who has taught us the nobility of work, the good pastor worked hard and instilled this evangelical spirit in the hearts of his parishioners and well wishers.

7.4. *“Marriage-Bureau”:*

St. Joseph’s parish had not only a ‘Job-Bureau’ but also a ‘Marriage-Bureau’. How did it operate? It was a bureau without a formal structure. Individuals, highly qualified in mass-media or in building up human relationship, were not employed in this office paying a fat salary. Not even did the parish priest have an adequate room formally furnished with modern gadgets. He was the sole soul who worked strenuously to find right life-partners for the parish youth whom he knew very well. In this context the experience of Mary Piccardo is very enlightening: “I was born in a very poor family. My family background was very poor. At that time Fr. Roche came to our parish. He visited our house and saw our poverty. With his personal initiative he put me in contact with a young man from Mangalore who was working in Saudi. By the

grace of God and the support of Fr. Roche we got married and we live happily with our three children. Gradually we built a new house in Lower Kasarkod and the foundation stone of the new house was blessed by Fr. Roche.... He was a peaceful person. Still now I remember his smiling face and all the good that he has done in my life. I never forget my dear Fr. Roche. He is always in our family prayer".¹⁰³

There was a youth group consisting of more than hundred youngsters (both boys and girls). They were a strong force upon which the pastor could ever rely. They were ready to spend their God-given gifts and talents for the betterment of the parish and the parishioners at the request of their good hearted guide and pastor. Besides, they shared with him their joys and preoccupations in life. Being with them, listening to them, and moving with them he could understand their existential situation. Besides, interacting with the elders, he learnt that, owing to certain age-old traditions or customs, marriages were mostly arranged within the confines of the parish and neighborhood. Time and again, marriage-partners were close relatives.

Knowing very well the negative implications of such practices, the pastor made special efforts to instruct and enlighten his flock rightly and to break such customs with great delicacy. Then, he encouraged and helped the young men of the parish to find suitable and worthy life-partners from distant places in and through his personal contacts. Similarly, he guided and supported marriageable girls to find

¹⁰³ Mrs. Mary Piccardo , *I am Mary Piccardo*, p. 1. Mrs. Mary Piccardo is a parishioners of St. Joseph's Parish, Lower kasarkod. She is very grateful to Fr. Roche for the role that he has played in her life.

young men of quality from distant places. Thus, today we can see a good number of young ladies gracefully given in marriage to the young men of St. Joseph's parish, Lower Kasarkod, who have enriched these families with their rich cultural heritage. So also, there are many young ladies, joyfully given in marriage to young men of distant parishes, who have brought up beautiful families, enriching them with their rich spiritual and cultural patrimony.

7.5. *New Friary:*

During his first term of six years, while trying to build the spiritual temples of the Lord in the hearts of the faithful, the good pastor did succeed in constructing a simple but beautiful and spacious house to the Lord along with a sonorous Italian bell lifted high in the sky. He lived in the same age-old parish house along with the other community members who joined him in the course of time. During his second term of office, while paying due attention to the needs of the parishioners, he felt the necessity of constructing a friary with, of course, the necessary offices for the pastoral needs. As the superior of the fraternity, he realized that he had to create an atmosphere of silence in the house and provide certain privacy to the confrères. Besides, space was needed for the students of philosophy (the capuchin formees doing their graduation as externs in the Dharwad University) who had to stay at St. Joseph's Friary during their BA exams in the months of April and May every year. Taking into account all these factors, a modest friary was built under his leadership and was blessed by his Excellency, William D'Mello, the former Bishop of Karwar, in the year 1991.

