CHAPTER THREE

GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

From a small beginning at Kohima and Lakhuti in Wokha district in the early part of 1950 the Church began her journey to other parts of the state. But this journey was not without hurdles and often she met with successes and failures. Lack of personnel and finance, inaccessibility to the villages, poor transportation and communication, insufficient knowledge of the customs and culture of the people, absence of proper lingua-franca, hostility and persecution from the Baptists, indifferent attitude of the people, vast area etc are some of the hurdles to be mentioned. While God’s providence, love for the mission and people, people’s desire for good education, able leadership of Bishops, indomitable spirit of the missionaries and Catholics, and total support from few bureaucrats, village elders, and people helped the Church keep growing. In forty years’ time, against all odds the Church was able to get rooted in the soil here.

3.1 GROWTH OF THE CHURCH IN LOTHA AREA

From the starting at Lakhuti the church began to reach out to its neighbouring villages in Lotha area. Even from the very beginning of the church, many people in the villages voluntarily expressed their desire to embrace the new faith. The community of Sunglup was started with just two families in 1953. The pagans, however, decided not to extend any help when the small community decided to build a church, as a result the Catholics of Lakhuti came to help. On the day of the blessing of the church the elderly people of the village (Sunglup) did not allow it to be blessed as according to the pagan tradition that year was the year of building the ‘morung.’ But the Catholics, however, began to use it from that day. Later on some elders of the village informed the
Government that they would not allow the Catholic Church to be in the village and if anyone was found practicing they would be expelled. To strengthen their stand they approached Nchemo Kinghen, Wokha Bench Court Chairman who told, if they expelled them from the village for accepting the Catholic faith then the village was responsible to build the latter’s houses and shift their belongings wherever they went (Yanthan, 2003). With this ruling things got settled down and no more harassment was reported.

3.1.1 APPOINTMENT OF FR. LARREA TO THE LOTHA MISSION

In the beginning Bishop Marengo, the new Bishop of Dibrugarh cared for the Lotha Nagas personally, since he had no personnel to spare. Mattappally (2007) wrote, “to this end, he studied the Lotha dialect and got the first catechism, prayer books and hymn books ready” (p. 252). It was indeed a great need to appoint a full time priest for the promising Lotha mission. In December 1953 Fr. Larrea, fondly called by the Lotha Catholics as ‘Our Lotha Father,’ joined the diocese of Dibrugarh, and was put in charge of the Lotha area. He worked for the Lothas till 1965. Larrea (2005) wrote, “for two long years, 1956 and 1957, I could not obtain permit to visit Lotha area until March, 1958. So the only way to instruct you in the Catholic Faith was the leaflet NTSA” (p. 5). One of his successful missionary efforts was the Naga School at Golaghat for the Lotha children which started on 15 February 1958 with 17 boys. From 1953 onwards church had been sending Lotha children (boys and girls) to different schools situated at Dibrugarh, Tezpur, Nahargatia and Shillong. And in 1958 he brought these children back to school at Golaghat. This school was shifted to Wokha in August 1965. A number of Lotha girls too had been sent to Golaghat from time to time and were residing with sisters to have training in home science along with catechesis.

In 1955 a small community at Mekokla was started at the initiative of the Catholics of Lakhuti village and they were baptized by Fr. Larrea. Shanpano Humtsoe and Yantsao Ynthan from Lakhuti village used to visit Akuk village regularly to teach
Catholic faith to the people. Also from 1951 to 1954 some people from Akuk also used to visit priests at Golaghat and Catholic families of Lakhuti. Thus the Catholic Church was established in the village in the year 1955 by Fr. Larrea.

Fr. Larrea had often heard from Peter Yanthan his first catechist in Lakhuti about Lungsa village, where some people had expressed their desire to become Catholics. But it took him another long six years to reach the place as he had been denied visa by the government. After 12 hours of walk when he reached Lungsa he was not welcomed, however, he and his team were lodged at the house of one Nyamo, who was a police and a citizen of Dimapur. He then visited some sick and went back to Wokha. On 24 January 1963, Fr. Larrea made his second visit to Lungsa. In the chronicle of Catholic Mission Golaghat 1954-1965, Fr. Larrea (1963) commented, “people are still sympathetic. It is a pity no more headway has been made so far. A precious time has been lost in this village still predominantly pagan”. It was during this visit that he visited a sick child and quietly baptized him by pronouncing the words, ‘I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (Larrea, 1988, p. 5). The baby died soon after that. He was the first person in Lungsa to be baptized. Fr. O’Hara’s first visit to Lungsa was in the end of 1963. Eventhough three families wanted to embrace Catholic faith, at the end one Mothungo’s family could become on 1 January 1964. In 1966 four more families joined.

While on their way to Golaghat the three pioneers of Lakhuti used to go through Yimbang and stay with their relatives and in the process they heard about Catholic faith. There was one Charles Stonor (C. R. Stonor) a Catholic European; a Surveyor in the Naga Hills during the British period who had good acquaintance with Yimbang village. When he and his servant, Oremo Kikon from Yimbang were in Bombay before the Second World War, used to attend Holy Mass. We read in the chronicle of ‘Catholic Mission Golaghat 1954-1965’, Stonor used to tell Oremo, “the day in which the Catholic
Father goes to your village you must become a Catholic.” Oremo never forgot the advice, and he said this story on 22 October 1954 the day he was baptized (Y. Vincent, personal communication, May 5, 2012). One day Mr. Mantsuo Yanthan, church secretary of the Baptist Church, Yimbang, called Phyuchümo Peter from Lakhuti to bless his house. So he received Catholic faith on 26 December 1953. On 31 December he was followed by three more families. Bishop Marengo and Fr. Larrea visited Yimbang on 31 March 1954 and baptized six families on 1 April 1954.

On his first visit to Pangti in 1955 Fr. Larrea was vehemently opposed by some leaders of the Baptist Church. He slept in the house of a gaonboora, Nyansao Ngullie and celebrated Mass at three o’clock in the morning before anyone got up. The next morning, Mr. Mensemo Kikon, an elderly man invited him to his house. He was received into the church on 15 May 1957. A few families followed him and they formed a community with the help of people of Lakhuti.

Another village under Wokha district to receive Catholic faith was Riphyim. On 22 January 1960 Fr. Larrea went to Riphyim and preached about Catholic faith to the people gathered but his preaching fell into deaf ears as nobody believed him as they had never before heard about Catholic faith. On 24 evening he went down to Yikhum and there he stopped for a while in a friendly house but the Protestants sent him a memorandum stating that in that village there was no place for Catholics. It is mentioned in the chronicle of Catholic Mission Golaghat 1954-1965 that after he returned to Ripphyim a non-Christian approached him and said, “there is hope for you in this village.” He came back to the village once again in April 1961 to preach and found people were more welcoming than the previous visit. Later on to his third visit to this village he baptized the first person in Riphyim, Mr. Yanchamo’s mother Nanshumi, who was sick and asked for prayers and baptism. On 2 April 1962 four people, Yanchamo Abraham Humtsoe, Ngheo Robert Patton, Jobhao Patton and Tsatemo Peter Patton received
Catholic faith (Humtsoe, 1986). As Catholics they were denied the right to cultivate their fields.

3.1.2 RECEPTION OF NTHEO YANTHAN INTO THE CHURCH

Mr. Ntheo Yanthan, the pastor of Lakhuti Baptist Church for two years from 1950-51 used to visit pagan families speaking about Christianity and as a result of his strenuous effort 27 pagan families became Christians. Many pagans did not want to become Christians as Baptist Church forbade them from drinking rice beer. In the second year, Ntheo, however, resigned as pastor on his own. He said, “I had no qualified degrees to be a pastor and also my desire to bring more people to God could not be fulfilled as the pagans were not willing to get converted to Baptist religion” (N. Louis, personal communication, May 3, 2012). Meanwhile he decided to change his denomination, as he thought more people (pagans) would follow Christ as Catholic Church had no aversion to rice beer. In the year 1953 he met Bishop Marengo and expressed his desire to be a Catholic. The Bishop sent him to Dibrugarh for Catechist training and in 1954 he was baptized and in the year 1955 he was appointed the catechist. He was accused as a ‘deserter’ by the Baptists. He encouraged Lotha children to avail the education imparted at Golaghat, which he said was same as in foreign countries and as a result many went to study there (N. Louis, personal communication, January 10, 2007). The high turnout of people to become Catholics disturbed the Protestants. The protestant pastor of Lakhuti had, therefore, written a letter to Bishop and Fr. Larrea threatening to complaint to the Government against the Catholics. The chronicle of ‘Catholic Mission Golaghat 1954-1965’ further informs that Father had prepared a series of a cyclostyled newspaper, “NTSA”(Truth) to meet Protestant objections, explain Catholic religion, and counteract the action of a number of Protestant pamphlets spread in the area by American Baptists. This was written to help the Catholics as a defense in case they were caught unaware and also to attract many Protestants still in good faith.
3.1.3 WOKHA

Mr. Nchemo Kinghen, the Political Assistant to the Deputy Commissioner and the authority among the Lothas was sympathetic to the Catholic cause. He insisted that priests should move to Wokha as early as possible as he saw future prospects for the rest of the Lotha range and also the possibility to evangelize the Semas and the Rengmas. The chronicle of Catholic Mission, Golaghat 1954-1965 stated, “round and about Wokha there are a number of villages, non-Christian in the majority, less sophisticated than those of the middle and lower ranges, and with less protestant influence,…a station in the Upper Range would open our work to the Semas and Rengmas close by.”

Fr. Larrea had been insisting with his superiors for years that an Indian priest be put in charge of the mission. It did not sound well to keep a foreigner there any longer and it was absolutely essential for the proper running of the mission that a priest free to visit the communities may be appointed. Fr. Larrea applied for Indian nationality since 1954 but denied. After the Naga agitation began it became all the more difficult to get permit to visit the Hills. For the whole of 1959 he could not visit the communities. In fact some new converts had already returned as there was a pastoral negligence and there was a fear more could follow the suit. Finally the request was felt as an urgent need and so in 1959 Bishop Marengo sent Fr. Roland O’Hara to join the Lotha mission at Golaghat. With his arrival frequent visits to the villages became possible. He realized occasional visits from Golaghat would not lead to a fruitful ministry in the hills. Though the Naga School at Golaghat catered exclusively to the Lotha boys, it was realized that no lasting work could be done without a residence in the hills. As the number of Catholics as well as the students at Golaghat increased, the urgent need to build a residence for the priests and to shift the Naga School to the hills was felt (Mattappally, 2007). After the Baptist foreign missionaries had left Wokha the people approached Fr. Larrea with a request to open a school in Wokha in 1962 (O’Hara, 1990). In January 1963 another delegation met
Fr. Larrea and they discussed about the possibilities for opening a school and for which he laid down certain conditions which they agreed. And so on 5 December 1963 Bishop and Fr. Larrea had a meeting in Woka and once again the request to shift the school from Golaghat to Wokha was given a serious thought.

In the meantime many allegations had been leveled against the Catholic Church particularly in the area of marriage wherein one Etssonyimo Kikon, Commissioner, Lotha Province, Federal Government of Nagaland, wrote a complaint letter addressed to Fr. Larrea on 4 January 1964 that Roman Catholic religion was unwelcome religion in Nagaland, because it challenged and did not respect the age old customs and traditions of the Nagas particularly of marriage (Kikon, 1964). In a written reply, Fr. Larrea clarified the position of the Church regarding marriage stating the Catholic Church had never violated any rule but only followed the church law to keep up the sanctity of the marriage.

As the Church was reflecting on the idea of establishing a centre at Wokha and shifting the school from Golaghat, Baptists came into the scene with strong opposition. They tried all possible means including the might of the underground to dissuade the people from selling land to the ‘Romans.’ Fr. O’Hara came to Wokha in 1964 to stay. He, however, managed to get land, by end of 1964 at an exorbitant rate as people were anti-Catholic, perhaps they thought if the land price was fixed at a higher rate the Church would not buy. O’ Hara (1990) wrote, “in fact, the story that spread was that, the Romans have come to disturb the peace of Wokha” (p. 17). There were no catholics of Wokha origin at that time but a few Catholics of floating nature were present (R. O’Hara, personal communication, December 29, 2008).
3.1.4 NEW BISHOP AND SHIFTING OF THE SCHOOL

In the meantime there was a change of guard in the Diocese; Bishop Marengo was transferred to the new Diocese of Tezpur and in his place was appointed Bishop Hubert D’Rosario. He visited Golaghat in February 1965 and decided to open a Catechist Centre at Dibrugarh and to shift the Lotha mission from Golaghat to Wokha. On 10 April the work of the school began in the midst of strong protest, both from Baptist leaders and underground. The landowners were told to rescind the deal or else face consequences. No local support came for the construction of the school building except the help of few Catholics staying at Wokha. Hence Fr. O’Hara and a few masons and labourers from the Khasi Hills did the construction. In two months’ time the first building took shape which could house the primary school, church and a hall which also served as the dormitory. On 1 September 1965 the first batch of 27 Lotha students arrived from Golaghat and started the Don Bosco School at the present campus. Lotha was the medium and only boys were admitted. On 8 September 1965 the parish of Wokha was officially erected comprising of the districts of Wokha, Mokokchung and Tuensang and Fr. O’Hara was appointed the parish priest and Fr. T. J. Chacko as assistant (Mattappally, 2007). In 1966 the Lotha medium was changed into English medium and began to admit girls too in the school. Fr. O’Hara’s ministry was cut short due to some serious misunderstanding he had with Fr. Larrea and Bishop Hubert. He favoured English as the medium in the school while Fr. Larrea ‘Lotha’. Secondly, Bishop Hubert strongly opposed his healing ministry to the sick particularly women at child birth (R. O’Hara, personal communication, December 27, 2008). In short Fr. O’Hara left priesthood at the end of 1968 and was replaced by Fr. Paul Bernick. Fresh life was poured in with the coming of the Daughters of St. Ursula from Ranchi in January 1969. The sisters started visiting villages, giving medicines and teaching catechism (“St. Paul’s Wokha”, 1999). In the later years communities were established at Bhandari Village, Khomchoyan, Lio-Longidang, Lio
Wokha, Longayim, Merapani, Pantong, yamhon, Yampha, Yanlum and Yimpang, Lotsu, Pynagsa villages.