CHAPTER 8

HOLY FAMILY CHURCH BRAHMAVAR

Introduction:

As a septuagenarian friar, Fr. Alfred, did not have the physical energy that the loving Father had previously granted him. He was not able to take up major responsibilities any more. Knowing his health condition, the Major Superiors transferred him from St. Joseph's parish, Lower Kasarkod, to the Holy Family Friary, Brahmavar, as the vicar of the fraternity in the year 1994. It was in this context that he had begun his formal pastoral ministry in the year 1956 with a special mandate to be a messenger of union and communion in a context of conflict and confusion. In addition to his humble service to the confrères, he was happy to labour in the vineyard of the Lord as a helper where he had, some thirty eight years ago, begun to sow the seeds of the Word as a pastor. It was a great joy for him to see how the plants/trees had grown up and how they were producing beautiful flowers and tasty fruits.

8.1. Mission of Union and Communion:

Though his flesh was weak, his spirit was strong. So he made himself available to the people of God and began to render his generous service with love and dedication. It was a God-given opportunity for him to renew his old contacts and spend some time with the people whom he had loved, irrespective of caste and creed. He was thrilled to see the infants, baptized

by him, teaching in schools, lecturing in colleges, and working in well known companies and institutes. It was a joy for him to see the children and the youth who had lived with him, prayed with him, ate with him, and toiled with him working in different parts of the world, occupying important posts. It was very comforting for him to see the all-round development that had taken place in the Holy Family Parish, Brahmavar, and in its surroundings.

People, from far and near, approached him in their needs, spiritual as well as temporal. In him, they found a fatherly and motherly figure with profound spiritual depth and vast human experience. The very fact, that they could find someone in whose presence they could openly and freely pour out their wounds and pains, was a special grace for many. For he made himself available to them: He patiently listened to their joys and sorrows and accompanied them on their journey: spiritual as well as temporal. As a result, he could, once again, continue his **mission of reconciliation, union and communion**. His noble presence and fatherly guidance facilitated the mission of reconciliation and peace in the families. His simple and humble personality fostered the spirit of brotherhood and communion among the Christians of different denominations and brought about greater peace and harmony in the parish. This ecumenical spirit prevailing in the Holy Family Parish had its reconciling and healing effect far beyond the confines of the parish.

8.2. Mission of Interreligious Dialogue:

While working for Christian unity and brotherhood-sisterhood, he did not neglect the members of other religions. As he was wont to do all through his

pastoral ministry in different places, he renewed and strengthened his fraternal relationship and built up an interpersonal rapport with them. His spirit of openness and universal brotherhood encouraged the **spirit of interreligious dialogue**, breaking down the walls of prejudices and biases. I believe that the testimony of M. Shivram Shetty, the veteran head master of the Handadi School, will certainly shed light on this point: “Fr. Alfred Roche with his personal efforts made it possible as well as compulsory for every child (rich and poor) to attend the school. Due to caste, creed, and color there was a sickening restlessness among us. In spite of that, Fr. Roche courageously extended his helping hand to everyone without making any discrimination. This compassionate attitude of his was nothing but an expression of his spiritual strength. People loved him so much that, when the transfer order from the Higher Superiors came, requesting him to go to St. Anne’s Parish, Binaga, North Karnataka, they vehemently opposed and pleaded with the Higher Superiors to change the transfer order and keep him at Brahmavar. At this juncture, he himself had to make the people understand that, as a religious he has to obey his Higher Superiors and that he would willingly go to the new place”.¹⁰⁴ This openness towards the members of other religions and brotherly sharing with them gradually prepared the way for conversions to the catholic faith. Thus, though *old*, he became *gold* which he freely *sold* following the evangelical *mould*.

What kind of relationship he had built up with the people, and to what an extent the spirit of

¹⁰⁴ Mr. M. Shivaram Shetty, *Rev. Fr. Alfred Roche of Barkur*, p.1.

ecumenism and interreligious dialogue had borne fruit, could be known from these words taken from the invitation card, sent to the well wishers by the organizing committee on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of his Religious Life, celebrated at Brahmavar on the 30th of April, 1995: "In this public gathering on this auspicious occasion, we have decided to felicitate our dearly beloved Rev. Fr. Alfred Roche who, having trodden the path of Christ, working tirelessly for the well-being of everyone without making any discrimination between caste and creed, rich and poor, is all set to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of his Religious Life, having successfully completed 50 years as a Franciscan Capuchin Friar".¹⁰⁵ These words express the spirit of enthusiasm and gratitude of the people at large.

It was a joyful and graceful celebration to thank the Lord for having given them such a pastor and friend. It was a public celebration with the involvement of all men and women of other religions. Relatives, friends, benefactors, and well-wishers from all the places, where he had rendered his loving and dedicated service, came to join him in rendering thanks to God, the Giver of every gift, for the manifold blessings conferred upon him, and felicitate their guru and spiritual companion who had been with them in their joys and sorrows. All of them considered it their privilege to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of their good shepherd and friend who had done so much for them.

¹⁰⁵ The Organizing Committee was consisting of the members of the Parish Council and representatives from the other religions. It was a combined venture with a twofold purpose: to thank the Good Lord for the manifold blessings conferred upon Fr. Alfred and to express their sentiments of love and gratitude for the praiseworthy service rendered by Fr. Alfred to the good hearted people of Brahmavar.

8.3. *Hymn of Gratitude:*

On this joyful and graceful occasion, casting a glance on his life-journey, Fr. Alfred could realize how good and compassionate the Lord had been to him all through his life, and especially during the course of the 50 years as a son of St. Francis of Assisi, called 'another Christ', walking in the footsteps of **Jesus, the Universal Brother**. It was a special God-given opportunity for him to thank and praise the heavenly Father, the Source of every grace and blessing, following the example of our blessed mother Mary: "My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name" (Lk 1,46-49). These sentiments of gratitude towards the Lord as well as the confrères, parishners, relatives, friends, and well wishers were spontaneously expressed by him in the few words that he spoke on the occasion of this grateful and joyful celebration. Tears of joy and gratitude were flowing from his eyes as he was sharing his heartfelt feelings.

8.4. *Final Call - 'Final Transfer':*

Since June 1996, Fr. Alfred was getting weaker and weaker in health and more than once he was hospitalized for sugar and heart complaints, vocal cords disturbances, urinary problems and continuous hiccups lasting for days. He came and stayed at Kripalya, the then theologate of the Capuchins at Bogadi, Mysore, and he was taking some treatment at the National Institute for Speech and Hearing, which is next to the Mysore University. But, he did not get much relief with that treatment. So, he returned to the Holy Family Friary, Brahmavar. Meanwhile his physical condition was

getting weaker and weaker in spite of different efforts made by the confrères to improve his health. Finally, the crowning 'transfer' came from the all-loving and all-compassionate Father on the 31st of December, 1996 at about 5.30 a.m., telling him: Well done faithful and generous son, come to the embrace of your Father (cf. Mt 25,34). This final call came to him when he was in Fr. Muller's hospital, Mangalore, through a cardiac attack. Though the two novices, who were attending on him, immediately referred the critical situation of Fr. Alfred to the doctors, no human effort could rescue him. Thus, humbly and wholeheartedly, he responded to this call of the heavenly Father saying: "Father, may Your Will be done". Thus, in the words of St. Francis of Assisi, his founder and patron, he embraced 'sister death' peacefully and gracefully.

The unexpected news about the 'final transfer' of the beloved pastor to the embrace of the heavenly Father saddened thousands of people who began to rush to the hospital to have a last glance of their beloved father and friend. As the mortal remains of the departed pastor were placed in the hospital morgue, they could not have a darshan of their father and caretaker. But, some of them could do so on the following day at St. Peter's Church, Barkur, his native parish, where a requiem mass was offered for his eternal repose with a number of priests, concelebrating with a large number of the faithful gathered around the altar to thank the good and merciful Father for giving them such an exemplary and saintly priest. After the requiem mass, the mortal remains of the departed father and pastor were gracefully brought to the Holy Family Church, Brahmavar.