3.2 GROWTH OF THE CHURCH IN ANGAMI AREAS

As the church was growing in Lotha areas many villages in Angami area requested Fr. Marocchino to preach and teach Catholic faith to them. After the Sisters had left the hospital Fr. Marocchino had asked for two boys to stay with him in the hospital in 1955. While Zhazolie and Zedeilie of Nerhema village stayed with him they also learnt about Catholic Church. During vacation they shared their knowledge about church and some people showed interest in it. For two years they remained as catechumens. Then the fight between the Naga army and the Indian army started on the hills of Chiethou on 14 March 1956. This resulted in villagers finding shelter in the forest. Their agony lasted for eight months and when they returned to the village they built a church. On 9 March 1959, Fr. Marocchino baptized six people. The reason for members joining the church is given by Vattoth (2010) in these words, “among the pagans all are not allowed to sow seeds but only an appointed person. This delays cultivation. With the Catholics, all began to sow and cultivate and thus speeded up the process. Seeing this advantage, many pagans became catechumens” (p. 112).

Between the years 1959-1960, Mr. Kramhieo and Mr. Lhouphfelie of Zhadima Village, formerly known as Keruma Village, had the privilege of meeting Fr. Marocchino from whom they came to know of Catholic Church, at Christ King Church Kohima. When the Baptists and pagans came to know of the plan to establish Catholic Church in the village they opposed. However, Fr. Marocchino sent Vilalie Victor from Kohima village to teach them and on 30 October 1960 Fr. Marocchino baptized seven of them of which except one, Neile-ü Nelly, the rest left the Church after some time (“Catholic kehou dze”, 2010). After sometime, around 30 of them joined the Church. Since it was a strong pagan village, the Catholics had to go out of the village and start a
new village and church. The desire of Khrielhoulie Christopher to establish a Catholic school in his village Chichema led to the establishment of Catholic Church there. Through Mr. Thakrie the church was established in Merema in 1966.

Khonoma, the first green village of Nagaland and a historical place is dearly associated with late A. Z. Phizo, the father of Naga nationalism. Pelie Elias Chase from the village was fortunate to have had an acquaintance with the first missionaries of the church at Naga Hospital, the five Spanish sisters-Guadalupe Velasco Galos, Margerita Cifre Cerda, Pilar Gonsalez, Doleres Borga and Albino Bronte; and Mgr. Emmanuel Bars and Fr. Marocchino. After his baptism in January 1955 two more joined the church. From the year 1955 to 1965 a good number of people embraced Catholicism. In 1965 Fr. Felix started a school to impart good education to the people of the area (Alangimattathil, 1977).

In Rukhroma Catholic faith reached in the year 1965 with the baptism of Mr. Lhoupfelie Linus. The first missionary to visit Jotsoma was Fr. Bernick along with some people in 1967. After a number of days of instruction Mr. Vitsútha Joseph and Mr. Guovi embraced Catholic faith. Their desire to open a school was thwarted by the learned people of the village as they had been instigated by the Baptist Church. Even though the church could not establish a school at that time the church continued to grow in strength and in number with the help of touring catechists Mr. Neichüwhelhou and Thekrunei Edward (Rino, 1992). Zubza was the next village to hear about the Catholic Church. Mr. Guovi of Jotsoma preached to some of his friends and they became Catholics in 1969. Mezoma, a few kilometers away from Khonoma received Catholic faith in the year 1975.

Mr. Chavi Xavier of Phesama village had the privilege of knowing Catholic faith from Mr. Neizo Louis and Mr. Kevipralie Paulus of Kohima village. On 24 December 1959 he and his wife were baptized at Christ King Church, Kohima village by Fr.
Marocchino. They were followed by a few more people in the following year. In 1961 a small church was built and Fr. Marocchino blessed it and named it as ‘Sacred Heart Church.’ Phesama village thus became the first blessed village in the Southern Angami region to have received the Catholic faith (Xavier, 2009).

Mrs. Vicha-ü and her children from Phesama brought faith to Viswema village when they moved in there. They were assisted by Mr. Chavi and Fr. Felix. The Catholic community of Kigwema too owes its indebtedness to catechist of Jakhama village who played a key role. Mr. Visazo Paul and Thino were the first people to get baptized in Kigwema in 1965 through the instrumentality of Mr. Chavi Xavier and Kehozecha Zacharia of Jakhama.

3.3 KOHIMA

It was the desire of the Catholic community of Kohima village to have a permanent site for the establishment of the mission. Fr. Marocchino paid for five acres of land in 1959. As the community began the work, there were objections raised against the construction by some people saying Catholic Church could not own land in the village. They accused the Catholics of buying land with Roman money. So it was decided to settle the case in the Panchayat Court. The Court declared its verdict in favour of the Catholics as the case was heard by members who were mostly pagans who judged it impartially. However, the Catholics could not build the Church as the said land and the surrounding area were requisitioned by the Deputy Commissioner for the directorate of School Education. In the meantime some of the Baptist leaders sought the help of the underground army to murder Kevipralie Paulus Belho, Neizo Louis Solo and Suosahie Philip Dzuwichu and also accused them as traitors and of buying Naga land for Rome (Vattoth, 2010). Finally in their search for a new plot of land they managed to acquire it in P. Khel of Kohima village, where the present Christ King Parish stands. In the year
1963 Fr. Marocchino was transferred, for the Government was not willing to renew the permit of the foreign missionaries.

At the departure of Fr. Marocchino, Fr. Paul Bernick from South India, an Indian citizen by registration was appointed as his successor on 4 January 1964. As he could not reach in time Fr. Joseph Felix was asked to look after the Kohima mission. For some time he stayed in the rented residence where Fr. Marocchino stayed at Pezilietsie, Kohima. It was during Fr. Bernick’s time the Church spread to Jotsoma, Rukhroma, Phesama, Kigwema, Zubza, Zhamai, etc villages. Fr. Felix was going around preaching and at the same time opening schools in many places. His argument was that only through English education church could win over the hearts of the people and respect from the Baptists. On the occasion of Christmas he made a big star made of red clothes and placed it on top of the church for everybody to see. But Fr. Bernick did not like it because he was an anti communist (J. Felix, personal communication, December 28, 2008).

While Fr. Marocchino was staying at Mr. Samuel Mezhür’s quarter in the War Cemetery they started the Kohima English School in the hope that one day sisters would take over the school and run it. In fact when the sisters of the congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters) came on 14 May 1964 they started teaching there, but gave up the idea of taking charge of the school, as the place was not sufficient and suitable for them. So they started the Little Flower School in 1965 in the present location.

The presence of the young Catholic Church in Nagaland was felt at the International Eucharistic Congress at Bombay at the end of the year 1964 when 25 Angami delegates of Nagaland participated in it. In February 1969 the Bethany Sisters took the initiative to establish the Christ King School. When Fr. Bernick was transferred to Manipur in July 1969, Fr. Ittiyachen Manjil was appointed parish priest. He started the
Don Bosco School in 1971 with class V upwards. Students who completed class IV at Christ King School were absorbed by Don Bosco School. Later on both the schools became independent. In the year 1972, the Medial mission Sisters arrived in the parish and established their Medical Unit in the Child and Maternity Centre at L. Khel, Kohima Village (Suosahie, 2002).

3.4 BEGINNING OF THE MISSION TO THE CHAKHESANGS

The Chakhesangs are a major tribe in Nagaland and the Catholic Church’s association began with them in the latter part of 1960. The first village in Phek district, inhabited mainly by the Chakhesang and Pochuri tribes to have contact with the Catholic Church was Zhamai village. The original name of Zhamai is known as ‘Zevame’ meaning people of the ‘enchanted lake’ (Dukru, 1993, p. 1). The preaching of the Catholic faith and the subsequent consequences faced by the Catholics of this village could be compared to that of the early Christians. The people were open to the Catholic faith because of the influence came from Mao area in Manipur, where a large community was established by Fr. Peter Bianchi (Syiemlieh, 1990). On 18 October 1964 a group of traders namely Akha, Tho-o, Theba and Thezü of Zhamai village were told about Catholic faith by Mr. Panü of Liyai village under Mao centre on their way to Imphal. They then approached Fr. Bernick, at Christ the King, Kohima, who sent a group of youngsters under the leadership of Mr. Suosahie Philip to preach Catholic faith. Fr. Bernick baptized the first 11 members on 20 March 1966, the day the church was blessed. Soon there began an unleashing of accusations against the Catholic community and they were branded as ‘anti Christ.’ The chorus of accusations was supported by the Naga army which arrested Mr. Akha, the pioneer of Catholic faith on 16 December 1966 and took him to Khomi village, the Company Headquarter of the Naga army, where he was placed in a dungeon. He returned on the Christmas day of 1966, giving up his faith
because he was threatened that he and his family would lose their lives if they did not go back to their original faith.

On 18 April 1967 K. Yevecho Nenuotso, Razou Peyu, Phek, Federal Government of Nagaland, sent a letter to the leaders at Kohima in reply to the letter sent to him in respect of Mr. Akha who was taken into custody for becoming a Catholic. Nenuots (1967) wrote, “so we, the Chakhesang people have determined to abide by the resolution of the Federal Government and no other religion will be allowed to be mixed with our religion; we ask you to keep this in mind” (p. 1). He further said that all the land was grouped into a state and the state was divided into districts and now the Catholics, without consulting him started a new religion that would create trouble in the land. Fr. Bernick kept up his visits to this village despite various threats from the Baptist Church and the undergrounds. During this time the Baptists published the “Citizens’ Voice, The Voice of Nagaland Baptist Churches,” accusing the Roman Catholic Church of “naked intrusion” into Nagaland thereby creating serious tensions (Longri, July 5, 1967). The Catholic Church immediately responded through her reply entitled, “An Echo” to “The Voice of the Naga Baptist Churches” (Sousahie, July 11, 1967). In this they refuted the allegations made against them. Again on 23 July 1967 the Nagaland Baptist Churches Council (NBCC) brought out another leaflet entitled “Roman Pope or Christ”?

The underground Naga Army at this juncture joined hands with the anti-Catholics and abducted five Catholics namely Sasü Dukru, Mekho Nukhu, Nasü Dukru, Thekhru Dukru and Tho-o Dome from Zhamai on 19 July 1967 and lodged into a dungeon where they were fed with a single meal a day (Dukru, 1993). About the unreasonable behaviour of the outlawed people Coelho (1984) wrote, “the majority of the outlawed Naga Army were Baptists and the Yehzobo (constitution) of the Naga Federal Government which proclaimed ‘Nagaland for Christ’ stated that in Nagaland only Baptist Christianity and the Naga religion but no other would hold a monopoly over the Naga people” (p. 38).
After 83 days of detention which consisted of two terms they were released. While in detention they had to bear up with mental and physical torture. Bishop Hubert Rosario visited them, consoled them and as a reward for their faithfulness built a church in 1970.

When they were released they were told to report on 29 November 1967, but got delayed owing to the visit of the Bishop. This time together with the earlier five people two more namely, Khazi Dukru (Head *Gaonbura*) and Limo Dukru were taken as captives to the camp. Nasü Dukru, one of the survivors of the imprisonment, said that on reaching the place they were thrown into the dungeon and as usual fed them with meager food. They were made to carry wooden benches from Khomi to Sakraba village as a punishment (D. Nasü, personal communication, June 7, 2012). Later on Mr. Suosahie Philip along with Major Neitsülie, a Federal representative to the Peace Mission met Mr. Zasheyi, President, Federal Government of Nagaland and apprised him of the situation of the Catholics under custody. The latter replied saying involvement in religious affairs of the people was not a matter of concern of the Federal Government. As a consequence of their meeting, the arrested Catholics were released on 7 January 1968. In all they were imprisoned for 120 days.

The Catholic community’s woes did not end there. They were forbidden from harvesting crops from their fields, beaten up with wooden poles, made to stand naked with hands and legs tied and exposed to inclement weather and attack of the flies, and so on. Once two women, Lhouzeü Lucy and Pfulhouzeü Lucy from Kohima village, came to teach Catholic faith were forced to leave at midnight as several pleas made to let them leave next morning fell on deaf ears. All these cruel activities were carried out by Nühū and Yevecho of Khomi village, the then Captain and Rayopezu of the Naga army respectively (Dukru, 1993). The firm faith in the Catholic Church and extraordinary courage displayed during the persecution, inspired many neighbouring villages like Zelome, Chobama, Chizami and Thenyizumi to come forward to accept Catholic faith.
The next village to accept Catholic faith was Zelome village. The name ‘Zelome’ was originated from the word ‘Ze’ means ‘lake’, ‘Lo’ means ‘on the side of’ and ‘Me’ means ‘the people.’ Thus, ‘Zelome’ means ‘the people who settled on the side of the lake’ (Joseph, 1996). Having heard of new faith in Zhamai Mr. Potokho Philip and Mr. Lhinizo of Zelome went to Kohima and met Fr. Bernick in 1966 (M. Mosonyi, personal communication, June 7, 2012). The same year Mr. Potokho and his family received baptism and thus established the Catholic Church at Zelome. Soon the first family was joined by five more families. On 29 November 1967, Fr. Bernick baptized 19 members and thus the church was officially established. The underground forbade them from harvesting their crops. Unable to bear humiliation and harassment many returned to their earlier faith.

3.5 CHURCH IN THE LATE 1960s

In the late 1960s Catholic Church began her mission among the Changs, Rengmas; Semas in Kohima District and in Dimapur.

3.5.1 TUENSANG AND NEIGHBOURING VILLAGES

Catholic Church in Tuensang is the ‘Mother Church’ of many communities in the region like Kiphire, Tobu, Longleng, and many villages. St. John’s School was first opened in 1965 by Mr. L. J. Graves under the direction of Fr. J. Felix. But it was handed over to the Bishop in 1967. He appointed Fr. Mani as in charge of the new mission and sought the goodwill and service of the Adoration Sisters.

Akum Imlong, the then minister who was the Tuensang Affair Minister, took the initiative to invite Fathers and Sisters and he expressed his desire to Fr. Mathew Uzhunalil. Fr. Mathew informed Bishop who sent him to Kerala to approach the Adoration congregation (Blessilia, 1992). On 28 February 1967, Fr. P. C. Mani with a group of five Adoration Sisters: Sr. Epephrasia, Sr. Rose Tresa, Sr. Blessilia, Sr. Cicily
Kattakayam and Sr. Lilly Therese came to Tuensang and took charge of the mission and St. John’s School (Blessilia, 1992). The Baptists were not too happy about establishment of a Roman Catholic institution in Tuensang and were trying to destabilize it. The firm decision was, let no one sell land for a permanent establishment. So fear had already gripped the minds of the people about the arrival of the ‘Romans.’ Fr. Mani, however, with his gentle ways and approach and with the goodwill of many people, especially the civil authority, managed to soften the hardened hearts and won over them. A few bureaucrats of Tuensang district namely Mr. Aliba Imti, Mr. Lanu Toshi, Mr. N. I. Jamir IAS, and R. L. Jamir; the army, the civil officials and a host of public leaders including GBs and DBs extended all possible help to the mission. The Town Club was given to run the school in. There were about 130 students from Nursery to Class V when the church took over the school. This school, since it was doing well, made church’s presence a necessity in Tuensang. One day on his return from Dibrugarh to Tuensang Fr. Mani noticed that no children went to him and when he called them they ran away. One boy, however, said to him that many leaders from the Baptist church had visited all the houses and advised the parents not to send their children to catholic school. Fr. Mani was told by some friends, including Mr. Chubalan Kinghen, circular officer, that there were moves to send the Catholic Missionary and ‘his women’ (sisters) away from Tuensang (Parenkulangara, personal communication, November 3, 2007). Then and there he decided to collect youngsters from different tribes of Tuensang district and train them as catechists, although they were not Catholics. So he sent twelve of them to the Catechist Training Center at Dibrugarh. Parenkulangara (1999) wrote,

This act of mine was pointed as ‘high handednesses’ on my part by one of the officers, Mr. Lanu Toshi, in front of the Minister for Tuensang affairs. I was asked to bring the students back. However, our D. C. Mr. N. I. Jamir had the good sense to tell me that it was better that those
students remain on in Dibrugarh even during holidays- of course for other reasons (p. 37).

On 13 April 1968 during the Easter vigil baptism was administered to Zamila and her two sisters and two brothers, who are sons and daughters of the place. Despite all the efforts by the fathers and sisters offering free medical aid and educational facilities, Tuensang village, with a population of over 4000, has remained indifferent if not openly hostile to the Catholic Church and its message (Mannookhuzhy, 1987). In February 1973, the Jesuit pioneer, Fr. Edwin Goveas died of diabetes in Tuensang, the first priest to die in Nagaland. After Mr. Peter Chingmak, a Baptist, became a Catholic he was threatened by the Baptist church either to give up his faith or he would be stripped off his Chang citizenship and lose his government job. He was cursed at by some people for his decision, and soon his wife left him (P. Chingmak, personal communication, January 4, 2007). Another person who had to pay heavily for his faith was C. Simon from Chakba village under Mokokchung district. He was threatened to give up faith and asked to pay a heavy fine (C. Simon, personal communication, January 4, 2007).

In the initial stage attempts were made to contact villages to speak about Catholic faith and education. The first evangelization tour of Noklak area began on 2 January, 1969 by Fr. Felix and Fr. Lucian Miranda. Few months later, Fr. T. J. Chacko, with his indomitable spirit and missionary zeal began touring Tuensang and Mon districts from August 1969 to July 1971. He was a stranger to peoples, language, customs and practices and yet met and spoke with public leaders, gaonbooras and dubashis, pastors and teachers about Catholic Church and the need to sending children to a good school. On three occasions he made extensive tours of the Noklak area. Fr. Chacko (1968) mentioned in the chronicle of St. Thomas Church Tuensang that from Noklak Town he moved to Noklak village where people already had anti-catholic feelings. Then he toured Nongkyen, Nokhu, Khengyu, and Penso- the biggest and the mother village of all
Khemungen tribe. The population was very thin in proportion to the number of houses due to large scale head-hunting practiced till 1963 and also due to high infant mortality rate. From there he went to visit Yokao, Tsawao and Lengyu villages. From all these villages the leaders had agreed to send their children to the boarding at Tuensang. A lesson he learnt from this tour was that as soon as the Baptist leaders, field directors and evangelists learned about his tours, they alerted all the pastors and school masters not to accept him or cooperate with him or to be deceived by him in any way and not even allow the film show. They even forbade villagers from sending their children to the boarding. So, many among those agreed to come to the boarding backed out after some time.

Fr. Chacko began his second tour of the Noklak area from 12 to 24 February 1970 to bring about 15 students who had been arranged for the boarding. But people boycotted his programme and those who had given name for the boarding had withdrawn except at Tsawao village where he got three boys for the boarding. In all he managed to get four Khemungen boys for the boarding. Not discouraged by the second tour he undertook the third tour from 3 to 13 December 1970. In Noklak the boys who agreed to tour with him backed out. In all the villages the Baptists objected to the film show. The non-Christians too were indifferent. On being asked about the intention of his tour Fr. Chacko said, “my intention was to make the first contact to announce our presence at Tuensang headquarters and to get children for the boarding so as to sow the seeds of Catholic religion; in short evangelization, for vast majority in villages were non-Christians” (Chacko, personal communication, November 5, 2007).

A decade later seeing the fast progress made by the people of Tuensang through Catholic education people began asking for a school at Noklak. With this the work of the Catholic mission among the Khiamungans entered a remarkable period with the establishment of St. Paul’s School on 7 March 1984 and baptism of 5 families into
Catholic faith in 1997. A similar request was made from Tuensang Village where a school named ‘St. Thomas School’ was established on 19 March 1984. The people of Anganba belonging to the Sangtam tribe were the next group to ask for Catholic mission in Tuensang District. The peoples’ wish was fulfilled on 3 March 1986 when Christ King School was opened for their children. In August 1993, 25 families accepted Catholic faith. Opening of St. Peter’s School at Trongor on 5 March 1987 saw the long standing dreams of the people realized. With the baptism of 7 families from the place on 18 May 1993, the church ushered into a new period.

3.5.2 DIMAPUR

Fr. Joseph Felix, from Christ King, Kohima used to visit Catholic families scattered in places like Burma Camp, Singrijan and Samaguri in and around Dimapur who had been there from early 1940 (“Holy Cross Dimapur”, 1999). Fr. Felix constructed a chapel in 1964 in the compound of Thehuohie Felix Angami who was a Catholic (Mandal, 1993). Having perceived the urgent need for schools and good education, Fr. Felix invited his father, George Felix, who just retired from the Tata Iron and Steel Company, Jamshedpur, to come and help him in his work. Accepting the request of his son, Mr. George Felix came to Nagaland and opened Holy Cross School, at Dimapur on 16 April 1966 in the premises of Mr. Felix Angami (Lucious, 1992).

Meanwhile Mr. Namgangheing, former Tribal Council President of the Zeliangrong requested Bishop Hubert D’ Rosario, to establish a Catholic centre in Jalukie. But the latter told him the urgency was to establish one at Dimapur. In 1969 Fr. Mani shifted the school to the present site bought with the help of Namgangheing. The first group of Bethany sisters arrived in January 1969 to help in the mission. The parish took care of a community of about 1000 members, most of who were residing in the Mikir Hills (Karbi Anglong). In the subsequent years communities were established in places like Diphupar (Rongmei) (1970), Zeliangrong Village (1971), Diphupar (Angami)

3.5.3 AMONG THE RENGMAS

From the inception of the Church in Nagaland, a man who played a key role in making the Church known to many parts of Nagaland was Mr. Pralie Paulus Angami from Kohima village. The Rengmas who inhabit the land between Kohima district and Wokha district heard of the Catholic Church only when Mr. Pralie Paulus was appointed in Tseminyu as an Agricultural Instructor in 1966. In his urge to establish the Catholic community he started visiting and meeting people. When he began contacting people at Tseminyu he faced some opposition from certain quarters, so he turned his attention towards Tesophneyu. He won over the hearts of some of the leaders of the village like Mr. Lotsuo Dobashi (D. B), Mr. Nphuseng D. B, Mr. Nighewa D. B and Mr. Mezuchü Gaonbura (G. B). He taught all the prayers in Angami dialect till Peter Tep became the touring catechist and translated the prayers into Rengma dialect. After the initial instruction Fr. Bernick from Kohima, came on 5 January 1967 to instruct them in faith. With the baptism of 83 people on 19 November 1967 by Bishop Hubert D’ Rosario, the church came to exist.

Many a time Pralie took a group of people from Tseminyu to Tesophenyu to instruct the newly formed community. They in turn showed keen interest and formed a solid group to be the future members of the Catholic Church in Tseminyu; chief among them were Mr. Khikebu Khing, Mr. Ngabu Khing and Mr. Kejwishe Khing. It was a felt need to instruct the newly formed group in their own dialect and so it was decided to send Mr. Ngabu Khing, for catechist training. He resigned as a teacher and received baptism from Christ King, Kohima on 31 July 1968 and took the name ‘Albert.’ Thus he became the first Rengma Catholic from Tseminyu (George, 1993). After a two and half year of training at Dibrugarh, Ngabu Khing returned and was made the local catechist
in 1971. Instruction in Catholic faith continued and the first batch of 15 persons received baptism on 1 December 1968.

Through the effort of Mr. Pralie the village of Kandinyu, heard about Catholic faith and a few people remained as catechumens for three years and they were baptized on 6 December 1970 by Fr. K. P. Antony from Wokha. As the church was being established at Tseminyu and Tesophenyu one Mr. Kapa from Nsunyu learned about Catholic faith and got baptized at Tesophenyu.

3.5.4 SEMAS OF LAZAMI

Lazami is the biggest and oldest village in the Sema area. The first contact with the Catholic Church was established by Mr. Punakha Sema, an accountant at Civil Hospital, Kohima, and Mr. Vihokhu and Zekiye both primary teachers, who came to know about Catholic faith through Mr. Philip Suosahie and Mr. Paulus Pralie. They visited priests at Kohima and requested them to open a school in their village (Leo, 1985). When they heard, without a Catholic community the school wouldn’t be opened they started approaching people who were willing to become Catholics. Fr. Bernick visited the place in December 1967 along with a group of people. But the underground opposed the establishment of the Catholic Church there. Ponnattil (1988) wrote,

Mr. Vihokhu one of the would be members of the Catholic community and the leader of the group was caught by the underground and kept under their custody for three months. He was a man of strong faith and said to them ‘whether I live or die, it does not matter, I want to be a Catholic and I shall be one’. His friend Xekiye Swu reported the matter to the higher authorities and got him released (p. 43).

Some people, expelled from the Baptist Church for their habit of drinking rice beer, wanted to become Catholics as they did not wish to go back to earlier faith. Later
on Fr. John Med continued to visit and stayed in the village for a longer period. In 1971 he printed a small prayer book in Sema dialect containing the morning and evening prayers and also the Mass prayers entitled “Short Prayers in Sema Naga” (Ponnattil, 1988). After due preparation, he baptized the first batch of catechumens numbering 76 of them on 4 April 1971 and thus officially the Catholic Church was established in Lazami village. The village has three Khels, Lazakito Khel, Izüka Khel and Iyinu Khel. Among them Iyinu Khel is commonly known as the Catholic Khel as the majority of the people are Catholics. This parish has three more sub-centers namely Pughoboto, Natsumi and Ghatashi.

3.5.5 JALUKIE

The initiative of Mr. Namgaheing Iheilung, the Tribal Council Chairman, led to the opening of the Catholic mission in Jalukie. As he was convinced of the role of Catholic institution for the development of the area and the uplift of the people, he went to Kohima and met Fr. Felix who directed him to Bishop Hubert D’Rosario. At the saying of Bishop that the priority of the church was to open an institution in Dimapur and later to other areas Namgangheing took initiative to get the present plot of land for Holy Cross School, Dimapur. Once again he discussed the matter with the Bishop in Dibrugarh and the latter gave permission to open the centre in Jalukie (Mao, 1994). In the words of Parenkulangara (1999), “Mr. Namgaheing was called the Bishop of Jalukie. It was this one man’s persuasive skills that brought the Tribal Council members of the area together to support the opening of a Catholic school and the Church in Jalukie” (p. 37).

On 18 October 1965, Namgaheing made an appeal to the Zeliangrong people to come and settle in Jalukie area from outside Nagaland. On 1 February 1967 some people from Longzang and Sangzee in Manipur came to Samzuiram, Mhainamtsi and New Jalukie and established villages, among them few were Catholics. The Baptists at that
time passed a resolution that no Nagas of other denomination would be allowed to settle in the village in order to discourage further settlement. So the minority Catholics had to face endless harassments at the hands of the majority non-Catholics. It was so cruel that some Catholic families were even sent out of this young community (“St. Xavier’s church Jalukie”, 1999). Against this action, Mathew Chandy and Ambrose Melengmai filed a case with the Tribal Council. On 23 February 1972, an order was passed by Z. Sakhrie, the Sub-division officer of Jalukie upheld the petition of the Catholics that they and others were allowed to reside at Samzuiram besides that the Indian Constitution guaranteed freedom to profess any religion. Prior to this order the Baptists had resolved to allow only three groups in the village namely, the Baptists, the Herakas and the non-Christians. After the order had been passed the Baptist youth of Jalukie wanted to kill Mr. Mathew Chandi in 1973 and he managed to escape. In the same year Mr. Anthony of Nkoreo came from Manipur and built a hut for him in New Jalukie. But it was burnt down on 24 December 1973 by some unknown people. So Mr. Namgaheing gave him a place in Nkoreo to settle down (M. Chandy, personal communication, July 29, 2012). Subsequently some more people came and made a new settlement at which is the present ‘Nkoreo’. Others came to stay at Ekiesangram, New Beijampui and Mhaikom (Syiemlieh, 1990). In 1979 the Baptists of Mhainamtsi village refused to give land or accommodation to three Catholic families, who came from Charoi village in Tamenglong district of Manipur. So Bishop Abraham bought land for them in the same village for a sum of Rs. 10000/ and they got settled there (M. Chandy, personal communication, July 29, 2012). The cooperation extended to by some prominent people like late Lungalang, the Commissioner, Ilkising, Ex. Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) and P. Nampeung, sub Inspector in establishing the Catholic mission is praiseworthy. With the permission of the Bishop and support and wishes of late Namgaheing the mission took to its start on 29 May 1969 with the official inauguration of the St. Xavier’s school by Bishop Hubert D’ Rosario on the two hundred and sixty
acres of land for the mission freely given by Namgaheing. The Missionary Sisters of Mary help of Christians came to assist the work in the parish. The first native Catholics were Mr. Kevipele Iheilung, Mr. Blaize and Mr. John Bosco Heikiding who received baptism on 15 August 1970.

3.6 CHURCH IN THE 1970s

The church began to spread out to other parts of the state in the 1970s due to the contribution of a good many men religious congregations like the Missionaries of St. Francis De Sales, the Society of Jesus, the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Diocesan priests.

3.6.1 SHAMATOR

Fr. T. J. Chacko undertook a missionary tour to the Shamator area from 4 to 15 April 1970 and met with severe hostility from the Baptist leaders. He was confronted at Langkhanger village and warned with severe consequences if he entered the area again. Chacko (2010) wrote, “they started shouting, ‘get out you Roman,…you are not Christian, we are Christians we believe in Christ not in Mary, only Christ saves us’,….others shouted together ‘go back,…go back,…Roman’ (p. 28). Hostility and indifference continued for many more years. Whenever the Baptist leaders had a clue that the Catholic Church was going to start mission work at the request of the general public they would object either through personal confrontation or threatening letters. In the early part of the year 1980 letters had been sent by them not to open Catholic mission. In 1983 Mr. P. Akhum Yim, Executive Secretary of the Yimchungru Baptist Association sent a letter to the priests at Tuensang purportedly written by him on behalf of the public of Wongphunger villages not to establish the school as it might lead to misunderstanding among the villagers and would also divide the villages on this issue. However, in the latter part of the same year, in 1987 and in the 1990’s letters had been pouring in from
the public of the area to start the mission with assurance of full religious freedom and protection. In February 1987 the head GB of Shamator wrote a letter on behalf of Shamator Area Public consisting of seven villages namely Shamator village, Shamator town, Myleangkur, Leangkonger, Chessor, Sangphur and Yakor villages requesting to open a Catholic school in Shamator. Again after repeated requests and keeping it at an abeyance, the Church opened the centre only in the year 2002. Today many public leaders of the place lament that they are many decades behind in education, religion and development due to the faults of few.

3.6.2 JAKHAMA AND JESUIT MISSION

In October 1965 having heard of a new religion in Kohima and Phesama a group of Jakhama villagers had invited Mr. Chavi Xavier, to visit them and to preach to them. Sensing a good opportune time Mr. Chavi approached Fr. Bernick and requested him to enlighten those who came in search of truth. Due to the concerted effort of Fr. Bernick and both the communities a small community was born in the year 1966.

The Jesuits are the second religious congregation after the Salesians of Don Bosco to have come to work in the Diocese of Kohima. In 1967 Fr. J. Verstraeten, was deputed to explore the possibilities of a Jesuit centre in Nagaland. An extract of his report reads as, “Prospects: glorious, Peoples’ needs: extreme, Educational standards: low, Co-operation: promised, Likely response: overwhelming” (Syiemlieh, 1990, p. 72). As per the promise and assurance given by the superiors, three Jesuits namely Fr. Ligouri Castelino and Brother Raymond arrived on 21 April and Fr. S. Coelho on 11 May 1970 in Nagaland.

The search for a suitable location led them to Jotsoma but having denied entry there they finally pitched their tent at Jakhama. The mission opened a school for the children of the area and named it as Loyola School in 1971. In 1971 a small group of
young men from Kidima village invited priests to instruct them in faith (Coelho, 1984). A small community was formed and St. Xavier School was established there in 1979. The community at Khuzama was formed in 1974 and Sacred heart School was opened in 1978. Mima was the next village to invite priests to establish Catholic Church there. A small group of people accepted Catholic faith in 1978, amidst opposition. Various women religious congregations like Sisters of the Apostolic Carmel (AC) in Jakhama (1971), Bethany Sisters (BS) in Viswema (1977) and the Franciscan Clarist Congregation (FCC) in Phesama (1981) came to offer their service. St. Paul Institute of Education, a Teacher Training School was inaugurated in September 1977 by Bishop Abraham to meet the educational backwardness of the state. The Jesuits opened an Agro Industrial Training Centre, ‘Eden Gardens’ at Khuzama to provide non-formal and rural education to poor students.

3.6.3 KIPHIREE AREAS

The church in Kiphire, one that got into storms of life and tossed in accusations and threats and always stood firm against all adversities from the beginning till today, is the mother church for many churches in Kiphire area today. This area is inhabited mostly by Sangtam tribe followed by the Yimchunger (Makory, Tikhir and Chiri) and Sema tribes. The work of evangelization of Kiphire sub-division (now district) dates back to 1968, through priests stationed at Tuensang. The Church had its first members when Mr. Kirimog Joseph from Salumi Village and Mr. Yasong John Sangtam were baptized on 9 June and 15 December respectively by Bishop Hubert Rosario at Dibrugarh in 1968. Fr. L. Miranda was the first missionary priest to tour the areas reaching Phelungre on 7 January 1969 (Mlakuzhiyil, 1997). But the priest who toured widely the Kiphire Sub-division was Fr. Chacko, in all he toured 23 villages on three occasions from August 1969 to November 1971. His first tour of the area was from 2 to 17 December 1969 to Kiphire Town, Kiphire Village, Langkok, Singrup, Amahatore, Chanchore, Rutsûtsû,
Inscur, Phelungre and Anatongre. In all these places he spoke about the importance of education and religion in the lives of people. Other villages he toured include Thonoknyu, Chaliso, Tokchur, Pessu, Sanglao, Pungro village, Pungro Town, Thanamir, Penkim, Salumi, Luthor, Zanger, Chomi, and New Minic, now called Longkhimong Village. From all his visits he had taken a few boys to the boarding at Tuensang. Fr. Castelino, who was also in Tuensang, went to Kiphire at the pressing invitation of Mr. I. K. Chankija, the Civil Sub Divisional Officer (SDO).

In the first week of December 1971, Fr. Castelino, a frontier missionary particularly to the Pochuri and Chakhesang tribes in the early 1970s and 1980s, made his maiden tour to Kiphire area from Tuensang together with Fr. Edwin Govias. During this tour he confirmed the information he had gathered from the visits of earlier priests that this area was a fertile land for missionary activities. On his maiden visit Mr. I. K. Changkija, the Civil SDO arranged a meeting with all the public leaders to discuss about the prospects of opening the school at Kiphire. Castelino (1997) made clear the intention of the Catholic Church, “but as priests we are primarily missionaries who have come to preach the Good News of the Gospel, though we will be ready to extend our services in the field of social uplift in whatever we can, including education” (p. 27). Everyone promised of their support and willingness to cooperate with him. In their eagerness to have the school they wanted to start the school in the following academic year and offered the Council Hall in Kiphire to conduct the classes and to accommodate the staff.

The school, named ‘Loyola School’ started functioning on 6 March 1972 with 43 students. Like Tuensang, the school was started without a Catholic community in Kiphire. Some people were against the establishment of the school, as rumours spread that Catholics were not Christians and therefore, they were against Christians. Mr. Akumba, the Ex. MLA admitted that the face of Kiphire district was changed by the
Catholic School and it showed the door to advancement (R. Akumba, personal communication, July 29, 2007).

The first village under Tuensang district, to have a Catholic community was Phelungre. The church’s first contact with this village was on 8 January in 1969, by Fr. Miranda, who was allowed to preach in the Baptist Church. Fr. T. J. Chacko during his first and second tours, from 2 to 17 December 1969 and 28 December 1970 to 13 January 1971 respectively visited many villages including Phelungre. He collected 12 boys as hostellers from different villages and reached Phelungre village on 12 January and left for Tuensang on the following day (Throngsukiu, 2000). With the establishment of Loyola School at Kiphire the visits to Phelungre, mostly by Fr. Castelino, became frequent. And the man who was responsible for the beginning of the church was John Yasong, the touring catechist.

Fr. Mathew Keemattam, the new in charge of Kiphire visited Phelungre on 18 August 1974 and stayed there from 20 December to 25 December 1974, visiting the people and giving medical aid to the sick, showing Bible films and conducting meeting with gaonbooras and elders of the village. During this visit the first baptism in Kiphire sub-division was administered during the midnight mass of 24 December 1974 in the presence of a large gathering of people, to Mr. Francis Yangtsakiu of Longthonger Village (Throngsukiu, 2000). Due to the missionary zeal of Fr. Mathew Keemattam and untiring effort of John Yesong and James Kiosuki, a student of St. John’s School Tuensang, many people expressed their desire to embrace Catholic faith. These people were taught the basis of Catholic faith and 30 of them, including 7 boys from Chomi village were baptized on 7 May 1975 by Bishop Abraham Alangimattathil. Thus the first Catholic community in Tuensang district was founded.

The Church in the initial days had to face many obstacles. The gaonbooras and leaders of the Baptist church threatened Bishop Abraham and Fr. Mathew Keemattam
with dire consequences if they propagated Catholic faith and asked them to quit the village. In June 1975 the Sangtam Baptist Church Association held a meeting to attack the Catholic Church with the agenda, ‘the birth of the Catholic Church in Phelungre village’. The church also faced mounting pressure from the Executive Committee of the United Sangtam Students’ Conference (USSC) during mid 1970s and even complained to the Governor of Nagaland not to allow the Catholic Church and school at Phelungre village. But the governor in his wisdom said to them that the Constitution of India guaranteed freedom of religion to every citizen. Mr. S. K. Sangtam an ex-minister and president of the then USSC, cautioned the people not to become Catholics. He said that let all those became Catholics may remain but no more new members would join and let no Catholic school be opened. If the school is opened the Catholic strength would increase and that would be a threat (Y. Moses, personal communication, July 22, 2007). Catholic School in the village could not be opened till 2000 because of the threat of the USSC and some people of the area. At the height of the situation the Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC), Kiphire wrote a letter asking people not to go against the freedom of religion guaranteed by the constitution of India (Appendix, Document B 4).

The Catholic Church’s first contact with Chomi village under Kiphire subdivision was in January 1971 by Fr. Chacko. He spoke of his first visit to this village as fruitful as people were kind, co-operative, helpful and appreciative. During that tour he got 12 boys from different villages to Tuensang to join the boarding and one among them was Pewsang from Chomi village who later became an instrument in starting the Catholic Church. When Fr. Chacko visited the village children ran to meet him out of curiosity as they had been told ‘a Satan had come into the village in a white cloth’. When Pewsang joined St. John’s School, Tuensang the people told him it was Satan’s school (M. Pewsang, personal communication, July 24, 2007). In 1972 Fr. Castelino and John Yesong started instructing people in Catholic faith. When Pewsang returned home for
winter holidays in 1972 he persuaded his two friends Rukhiuki and Y. Shahoto to study in St. John’s School. The three youngsters learned about Catholic faith, and then back at home during their vacation started to share their experience (Hosito, 2002). As a result of their faith-sharing many youth began to take interest in the Catholic religion. Sensing that it was a golden chance for the youth of the village who intended to become Catholics to be united, Mr. T. Korakiu, the chairman of the village strongly supported and encouraged them to form a united youth group with P. Tsakia gaonboora as their fellowship chairman. They also selected 8 youth to monitor and execute important decisions for the visible Catholic community.

In April 1975, Fr. Mathew Keemattam visited Chomi village to meet people at the requests of Pewsang, Rukhiuki and Shahoto. St. Peter’s church chronicle 1967-1979 mentioned that the villagers asked for a school but he told them the priority was to establish the church in Chomi and Pungro circle. In the meantime on 7 May 1975, 30 people, including 7 youths from Chomi village received baptism from Bishop Abraham at Phelungre. Since then these youths were having their own service in one house but soon they were prohibited from doing so. On 11 July 1976 some of the Baptist leaders came and took away from their possession the document of permission signed by the GBs. It is mentioned in the petition submitted to the ADC, Kiphire, 31 October 1976 that later in the day they also took away their church box with its contents- Rs. 159.60, church register and few other articles. This incident was reported to the district administration by end of July and on 2 August, the ADC sent message to the village to allow the Catholics to have their own worship. Again this matter was discussed with the ADC in Kiphire in October. Finally things taken from the Catholics were returned at the order of Mr. Rai, Commanding Officer (CO) of Pungro.

Again on 3 December 1976 the ADC Mr. T. P. Imchen issued an order that Catholics were allowed to practice their faith as guaranteed by the Constitution of India.
Since the Catholics were denied land to construct a church in the village they filed a case in the DC court Tuensang and the latter ordered the village council through the ADC Kiphire to give land and they managed to build a church (M. Pewangs, personal communication, July 24, 2007).

On 24 December 1976 the Baptists did not allow the Catholics to have their service and so they had it in the public ground in the presence of a large gathering (M. Keemattam, personal communication, June 17, 2012). This had further strengthened the faith of those 7 young men and all those were gathered there. The Catholic youth constructed a church on 15 February 1977 but the very next day the Baptists dismantled it. The determined Catholic youth put up another church within a day at another place and named it as ‘Christ King Church.’ On the occasion of the solemn blessing of the church 13 families accepted Catholic faith.

3.6.4 MISSION TO THE POCHURIS AND EXTENSION OF MISSION TO THE CHAKHESANGS

Catholic Church’s contact with the Pochuri tribe was mere accidental. Meluri, the head-quarter of the Pochuris was only a resting place for Fr. Castelino. One day in the year 1973 while on his way to Kohima from Kiphire he halted at Meluri and came across Mr. Joseph Lushai, a Catholic police Officer–In charge (OC), stationed at Meluri, who hailed from Manipur. This natural acquaintance led Fr. Castelino to speak about Catholic Church and led to the formation of the Catholic community at Meluri against many odds.

One day in December 1973 when he was in Kiphire, Fr. Castelino received a message from the Extra Assistant Commissioner (EAC) of Meluri to meet him the following day. On his way to Meluri he was wondering what crime he might have committed to be summoned to the EAC’s court. In fact it was a meeting arranged with the public leaders of Meluri with a request to open a Catholic school. It was in fact a
blessing in disguise for him as he was requested by his superiors to begin the work in Chakhesang area which included Meluri. Castelino (1999) wrote, “I was too happy to oblige them, as that would provide a base from which I could operate until a more permanent location was found for the mission centre which eventually proved to be Chizami” (p. 22). The people insisted that he started the school at the beginning of the academic year 1974 and placed two police department buildings at his disposal to start the school. With the permission of the Bishop and his superiors St. Xavier School Meluri was opened on 29 February 1974. Soon there was a threat that if the school and mission centre were not closed immediately, the entire set up would be burnt and destroyed. The curtain of this episode was brought down permanently with the full cooperation and involvement of the civil and local administration. According to Mr. Rashutho, Ex. MLA of Meluri, even though he had taken initiative to open the centre he was later accosted by then cabinet minister Vamuzo and an MLA of Pfutsero who told him that he made a mistake in inviting the Catholic Church to open a school as majority of people in the state belonged to Baptist Church. But he told them if his people wanted good education only the Catholic Church could provide and therefore he didn’t make any mistake. After the establishment of the school the pastor of the Baptist Church of Meluri came to his house and prayed and requested him to send half of his children to Baptist school and the rest to the Catholic school (Rashutho, personal communication, June 2, 2012). According to him all progress in the Meluri area owes its credit to the Catholic Church.

Encouraged by the visit and inspired by the words of Fr. Castelino, Mr. Joseph started talking about Catholic faith to his close friend, Mr. Khazhipa Nyusuo, a sweeper at the police station. Mr. Khazhipa was a national worker in the Naga Army before he took up this job. He was jailed by the Indian army and on his release requested his authority to discharge him from duty as he had no strength. Whenever father halted for the night at Joseph’s house and celebrated the Holy Mass, Khazhipa was present (N.
Khazhipa, personal communication, June 3, 2012). One day Fr. Castelino saw fishing net at Khazhipa’s house and asked him what he was doing with it. In reply he said that whenever he had no work his only hobby was to catch fish in the Tidzu River at the foot of Meluri hill. Castelino (2000) wrote, “I told him then the story of St. Peter, how Peter too was a fisherman before Jesus called him to be his disciple, and how Jesus had told him that from that day he would catch not fish but man” (p. 8). Khazhipa took these words seriously and began to work for the church from that day.

Before he could forget the bitter experience of the jail he landed in another fresh trouble of an alien religion which he was not so sure for being an illiterate man. Yet going against the tribal resolution of the Pochuris that no other religion in their land other than Baptist religion, he decided to become a Catholic. At this juncture there came to his rescue two people in the persons of Nyiluotho, his friend and Zhulatho, his brother who too decided to embrace the new faith in 1974. Outraged by the decision of these people there came a group of leaders who asked them to promise that they would abandon their new faith. Khazhipa (2000) wrote, “having declared, some leaders one day called upon us and gave us a bullet to bite and promise, that we will not take up the catholic faith. As our stand was firm we replied we will not turn back whether they kill or do anything” (p. 5). In the background of these troubles and threats eleven members were baptized in January 1975 in a small church built in Meluri village at Zheterüna within the perimeter of the Non-Christians, and Khazhipa took the name ‘Peter.’ The mission received a new impetus with the arrival of the Ursuline Franciscan Congregation Sisters in July 1975.

The new community’s trouble did not end there but it was just a beginning of a new volcano of agony. No sooner did they receive baptism than they were threatened with dire consequence that their church would be burnt down if they did not give up their faith. Besides, the pagan king asked the Catholics to return to their former religion or else to face the following: to quit the village since they became Catholics against the
existing traditional law of the village, to pay for if the harvest failed, and would be responsible for any natural calamities and epidemics that would befall on the people in case their god cursed them when their rituals and worship were disturbed by the worship of the Catholics. Courageously the neophytes shifted their dwellings from their ancestral site in the village and settled on the periphery of the village, near Meluri gate. After a few days sensing that some more pagans were planning to join the Catholic Church (Lewis, 2000), the king called for another public meeting in 1976 and again issued an order to quit the village.

To escape from the unending troubles, Khazhipa finally decided to settle down with the new community at a new place where he had his own land and soon began the Catholic exodus from Meluri village between 1977-78. Thus Khumiasü, the new village, three kilometers away from Meluri, down the Kohima road was established under Meluri sub division in July 1976. With the help of Bishop and Catholics of Chizami the new Catholic community consisted of four families of Tsivütho, Khazhipa, Nyiluotho and Kümatho and managed to settle down there (N. Khazhipa & J. Poji, personal communication, June 3, 2012). On the occasion of the silver jubilee celebration of the village on 20 June 2012, Mr. Yitachu, Parliamentary Secretary for tourism, law and justice, the Government of Nagaland said “it was not only celebrating the recognition of 25 years of the village but a celebration of history as Khumiasü happened to be the first Catholic village in Pochuri tribe” (“Yitachu graces silver jubilee of Khumiasü village”, 2012, June 22). Later on communities were established in Laphori, Old Thewati, Akhegwo, etc.

While Fr. Castelino was in Meluri, he was also busy preparing a permanent base of operations at Chizami which is 80 kilometers from Kohima. On 31 July 1974 Chizami was made as the main centre/parish in Chakhesang area and Meluri was made as its first sub-centre. In 1974 it had only five villages among them was Zhamai with a community
of 300 people who were proud of having with them the first martyrs for their faith (Coelho, 1984). The sparkle of faith reached Chizami through Tsilito Peter who had a friend in Zhamai who explained to him about Catholic faith. He in turn encouraged many of his friends and they accepted Catholic faith. In the beginning all those who joined the Catholic Church were not rich or educated (Puro, personal communication, June 5, 2012). From here the church extended her service to the nearby Mezhulomi village.

Thenyizumi is one of the villages of Chakhesang settlements in Phek district, 57 kilometers away from Kohima. The news of the persecution of seven men in Zhamai in the hands of the undergrounds for accepting Catholic faith had its influence on Dusayi, an Agricultural Inspector from Thenyizumi who decided to become a Catholic. He and his family were baptized on 13 April 1969. With the help of the catholic members of Thenyizumi, and Mr. Zhyoti Mark, the touring catechist, Catholic faith was preached to other neighbouring villages like K-Basa, Yoruba, Thevopisumi, Chozuba Town, Sakrumi and Chetaba Town. Sisters of the Holy Cross came in 1984 to work in the mission. As requested by the people a school was opened in Pfutsero in 1986.

3.6.5 MISSION AMONG THE ZELIANGRONGS

The parishes of Jalukie, Peren and Tenning are situated among the Zeliangrong tribes in Peren District. The name ‘Zeliangrong’ is a combination of three kin tribes: Zemeis, Liangmeis and Rongmeis. These three kin tribes decided to merge into one with the name ‘Zeliangrong’. Leangmei means ‘north’, Rongmei means ‘south’ and Zemei means ‘border.’ The Zeliangrongs, particularly the Zemeis had much contact with the Kacharis who ruled from Dimapur and later from Maibong. A big number of Zemeis live scattered among the Kacharis. Thus the Zeliangrongs have been spread over three states: Western Manipur, North Cachar in Assam and Jalukie area in Nagaland. Diphu and Lumding are supposed to be Zeliangrong names.
One Jadunang of Nungkao village in the Tamenglong area in Manipur state started a new faith in 1925; it came to be known as the Haraka cult. He rallied round him a big number of followers from among the Zeliangrongs (“The empire of the Zeliangrong”, 1985). Jadunang declared himself as the ‘messiah’ of his people. The new cult had a great influence on the socio, political and religious life of the people of the area. Even now there are people who practise this faith and at times quite opposed to Christianity. In the year 1964, Fr. Joseph Felix was invited by Mr. Namgaheing Iheilung, to open a Catholic school at Peren. (After four decades, Namgaheing received baptism from Fr. Mani). Soon after Fr. Felix’s visit Mr. Namgaheing went personally to Dibrugarh and invited Bishop Hubert to pay a visit to Peren. In complying with the former’s request the latter visited Peren in January 1965 with Fr. Felix (Mao, 1970). He had a meeting with Mr. Ikising, the head dubashi, Government officials, elders and gaonbooras and discussed about religious, educational and cultural life of the people. Even though some of the Baptists present there were aggressive at the visit of the Bishop, the latter assured the gathering of his fullest cooperation in opening a school. When he stepped forward to shake hands with them they insulted him in public saying, “we never shake hands with a dog,” reports late Namganheing in his A.Z.C.C. souvenir (Parenkulangara, 1999, p. 12). Mao (1970) wrote, “the next morning Bishop celebrated his ‘first mass’ in the new soil at my residence and my two children Pauline Asosa and Anthony Kholi were given baptism” (p. 4).

The school took its wings to fly with the coming of Fr. Felix’s brother Mr. Bony and his wife Mrs. Ivi, after having made them resign from their lucrative jobs at TELCO, Jamshedpur. So the first Catholic School in the Zeliangrong region of Nagaland was opened in March 1965 under the name ‘All Saints’ Home Cambridge School’, in Mr. Ikising’s building. Started with much hope but to the despair of many it began with barely 30 students. To counter the Catholics, the Baptists started the Baptist English
School. Whatever may be the obstacles, Mr. Bony and his wife worked hard and did their duties marvelously and people even today speak highly of the “Bonnie-Period” (“St. Paul’s parish Peren”, 1985, p. 2).

Though Catholic presence had been there in Peren since 1965, it was only from 1974 serious efforts in evangelization work began. Mr. Mathew Chandi, the touring catechist of Jalukie parish, sent by Fr. Mani Parankulangara, the parish priest of Jalukie, initiated the mission. The first person to receive baptism from Peren area was Mr. Peulu Franky who was baptized on 31 January 1974 at Dibrugarh (“St. Paul’s parish Peren”, 2005). The spark of faith lighted by Mr. Vikietuo and family helped the church grow in the town. Mr. Rachi Richard and Mr. Athong Michael, two trained catechists of the parish played a significant role in establishing and strengthening the Peren mission which includes six substations today.

During the visit of Fr. Felix to Peren in 1964, three elders of Tenning village extended an invitation to start a mission there. It is learned that all the Liangmei villages of Nagaland are situated in the southernmost part of Nagaland. Tenning is the centre of the Liangmei tribals (“Tenning mission”, 1985). Fr. Mani and Mr. Mathew Chandy evangelized this area and with the baptism of Mr. Athong Michael and Mr. Ramka Peter in 1974 Catholic Church in Tenning took her roots. A school was opened in 1981. Due to the influence of Heraka Cult Christianity could not be easily penetrated into this area. At the same time conversions to Christianity are from the followers of the Heraka cult. Of 20 villages in this area only eight villages namely Tenning (Town and Village), Nzau, Nchangram in Liangmei area and Nsong, Njauna, Nchan and Nkialwa in Zemei area have Catholic communities.
3.6.6 MEDZIPHEMA

Medziphema town had the visible presence of Catholic community from the early 1960s with the migration of the families of Neivonyü Savino, Chavi-u-Xavier Sanyü and Neivihu Savino from Khonoma. The first recorded baptism at Medziphema was on 5 May 1964 when Mr. Megovotuo Petrus son of Neivihu was baptized by Fr. Joseph Felix. It was followed by a few more baptisms in the same year but the community didn’t grow as expected. Majority of the early Catholics of Medziphema, however, had gone back to Baptist churches for reasons best known to them (“Catholic mission Medziphema parish”, 2003).

A new lease of life was given to the community by a group of widowed Catholic women from the place in the early part of 1970, namely Neisoü Whiso Elizabeth, Neiphenuo Rachael, Mekhrienuo, Khrieketulie-ü, Yievizo-ü, Tunuo, Vitsonuo Sara, and Khekhonuo Martha, who came together for Sunday services in some selected homes. From this time onwards priests from Dimapur parish too started caring for the community. A small church was built and blessed on 15 December 1974 and this centre was entrusted with the Missionaries of St. Francis De Sales (MSFS) congregation and Providence Sisters. On 28 February 1978 a Home Science training centre for the girls was opened. In February 1979, SFS School was inaugurated with 72 kids in the enrolment. To foster local vocation, the SFS seminary was inaugurated on 4 November 1988. The apostolic spirit led to the establishment of communities’ at different places including Kukidolong, New Socünoma, Ruzaphema, Punglwa, Ruzaphema Block III, Gaili, Piphema, Pherima etc.

3.6.7 CREATION OF THE NEW DIOCESE OF KOHIMA-IMPHAL

Due to pastoral reasons and vastness of the territory the diocese of Dibrugarh was divided and a new Diocese of Kohima-Imphal was created on 29 January in 1973.
Abraham Alangimattathil, the then Vicar General of the diocese of Dibrugarh was appointed its first Bishop. With the creation of a new diocese and appointment of the new Bishop the Catholic Church in Nagaland entered into a new era of pastoral, medical and educational fields. For pastoral reasons on 29 June 1980, the Diocese of Kohima-Imphal was divided into the Diocese of Kohima and the diocese of Imphal.

3.6.8 MISSION AMONG THE KONYAKS

Konyaks are the inhabitants of Mon District in Nagaland. They are of two different major linguistic groups- the Upper Konyak and the Lower Konyak. They are one of the backward tribes of the state. Their dialects differ from village to village. Tobu falls under Upper Konyak region. The church extended her service to this tribe by middle of 1975. In the words of Puthussery (1978), the first resident priest at Tobu,

> It is to this politically hot, socio-economically under developed, culturally fertile, religiously volatile, medically helpless and educationally backward area that the Catholic Church has taken a daring leap by the opening of the upper Konyak Catholic mission with its headquarter at Tobu with one priest and five sisters engaged in religio-socio-medico, educational activities sponsored by them (p. 2).

The first recorded entry of a Catholic missionary into the Upper Konyak area was in 1969 when Fr. Lucien Miranda toured this area from 21 to 27 February 1969. In all he visited 6 villages, namely: Changlangshu, Minyaksu, Yei, Yonghon, Kenchenshu, and Chingnyu. Except in Changlangshu, in other villages, people were quite indifferent and hostile and did not welcome his suggestion to take few boys from the villages to the boarding at Tuensang. The people of Minyakshu were quite surprisingly anti Baptist, highly superstitious and inclined toward black-magic. According to him as he mentioned in the chronicle of St. Thomas church Tuensang 1965-1971, there was a great scope for
the church in Changlangshu and Minyakshu. The first acquaintance with Konyak people was through five Konyak students of St. John’s School Tuensang.

As in other places the invitation to open the mission centre came from the people; here in Tobu from the parents of those students from Tobu studying at St. John’s School. Head Dubashi, Mr. Kussam Samniok whose son Anden was a student at St. John’s one day met Bishop Abraham and expressed his displeasure over priests’ failure to visit Tobu. In his own words, “fathers don’t like us, fathers don’t like our tribe” (P. Puthussery, personal communication, April 25, 2012). Fr. Devassy asked Mr. Kussam to convene a meeting of all the leaders of Upper Konyak region to discuss the possibilities of opening a Catholic centre. In the meeting held on 14 December 1974 in which Fr. Devassy and Sisters Rose Teresa and Blessilia were present, they said that they wanted a Catholic mission. On 14 January 1975, all the public leaders of Tobu circle together with Mr. Anden Konyak, MLA of Moka constituency signed the resolutions to invite the Catholic mission among the Upper Konyaks (Augustine, 2003). When Mr. Anden Konyak submitted the resolutions he wrote to Bishop Abraham, “we are eagerly awaiting your arrival here to open the eyes of this backward area people” (Cheruseril, 2001, p. 5). The assembly of public leaders of the Upper Konyak and people of the Tobu Circle adopted another set of resolutions on 5 May 1975 in the presence of Bishop Abraham. They resolved, “that the Catholic missionaries be given fullest freedom to preach, propagate and practice the Catholic faith in the entire area” (Cheruseril, 2001, p. 5). Accordingly on 10 February 1976, Fr. Devassy together with sisters Mary Punnathanam, Jane Mary Kaithakary and Mercy Kottiyani of the Medical Mission Sisters (MMS) and sisters Blessilia and Celine Jose of the Sisters of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (SABS) arrived at Tobu to begin the mission. This centre was officially erected on 1 March 1976 and on the same day Newman School was inaugurated with 35 students in
the Area Council Hall at Tobu Town. In the words of Karinthayil (2001), one of the priests who worked there,

No mission in Nagaland has started with similar co-operation from people. The public leaders put all their resources at the disposal of the mission. The jeep of Mr. Anden MLA, the residence of Dobashi Kussam and the resources of the village of Tobu given by Mr. Khamba (Gaonbura of Tobu). It is not just Tobu village, but all the village leaders of Upper Konyak area came to the support of the mission” (p. 8).

The sisters were engaged both in educational and healing ministry. The healing ministry proved to be a great blessing for the people as hundreds of them began to flock to the dispensary from far and near. There was still another invitation from the public leaders of Monyakshu village on 30 April 1976 to start the Catholic mission there with absolute assurance of freedom to propagate the Catholic faith. However, the Konyak Union, Konyak Students’ Union and the Underground could perceive well in anticipation that some people might become Catholics in due course of time, started threatening people. The wrong seeds had already been planted in the minds of the people of the Upper Konyak region by the Ao pastors who were the ones who evangelized the Konyaks as in many places in Nagaland. They had leveled several allegations against the Catholics including going to their school and getting treated at their dispensary were sins, Catholics had crucified Jesus etc. Mr. Chungo Thomas Lempa, catechist of the Tobu Catholic mission said that soon after receiving Catholic faith he started receiving threats from the apex bodies of the Konyak tribe and the underground (C. Lempa, personal communication, December 30, 2006). He was asked by them to resign from the job of the catechist of the parish so as to close down the Catholic Church. There were some leaders like Jackson, Vincent Homang and Peter Neamnei worked hard against all sorts of threats and calumny even before they received catholic faith. While Vincent
Homang and Francis Wanmai were doing their Teachers’ Training Course at Phesama. They were offered government jobs by the then minister, Mr. Yothen Konyak. This offer was made to prevent them from becoming Catholics because he heard that they were exhorting people to become Catholics. Vincent was offered a job at Secretariate while Francis in the Agriculture Department in Aboi. If both were placed at two different places they would be dissuaded from becoming Catholics (V. Homang, personal communication, December 30, 2006). Jackson’s story is different from others regarding his conversion to Catholicism. There was a serious problem between the Konyaks and the Changs of Tobu village. The Baptist Church of ‘A Khel’ insisted that all those who went to the Baptist Church should become Changs. At this Jackson took some 20 people from the ‘A Khel’ and met Fr. Chacko and discussed the matter of becoming Catholics as they were forced to change from one tribe to another. They started visiting the families of non-Christians and encouraged them to become Catholics (L. Jackson, personal communication, December 31, 2006). On 7 October 1984, the mission bore its first fruits in the Upper Konyak area at Tobu, when about 135 people accepted Catholic faith.

On 13 May 1988, the Catholic community of Mopong came to exist with the baptism of 133 people and Hongkong Christ School was opened. The Angjangyang mission was started at the initiative of three villages, Changlang, Jakphang and Angphang. In January 1993 they had collectively decided to start a new model village (catholic village) and requested the Catholic Church to start a school with the promise that whoever came to that village would become Catholics. On 25 January 1994, about 54 people (adults) received baptism (30 families). Thus the Catholic community was established and a primary school was opened. It is to be noted that no one from Jakphang village became Catholics even though they too participated in the meetings of the three villages (Augustine, 2003). Later, the Konyak Baptist Bumeinok Bangjum (KBBB), the apex body of the Konyak Baptist Churches, took a different stand and established a
Baptist Church besides a Mission school with many incentives like low tuition fees, hostel facilities and admission and books on credit. And much of the members of the Baptist church there are from Jakphang (Augustine, 2003).

Forgetting all the previous resolutions passed by leaders of various villages that there was no objection to starting the Catholic Church in the respective villages, the Konyak Union started issuing threatening letters against the Catholic Church even in the recent past. The Catholic Church at Tobu receives innumerable letters of such sort asking the Catholics to go back to Baptist Christianity. When the Church initiated a plan to open a mission centre at Pessao village, at the request of the people in 2011, the Konyak Union and the KBBB, threatened both the villagers and the church.

Mon is the head quarter of the Konyak tribe. The earliest contact the Catholic Church had with the Lower Konyak was when Fr. T. J. Chacko from Tuensang visited Mon from 5 to 7 October 1970. The ADC of Mon welcomed him but told him the following day that some local Baptist leaders had objection to his visit and therefore, he had to get permission from the field director at Wakching. But he told him he was touring all Nagaland without the permission of the Baptist leaders. Chronicle of St. Thomas church Tuensang 1965-1971 mentioned that his next move was to the Mon village where he met the King who was very indifferent because it seemed that he was not presented with any gifts. So the king said that he had nothing to do with the priest. He had more than 30 wives and 50 children. Anyway he said that he would send some of his children to the school later on. Then he visited Chui, Wakching Town, Wakching Village and Thonkai. The impression he had on the visit to these villages was that the Baptists were quite strongly hostile. The people were quite indifferent, unconcerned, non-cooperative and most unreliable.

On number of occasions the people of Mon requested Bishop Abraham to start a school at Mon and he thought it as an opportunity to begin evangelization work among
them. Accordingly, on 6 July 1976 he visited Mon and met with Mr. Chingai Konyak, the leading man in Mon Town Committee, whose children had been studying at Catholic schools in Dibrugarh. He showed him two plots of land to choose from and the latter chose the one on the Mon-Tobu Road. But the Baptist pastors compelled the Town Committee to give away the land to the Border Road Department and the other was disposed off. So it was the Baptists’ first sign of hatred towards the Catholics. Later on in 1980, another request was made to Bishop. A meeting was arranged with the headman and the elders of Mon town and it was agreed that the mission would buy 30 acres of land on the Sonari Road before reaching Mon Town (Arokiasamy, 2005). On 10 June 1980, the first group of missionaries Fr. Peter Bianchi and Fr. Justin Lyngkhoi came to Mon to begin their work. The mission bought a school, ‘The English Medium School’ which had up to class VI, belonged to Mr. Chingai at a price of Rs. 20,000/ and renamed it as ‘Don Bosco School, Mon.’

It is true that the Catholic Church managed to establish a school at the district Headquarter of the Konyak tribe. The Konyak Union, the apex body of the Konyaks, however, is up in arms against the Catholics from the beginning till today. Their slogan, ‘one tribe and one religion,’ is haunting and pervading the whole Konyak region, from village to town; from illiterate to literate. The majority of the Catholic community of Mon town is originally from Tobu area where the Church has a parish. Mr. Liangen and family, the first Konyak Catholic family of Mon town since 1980 had to bear untold and silent sufferings as they were a small drop in the mighty ocean of the Baptist brethren. One day their child Stella heard from her friends that it had been discussed by the Konyak leaders and the undergrounds that nobody among the Konyaks should follow any other religion other than the Baptist religion. So she asked her mother, “if they come to know we are Catholics, will they kill us”? Her mother replied, “they are free to kill us.
We will live and die in it”. She then said, “if they come to kill then I will say, you can kill us” (H. Liangen, personal communication, June 20, 2012).

3.6.9 TO THE AOS

Repeated requests from the past students of St. Anthony’s College, Shillong to establish a Catholic School at Tuli was given a serious thought despite opposition from the Baptist Church pastors. To compensate the absence of a Catholic school, soon the Baptists opened a school, named it as ‘Koinonia.’ The past students, however, argued with the Baptist Church leaders that even though they studied at a Catholic institution they did not become Catholics nor was there a compulsion from any quarter to become Catholics.

When a delegation of past pupils approached Bishop Abraham again with a request he thought it as an opportunity to reach out to the Ao tribe who are apparently against the Catholic Church. During the visit of the Bishop, in September 1978, the public leaders of Tuli promised them freedom of religion and freedom for their children to become Catholics if they desired so. The initial plan of the priests to stay at Jorhat and look after the school until a Catholic community was formed at Tuli was abandoned due to the insistence of the people. On 8 December 1977, Fr. Tom Karthik took charge of the centre and accommodated in the house of Mr. Mar Temjen, opposite the Paper Mill office in Tuli Town. In the same building in the two ground floor rooms, opened two classes (Karthik, 2002), and the classes started in February 1978. From the very beginning, the Tuli mission entered into rough weather. No sooner had they begun the construction of the school at the new site than problems one after another mounted on, like demand for an increase in the rent, to award contract to the land owners, occasional change of demarcated boundary by people, stoppage of work, demand for plots of land within the campus in exchange for some other land, encroachment of land, etc. However,
the school is run today by the priests with constant interference and intimidation from the people.

Mokokchung town had the privilege of having its first Catholic School in the year 1979. The contact with the Aos dated back to October 1954, when Fr. John Larrea of Golaghat celebrated the first mass for a small group of floating Catholic population of Mokokchung town. In the 1960s and 1970s the Church had been making some contacts with the town folk through one Mr. Varkey, SDO, in Public Works Department (PWD) and one Mrs. Bernadette Lama, teacher at Model English School. Both of them offered their place for the missionaries passing through Mokokchung. Lama’s rented house in Aongza ward was served as chapel. Sebastian (1994) wrote,

The history of the Catholic Church at Mokokchung is practically the history of the Catholic school. As early as 1965, public leaders like Mr. N. I. Jamir, had requested Bishop Hubert Rosario of Dibrugarh diocese, to open a Catholic school at Mokokchung. In the second half of 1978, Fr. S. Coelho S. J. came to explore the possibility of opening a school there. By the beginning of 1979, the public at Mokokchung felt the urgent need to open a Catholic school and an Ad hoc committee was formed with Mr. Kariba MLA, as chairman, Mr. M. Bendangukshi as secretary and the following as members: Mr. A. Shanmugan, IAS, DC, Mr. Tali Longkumer, SDO, Mr. Imchalemba MLA, Mr. Takoyaba MLA, Mr. Intimeren MLA, Mr. S. I. Sungit, Mr. Apong Pongener, Mr. Tokishe Sema, Mr. Tinuwati, Mr. L. Chuba Pongener, Mr. T. Chuba Walling, Dr. T. Walling, Mr. Tsukungpokba, Prof. Jongshi, Mr. Bendangmayang Longkhum and Mr. Temsu Kietzar. The united move by the public leaders, Government machinery and the civic bodies was perfectly matched by a positive response from the Catholic Church’s side. Many
rounds of meetings were held and the site finally selected was the present plot which was then occupied by the army. This land for the school was gifted by the Ao Mokokchung Village, from the Aotsuba Semchar and Achimbung Semchar families, with the helpful mediation of Mr. Maputemjen Ao as the landowner’s main representative (p. 4).

Queen Mary School at Mokokchung was opened on 21 May 1979 by Fr. Stanislaus Coelho on behalf of the Diocese of Kohima. Like in many places, here too people offered the Town Hall to have the classes conducted for first few months. Until the first resident priest, Fr. Joseph Alancheril took charge of the school from December 1980; Fr. Coelho supervised it from Khuzama, by visiting it occasionally. The school and administration received new life with the arrival of the Ursuline Sisters on 27 January 1981. Recommending the recognition of this school, Mr. A. Shanmugam IAS, the then Deputy Commissioner, has written to the Education Department that Queen Mary’s School “has come up due to the popular upsurge of the people and public leaders to have a Catholic School in Mokokchung town” (Abraham, 1992, p. 2).

Some of the ex-service men of Chungtia village approached the Catholic Church at Mokokchung for a school in 1981. While they were on duty at different places of the country they came to know of the Catholic Church. Bishop Abraham said to the people that unless a Catholic community was established to support the school it was not possible. So under the leadership of Mr. Hengen, a signature campaign was undertaken but many of the ex-service men decided not to cooperate. So the council Chairman Mr. Sunang Senangshiba requested the public that for the sake of the school even if not all at least few people who were ready could become Catholics, or else there would be clashes between the churches (A. Michael, personal communication, January 6, 2007). From the very beginning Mr. Hengen had expressed his desire to become a Catholic and the Village Council had no objection to him but forbade him to canvass more people to be
converted to Catholicism. On 6 January 1983, 29 members came forward to join the Catholic faith. “On 7 August 1983 Bishop Abraham officiated at the baptism ceremony of the new converts amidst a large gathering of priests, sisters and faithful from various parishes of the Diocese. On this day the first Ao Catholic community was born” (Sebastian, 1994, p. 6). As per the wishes of the people, Christ King School was inaugurated on 12 February 1983. There came threat from the Ao Baptist Arogo Mungdang (ABAM), the apex body of the Ao Baptist Church on 29 March 1984 asking the Catholics to give up their faith or else face severe consequences. On 5 April 1984, the ABAM once again issued a threat to them to return to their fold by 31/7/1984 or else face consequences including being chased away from the village (Ao, 2007). In reply to the accusations and threats, the Catholic Association of Nagaland (CAN) through its president Mr. R. Rocus Chasie sent a three member delegation to Chungtia (Chasie, June 8, 1984); to encourage the community and not to fall victims to the threat of the Ao Baptist Church apex body.

On 17 February 1984, Mother Teresa, accompanied by Bishop Abraham, visited Mokokchung at the invitation of the Bishop, the Rotary Club and the people of Mokokchung. Shri Mayangnokcha, the first graduate among the Aos and Mokokchung’s most illustrious educationist, welcomed Mother Teresa on behalf of the public. Later Mother inaugurated the Mother Teresa Home for orphans and the disabled at Khensa (Sebastian, 1994). St. Joseph’s School at Khensa was opened on 28 February 1987 with the Sisters of the Adoration Blessed Sacrament to look after the same.

3.7 TO THE SEMAS

Coincided with the request of the then Governor of Assam for the Sisters’ help at the Naga Hospital, Kohima, a group of Sema past students of St. Edmund’s College, Shillong who were already baptized as Catholics there, appealed to the Bishop of Shillong in 1948 to send priests to Akuluto Range as the administration had already
granted religious freedom to the people of the Naga Hills (Appendix, Letter B 2). The Church may have had her own constrains, for not responding positively to the repeated requests. As the Bishop had not given them a reply, they again appealed to the Secretary, the Government of Assam for Tribal Areas, Shillong with a renewed appeal to allow the Catholic Church to function in their area. The following is the letter/memorandum submitted by them, dated 15 August 1951.
Letter 3.1

Letter Written by the People of Akuluto Range

MEMORANDUM

Letter No. AR/PRC/51/136,
Dated Akuluto the 15th August, 1951.

To,

The Secretary,
to the Government of Assam for Tribal Areas, Shillong.

Sir,

We the Baprist Roman Catholics beg to lay down the following few facts for your kind consideration and generous support.

That Sir, nearly three years have elapsed since we asked for permission to be granted to Catholic Priests to go over the Naga Hills as well, for preaching their faith, we beg to point out to your honour that it is not through the agency of R.C. Fathers but we ourselves became converted into R.C. religion; and now we want to acquire our knowledge both spiritually and educationally.

That Sir, it is officially learnt that the Government would permit the R.C. Priests to go over to the Naga Hills after one year only i.e. after easing the political situation of Naga Hills. It is very difficult to understand why Government should intervene in religious matter. However, we assure your honour that R.C. Priests are not coming to Naga Hills to interfere in Naga Politics, but we want the just for religious service-ministration in accordance with the freedom of religion granted to us under the constitution of India. Consequently, we request your honour to give permission to any R.C. Father to come to Akuluto Range of Mokokchung Sub-division, Naga Hills; for our religious service-ministration.

We shall be highly obliged if you would kindly treat it as EXTREMELY URGENT.

Yours faithfully,

1. K DATE
2. H.S. Amnu
3. On behalf of whole Akuluto Range.


Copy forwarded to:

1. H.E. Bishop's Secretary, Shillong for favour of H.E. Bishop's information and necessary action. He is further requested to send one Priest to Akuluto as soon as permission is granted.

2. H.E. the Governor of Assam, Shillong for information and necessary action. We should be most grateful for any assistance given that your honour could give in this connection.

3. The Deputy Commissioner, Naga Hills, Kohima for information.

4. The Sub-divisional Officer, Mokokchung for information. (Civil)

Mokokchung 10-7-51
As early as 1951 a small group of Sema Nagas from Akuluto Range had obtained necessary permission from the Governor of Assam for the Catholic missionaries to enter into their area and to start a centre. Meanwhile Baptist missionaries Andersons built a mission school at Aizuto in 1937. It was followed by a mass conversion movement among the Semas, helped and supported by the Aos, Lothas and Angamis. A Sema association was formed in 1946, and a Bible School was started in Aizuto in 1949 (Ponnattil, 1988). It was against this background that some Sema Nagas got permission from the administration to invite the Catholic missionaries to work amidst them. So a natural chain of reaction was expected to explode from the Baptist quarters against the Catholic missionaries. “Sensing a danger at the door, Mr. De Lano, who was in charge of the Aizuto Sema mission centre wrote to the Baptist mission in America, “uppermost in our minds is the Roman Catholic Church” (Ponnattil, 1988, p. 42). Ponnattil (1988) wrote,

Following the Governor’s green signal, the Naga Hills Church Advisory Council in its meeting at Wokha took a firm stand against the entry of the Catholic missionaries into the Sema area and communicated its ‘strong resolution regarding the Roman Catholic Situation’ to the Sema Tribal Council and to the Naga National Council. As a result, in May 1950, the Deputy Commissioner at Kohima rejected the plan of the Sema group, which had favoured the entry of the Catholic missionaries and prevented the latter from coming to the Sema area (p. 42).

Most probably due to strong opposition, those three Catholics who sought permission to allow the Catholic missionaries to begin the work in the Sema area were silenced into obscurity never to appear again with the same request because nothing is heard about them in the later days. V. C. Khutovi, the present chairman, Shichimi Village Council, who studied at Shillong, who had the desire to become Catholic and to
establish Catholic Church, brought Fr. Marocchino from Kohima to Sutemi village in 1959, but due to strong opposition from the people father had to go back. In the later years when he became the Gaonboora the people told him not to become a Catholic and not to bring the Church (S. Khutovi, personal communication, May 23, 2012).

After a wait of two decades the people again renewed their request during the time of Hokishe Sema, the then Chief Minister of Nagaland to start a Catholic school in his home town, Akuluto. This was made possible by the positive efforts of Mr. Viswadel from Viswema Village who was the EAC of Akuluto and was formerly a student of Don Bosco School Shillong. He was very much interested in the development of the people told them that only a good Catholic school could give their children good education (Ponnattil, 1988). With the support extended by Hokishe Sema, a school was opened at Akuluto in 1972 by Fr. P. K. Anthony. It was shifted to its permanent site from the government buildings in Akuluto town to Sutemi village, in 1975, nearly two kilometers away from the town which drastically brought down the enrollment. Bokato Robert of Akuluto, a boarder was the first Sema boy from Zunheboto district to have been received into the Catholic Church in 1982 (Ponnattil, 1988). As there were several requests from Aghunato, Zunheboto, Atoizu etc, Fr. M. M. Michael, a veteran missionary of the Diocese of Kohima was appointed in charge of the Sema area. He established his centre at Sutemi in the month of July 1985. The school ran classes till VIII. (M. Lhovito, personal communication, May 22, 2012). Upon Fr. Michael’s transfer, Fr. Job decided to shift his residence as there was no Catholic community in Akuluto and there was no immediate possibility of evangelization. So either at the end of 1990 or beginning of 1991, just before his transfer he started staying at Atoizu, where there was a small community. The school was entrusted with some teachers. Due to non-cooperation, persistent trouble from the people and the ill-treatment meted out to Fr. N. J. Francis, the school at Atoizu had been closed down and priests left the place (K. Job, personal
communication, October 27, 2012). With this the first part of the Sema mission came to an end. Not discouraged by the problems and difficulties faced there the church opened the centre once again at Akuluto for the good of the people in the year 2003 at persistent requests.

Some of the goodwill ambassadors of the Catholic Church from her inception in Nagaland have been district administrators and past pupils of the Catholic institutions, who are not Catholics. “The first attempt to have the Catholic presence in Aghunato came in 1979 from Mr. Khekiye Sema the then civil SDO of Aghunato who requested Bishop Abraham to open a Catholic centre at Aghunato” (Mariadoss, 2010, p. 22). Fr. Mathew Ponnattil visited Aghunato on 13 October 1981 to have an on the spot study. In the public meeting that was followed, the public expressed their eagerness to have a Catholic school. As a response to their request Fr. Mathew said that a school was possible only if a Catholic community was established.

After Fr. Mathew’s first visit the people extended a formal invitation and so his next visit took place on 20 February 1982. He spoke to people in the Baptist church on Catholic Church and hers mission (M. Ponnattil, personal communication, September 20, 2012). He also said that a community should be established first and other institutions like school and dispensary would follow. They argued that a school was a means to know and study about the catholic faith (Ponnattil, 1988). The contact with the fathers continued and Bishop Abraham visited the place on 14 February 1984 along with the touring catechist Mr. Leo Kiyelho. Mr. Leo from Lazami, Mr. Edward from Kohima and Mr. Marcus Angami Civil SDO were requested to instruct people in faith from 14 March. Finally in October 1985 Fr. Michael baptized four families of Hozheto Henry, Nitovi Michael, Kikheli, and Khekiye and officially the Catholic Church came to exist.

The school was closed down in 1988 due to lack of cooperation from the people. In 1989 the church was dismantled by some miscreants when none of the members of the
Catholic community was present at Aghunato. Problems and lack of cooperation from the side of the people of the area compelled the Salesian priests to withdraw from the Sema mission including Aghunato in 1993. The school at Aghunato is one of rare schools in the diocese which has seen a number of openings and closures till 1998 (Sharing, 2006). From Aghunato the church branched out to Zunheboto, Viyilho (Vilo), Tokiye, Sathakata, Hugher (Huker) towns and villages.

Atoizu is a small township between Akuluto and Zunheboto. One who took the lead in contacting the church since 1983 to start a school was Mr. Lhozhevi Isaac, a retired Assam police personal, who on duty at different places in the North-East India had seen and been to Catholic Churches. He was overwhelmed by the discipline and behaviour of the students of Catholic Schools. On his retirement he convinced his friends that they could ask the priests to start a school at Atoizu. Upon their request Fr. Michael told them a community was a must to have a school. In the meantime the Baptists raised objections to the establishment of the Catholic institutions. They also instigated the people that Catholics were worshippers of Mary and there was no salvation in the Catholic Church (I. Lhozhevi, personal communication, May 21, 2012). Added to that a group of representatives was sent to the then Education Minister, Mr. K. L. Chishi, who represented that constituency to block the plan. As Mr. Chishi was a student of Catholic institution, could explain to the people the positive contributions the Catholics could make for the Sema area. After Fr. Michael took charge of the Sema area he visited a number of times and instructed people who expressed their desire to embrace Catholic faith. In 1985, 10 families were received into the church. Before the Salesian society left the Sema area they had shifted the centre from Akuluto to Atoizu as the majority of the Catholics lived there. There was already a school by the name ‘Modern English School, Atoizu’ established in 1974, run by some teachers with class up to IV. The church took over it and renamed it as ‘St. Peter’s School.’
The third centre opened in the year 1985 by Fr. Michael, was at Satakha. The mission had flourished well from 1985 to 2000, but then it started decreasing gradually due to various reasons especially owing to the migration of some of its members to other places like Kohima and Dimapur (“A brief history of St. Mary’s catholic church at Satakha”, 2010). The V. K. Town Catholic community under Queen Mary Parish was born on 18 June 2000.

Since 1960, the public of Zunheboto too had been asking for a Catholic school in Zunheboto, the head quarter of the Semas. So Fr. Felix opened St. Paul’s Home Cambridge School, Zunheboto in May 1965 on his own will. In September same year Fr. Bernick, however, entrusted the school with Mr. R. A. D’Cruze, the headmaster, as there weren’t enough priests to look after personally. The public through their MLA expressed their displeasure by writing a complaint letter to the Bishop. Yeshito (16 July 1966) wrote, “this we feel is an infringement of the agreement previously done.” On being asked the reason for opening schools Fr. Felix said that only through English education, the message of the gospel could be communicated (J. Felix, personal communication, December 28, 2008). Finally a community was formed at Zunheboto in 2003 and a school was also opened.

3.8 CHURCH IN THE 1980’S AND 1990’S

By the end of 1970, Catholic Church came to be known by people in most parts of the state and a good section of the people including those from the rural areas began to enjoy the fruits of her service. Braving different types of accusations and allegations she went on to reach out to other areas of the state.

Lozaphuhu village, situated 14 kilometers away from Phek district headquarters came to know of Catholic faith from late Vesacho Vincent Hoshi who heard it from his relative at Lai village of Manipur. Back home he shared his desire for the Catholic
religion with Mr. Tavehu Chizo and Mr. Veniekhu Vincent Khamo who in turn too showed interest. In August 1980 they declared themselves as Catholics (“A brief history of catholic church Lozaphuhu village”, 2007). The then MLA of Meluri, Mr. Chiekhutso promised them that if they established a community he would request priests to set up a school in the village. Accordingly fathers Castelino and Boniface visited the village and met with the people. The proposal to establish the Catholic school first at Phek village or at Phek Town was rejected by the leaders and landowners on the ground that people might embrace Catholic faith; and so finally it was established at Lozaphuhu. On 7 November 1982 fifteen members received first baptism (“A brief history of catholic church Lozaphuhu village”, 2007).

As years went by, many Catholics from different parts of the state started settling down in Kohima town. Seeing the urgent need a small chapel of Christ King Parish was established there in 1975. The mass in this chapel, located in the house of Kevipralie Paulus at D’ Block was offered usually by priests from Don Bosco School. In November 1977 the laying of the foundation stone of the present Catholic Publication Centre (CPC) building, where St. Francis De Sales Church is located, was done by His Eminence, Lawrence Cardinal Picachy, S. J. of Calcutta, when he came for the Silver Jubilee celebration of Christ King Church in December. Sometime in the early part of 1980 Fr. Thomas Vattoth was posted as the first resident priest to look after the Catholic Publication Centre and the Catholic community of Kohima Town. It was on 15 August 1980 that St. Francis De Sales Parish/Church was officially erected with the installation of Fr. Thomas as its first parish priest (Chasie, 2005).

The Catholic Cathedral is the mother church of a diocese. The term ‘Cathedral,’ drawn from Latin means ‘chair’ and therefore is the ‘church where the Bishop of a diocese resides (Parish priest, 2008). The Catholic Cathedral of Kohima Diocese is situated high on the New Minister’s Hill in Kohima which is a parish with more than 400
families belonging to different tribes and linguistic groups. This church was inaugurated on 14 December 1989 with the beginning of centenary celebration of Catholic Church coming to North East India. The aim and scope of this church is well expressed in the words of Bishop Abraham. “My wish and prayer in building this church,… it becomes a center of prayer,… dedicated to Mary Help of Christians,… may turn out,… to be a place of pilgrimage, seeking the help of Mary Help of Christians (“Cathedral parish, Kohima”, 1999, p. 17). The lion’s share of the three crore financial expense came from the Japanese, who wished the church to be a place of prayer especially for the Japanese War victims who lay down their lives for their nation in the Second world War battle fought in Kohima. This is affirmed in the prayer inscribed in English and Japanese script in the Cathedral campus. “It is with thankfulness that we heard that Catholic Cathedral was being built at Kohima, where Mass would be offered every morning in memory of the fallen” (Parish priest, 2008, p. 1).

The most controversial Church of the 1980s which was dragged into allegations and counter allegations and finally led to destruction was the church at Penkim. Penkim is a village situated just below Saramati inhabited by the Yimchunger tribe. There had been requests to start community in the village. On 15 April 1983 accompanied by students from Penkim, studying at Loyola School Kiphire, and Mr. Yansekiu, Fr. Kurien set out for Penkim. At the residence of John Kiutsumong at Pungro, the Baptist pastor of Penkim Mr. Trongwo intimidated Mr. Yanseki; and John refused to go with him during the rest of the journey (Mannookuzhy, 1983). He met those expressed their desire to become Catholics, and 15 May was fixed for the next visit. During this visit, representatives of the catholic communities of Phelungre and Chomi, few students and Mr. Yansekiu accompanied him. On the way there was a heated verbal exchange with the pastor of Pungro Town and the evangelist of Pungro who tried to stop them. During this visit it was decided to have a temporary church put up and that the Bishop of
Nagaland would bless it and start the community on 29 June 1983. On 15 June the situation was rather tensed and some people including pastor Trongwo tried to manhandle the Catholics who were clearing the site for the church that belonged to GB Merimong who by then was a Catholic. As suggested by others Mr. Trongkhiba, the ex head DB of Pungro, one of the founders of the village was brought from Kiphire to settle the issue. Before he set out for Penkim, he met the EAC of Pungro Mr. Yimkhong Temsu at his residence in Kiphire and told him of his plan and sought the latter’s opinion. The EAC replied: “if there are Catholics in Penkim, then they have a right to build their church. You see that it is done and then come back (Mannookuzhy, 1983, p. 2). Before the church was constructed a complaint was lodged to the principal of Loyola Kiphire by someone from Penkim village stating that the public leaders and gaonbooras had a meeting and in the said meeting most of them expressed their displeasure over opening a Catholic mission in the village.

Catholics from Chomi helped in building the Church in the presence of Mr. Trongkhiba and the blessing of the church took place on June 29, 1983 by Bishop Abraham as planned. The chronicle of St. Paul convent Kiphire 1973-2010, mentioned that on this day 33 people received baptism. Tension continued following the baptism at Penkim and so on 3 September father and sisters were blocked at Pungro village when they were on their way to Vongti at the invitation of the people there. From his petition to the ADC dated 6 December 1983 we learned that the Yimchunru Baptist Borubo Amukhongto, the Supreme Baptist organization instigated the people against the Catholics. It accused the Catholic Church as the cause of division and so no Catholic Church be allowed in Yimchunger area and decided to dismantle the Church. The Baptists led by Head GB Hilumong, Mr. Pensukin and pastor Trongwo dismantled the church on 8 November 1983. The great sacrifices and sufferings of the family of Mr. David Yanseki (teacher) that were expelled from the village for becoming Catholics are
unforgettable. However, the people did not lose heart and some of them used to come to Kiphire for instruction and got baptized there in the month April 1984 and again a few of them were received into the church at Penkim later. Due to continuous pressure and threat, some Catholics had to flee the village. The ADC stood for justice and truth and finally the case was settled in favour of the church. As such the dedication of the reconstructed church of Penkim took place on 14 November 1985 by Bishop Abraham and on this occasion many people received baptism. In the following year a new church was dedicated by the late Bishop Abraham and a good number of people received baptism (Thuniyampral, 2008). The community, however, got completely disintegrated due to internal strife among its members.

It was Fr. T. J. Chacko who established the first contact with Pungro region between 28 December and 13 January 1971 accompanied by his touring companion, Mr. Joseph Kirimong. This area is inhabited by the Makhori group of Yimchumger tribe. In New Minic village, a troublesome village due to the presence of army and underground, he baptized Kirimong’s father who was a gaonboora of some six villages. Then he visited Thanamir, Penkim, Salumi, Luthor, Zanger and Chomi. In Chomi he met a boy named Chiusume, who was studying at Impur High School in class X, agreed to translate his speech. Fr. Chacko in the chronicle of St. Thomas church Tuensang, 1965-1971 quoted the words of Chiusume, “at Impur children are taught Catholics are not Christians; they don’t teach the bible; but preach about Mary and the pope and they follow practices like drinking, worshipping statues etc”. From these villages he collected 12 boys to the boarding. Of all the areas he visited, the Pungro area was the happiest place and children were honest. Chacko (2000) wrote,

During the June 1971 summer holidays while attending the church service at Pungro Baptist church, the boarders from St. John’s heard the pastor speaking against the Catholic Church. One of them challenged the pastor
saying, ‘Sir, what do you know about Catholic Fathers and Catholic Church? You were never with them. We are with them and we know who they are and how they are doing. You are telling lies. Fathers are not like you, they don’t tell lies and teach like you’. The pastor had to pacify them saying that if Catholics were to come they would destroy the unity and peace of the area (p. 79).

Towards the last part of 1970 some of the early Catholics from Chomi came and settled down in Pungro town. On 28 May 1983 Bishop Abraham visited the Catholic community at Pungro town. As the number of Catholics increased the need for a new church was felt and as such on 25 October 1983 Fr. Kurien blessed the church. On 22 October 1983 six people from Vongti village including the head gaonboora received baptism.

It was through the farsightedness and missionary zeal of Fr. Mathew Thuniamprel that the new community at Sitimi took its origin. In the last part of 1984 Mr. Sukuto Abraham and Mr. Shikiye Stephen from Sitimi met Fr. Mathew with a request to open a Catholic school. When he explained to them the need for a Catholic community to support the school there came the immediate reply that they were willing to accept Catholic faith and there won’t be any objection in preaching and establishing the church in the village and would not prevent anyone from embracing Catholicism. In the first part of January 1985 a two member delegation from the village consisting of Mr. Sukuto Abraham and Kiyehe (Head GB, Sitimi Town) together with Fr. Mathew met with Bishop. Bishop said, “without a Catholic community we are not interested in opening a school as it will not grow up without a community to support it” (Thuniampral, 2010). In the presence of Bishop Mr. Sukuto Abraham positively assured that he would embrace the Catholic faith.
In the aftermath of the discussion with the Bishop there was a meeting on 17 January 1985 at Sitimi Town hall in which the assembly (council) assured that the missionaries could work fearlessly. As a result, many came forward to receive Catholic faith. On 9 March 1985 the school was inaugurated in Sitimi town. On 15 November 1985, Bishop Abraham received five families into the Catholic Church. Thus the Catholic community of Sitimi was born. After the establishment of the community there communities were established in Thonoknyu, Kiusam, Vongti, Seyochung etc.

Invitation to the Phom tribe came through Mr Yingsham, an employee in the Public Health Department Longleng, whose son Chingchei was a boarder at Tobu Catholic mission. The *dubashis* and the *gaonbooras* of Longleng pledged their support towards the establishment of the mission in Pongo, nine kilometers away from Longleng town. Besides them, the Pongo village council, Hukphang village council and Yongphang village council also jointly extended their full cooperation towards this venture. Since the Baptists, however, would not part with land for the Catholic mission at Longleng it was decided to establish the mission centre at Pongo (C. Chingmei, personal communication, July 1, 2012). After the first visit on 12 November 1986, frequent visits were made for instruction in faith. On 6 February 1987 one hundred Catholics from Tobu went to receive the new members of Phom tribe of Pongo village to Catholic faith. About the establishment of the Catholic community at Pongo village, Alencheril (1987) wrote in the chronicle of St. Thomas church Tuensang 1987-2012 that on 7 February 1987 Bishop Abraham established the Catholic community in Pongo Village by baptizing about 150 people including the sacrament of confirmation administered to people 12 years and above. After the baptism the school was inaugurated.

On 20 February 1990 a small community of 11 families accepted Catholic faith at Tamlu closer to Tuli. The people of Yongnyah village met priests at Tuensang many times with the request to open a school. The chronicle of St. Joseph Convent, Longleng,
1990-2010, shows that on 17 April 1986 with 63 students a school was opened with the motive of future evangelization of the area. Gradually 27 families accepted Catholic faith on 4 May 1995. The first visit to Sakshi was made on 28 April 2002 and a community was established there too soon.

In the course of time a number of churches including one at Chumukedima in Dimapur district and a host of educational institutions including colleges, formation houses, convents, dispensaries, training centres etc have been established at different places in the state. In fact most number of churches and institutions has been established in the 1970s and 1980s, by which the people of the state strongly felt the presence of the Catholic Church and they began to enjoy the fruits of her works. By this time the church also became an independent entity and overcoming many of the hurdles and accusations through her service to humanity.