According to the ordinary practice, when a capuchin friar dies, he is interred in our own cemetery. Since Fr. Alfred was a member of the Holy Family Friary, Brahmavar, and had died in Fr. Muller's Hospital Mangalore, he should have been interred in our cemetery at Monte Mariano, Farangipet. But, owing to the deep devotion and extraordinary pressure of the faithful of the Holy Family Parish, through the then superior and parish priest, Fr. Cornelius Monteiro, Rev. Fr. Vincent Furtado, the then provincial minister of the Holy Trinity province (KGM), with the consent of the definitory, made an exception. Thus, the mortal remains of the saintly pastor were laid in the Holy Family Parish Cemetery at Brahmavar on the 1st of January, 1997. The funeral mass was presided over by his Excellency, Aloysius D'Souza, Bishop of Mangalore, along with Rev. Fr. Vincent Furtado, the provincial minister of the Holy Trinity province (KGM), Rev. Frs. Juze D'Souza and Antony D'Souza, coming from Mumbai, and a large number of priests and religious with a galaxy of people, irrespective of caste and creed, coming from different places to pray for their beloved father and pastor, have a final glance of their loving shepherd, and bid good-bye to their respected guru. As an expression of their love and devotion, Fr. Cornelius Monteiro, the superior and members of community with the faithful of the Holy Family Parish, have given to their beloved confrère and pastor the central place in the parish cemetery. It is praiseworthy to note that the confrères and the parishioners have conserved his grave with great care and decorum.

CONCLUSION

We are living in a fast developing and changing world. The dynamism of change and novelty play such an important role in one's day-to-day life that there are people in our society who want to have a change not only in their food habits but also in their lifestyle: They want to have the latest style in dressing; they want to have the fastest cars and helicopters for travelling; they want to have the costliest electric and electronic gadgets for communication; and they want to have the latest cosmetics for altering their color, shape and form.

In such a sophisticated and fanciful cultural context, can the life-pattern and value-system of a person like Fr. Alfred Roche have any significance, any relevance? Can we present him as an 'enriching and empowering model', knowing fully well that different models (heroes and heroines) play an important role in the daily life of millions around the world? Of course, the answer depends upon one's convictions and priorities in life. But, by the grace of God, one can say that the number of such ego-centered and crazy people belonging to the above mentioned categories is low. There are very many evangelical-minded and God-centered people in the world and especially in our country. Therefore, one can say that the rich heritage that Fr. Alfred Roche has left

behind, through his teaching as well as his lifestyle, is relevant to our day and has an important role to play in the life of the simple, unsophisticated, and God-fearing millions. For, he was a gospel-minded and God-centered capuchin friar and pastor.

Referring to his disciples, Jesus says: “You are the salt of the earth” (Mt 5,13). Fr. Alfred really became the salt of the earth wherever he was sent. As we all know, salt has some important characteristics: it preserves things from getting decomposed or putrefied; it purifies things that are polluted, and adds taste to things/food. Like salt wherever he went, the prayerful presence and experience-bound teaching of Fr. Alfred preserved/safeguarded people from harmful companies and bad habits that degrade and corrode the human personality. His constant service in and through the sacrament of reconciliation and spiritual accompaniment facilitated the people to be healed of their internal tensions/ruptures and external conflicts. His informal, but timely, family visits helped to build up broken/wounded interpersonal relationships and added taste to family life.

Further, Jesus says: “You are the light of the world” (Mt 5,14). In fact, Fr. Alfred was a little lamp that shone brightly wherever he went because, like the wise virgins, he was always attentive to add oil to the lamp. He was a torch bearer, and with this light he could dispel the darkness of ignorance and sin and kindle little lamps of grace and truth in the hearts of the faithful and teach them how to refill these lamps with new oil. Thus, like

the Samaritan woman, the faithful, enlightened and empowered by him, could, in turn, enkindle the lamps of others and dispel the darkness of sin and evil from their hearts (cf. Jn 4,39-42; Acts 26,15-18).

In addition to this, with his holistic outlook in life, he encouraged the children in their studies and supported the youth to find decent jobs through friends and acquaintances. In this way, he paved the path for the steady growth and progress of many so that they could gradually stand on their feet. Further, he promoted vocations for priesthood and consecrated life. Today, we are living in a world of manifold crises: family crisis, spiritual crisis, economic crisis, ecological crisis and so on. The concrete methods employed by Fr. Alfred Roche in his pastoral ministry: faith formation, education, vocation promotion, family visits, 'shanthi dal' 'job-bureau', 'marriage-bureau' and the like, are they not existential and adequate? Have they not got something vital to teach us, the modern educators, formators, and pastors? Without doubt, they are quite modern and absolutely adequate. Although his formation was pre-Vatican, nevertheless in his thinking, planning, and doing he was always post-Vatican and quite modern. He was not a closed book. He was always ready to learn. In silent prayer, he listened to the Lord, the Source of all inspiration and guidance; in consultation and dialogue, he listened to one another and learnt from their wisdom. That was the secret of his dynamism and success.

The life-pattern and the pedagogy employed by Fr.

Alfred have something to teach the people of every age and culture because they are evangelical. Even the modern clergy and religious, who are often more attuned to a more consumerist and comfortable life, could imbibe something vital from the lifestyle and missionary endeavors of this man of God. Of course, there may be some who may label him as an outdated old man. But, without doubt, there are very many who are duly touched by the tenor of his prayerful life and dedicated apostolate. They draw inspiration from the life-witness and the committed apostolate of this simple and humble son of the poverello of Assisi. The zeal of this dedicated friar makes them ask: As an ordained priest and/or consecrated religious where am I? What place do I give to the Lord in my day-to-day life? What is the spirit of sacrifice and self-discipline in my life? What is my identity? Do I really love the poor and the marginalized? Do I try to come to their rescue or am I too much under the sway of the mundane philosophy of individualism, consumerism and hedonism (cf. VC 88-92)? Thus, one can firmly say that the life-pattern, teaching, and the apostolic zeal of this God-centered and service-minded pastor can certainly become stepping stones for the spiritual growth and fraternal service of the clergy, religious, and the people of God at large.

Fr. Alfred said “God Bless” to us as he entered into the New Life. We firmly believe that the **tomb** is not the end but the **womb** of eternal life. It is the beginning of the **new journey** to the embrace of the loving and forgiving Father in heaven. While saying good-bye to us

as a faithful son of St. Francis of Assisi, the universal brother, he has left a beautiful message to one and all: **Let us learn to grow in our intimacy with the Lord. It will foster our love for the Church and the entire creation with a preferential option for the *anawim*.** May he, who is in the assembly of the blessed, intercede for us so that we, too, may grow in the same spirit of love, service, and communion.

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A PRAYER OF PETITION

All-loving and all-compassionate Father, You conferred the grace of Consecrated Life and of Priestly Ministry on your servant, Fr. Alfred Roche, in the Franciscan Capuchin Family. As a faithful pastor he spent his time and energy in preaching Your Word with zeal and in administering the sacraments with devotion. Many drew inspiration from his simple life-style and dedicated service. People, irrespective of caste and creed, approached him in their material needs, psychological distress and spiritual poverty and through his fatherly love and care received help in their material needs, solace in their psychological distress and enrichment in their spiritual poverty.

All-loving Father we firmly believe that Fr. Alfred, commonly known “amcho padriab” (our father) is with You in the assembly of the saints. Many of us did have him as our spiritual guide; others have been touched by his preaching and life-pattern. Grant us the grace to have him as our intercessor so that we may be able to love You more intensely and serve our brothers and sisters more dearly. We make this our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory...