

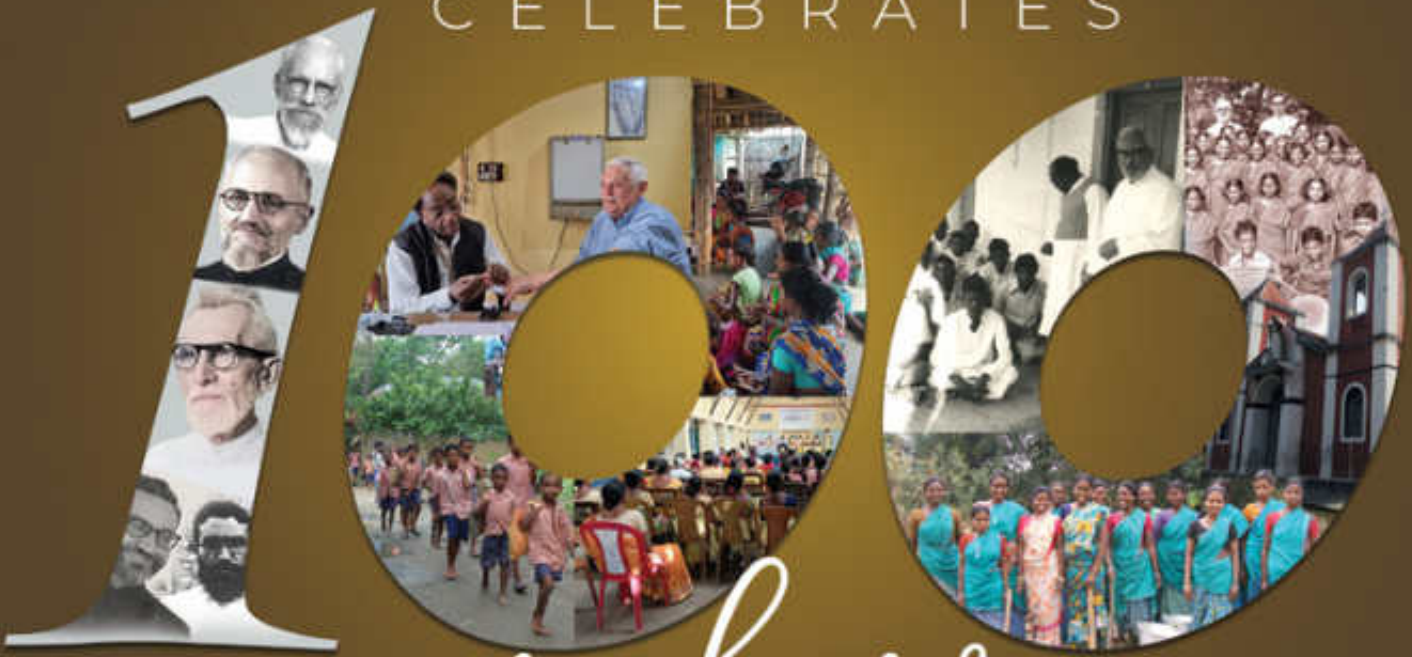
March, 2025

JIVAN

NEWS AND VIEWS OF JESUITS IN INDIA

Dumka-Raiganj Province

CELEBRATES



years of service



Jivan Awards

Short Story: First Prize winner



Prayer to the Carpenter

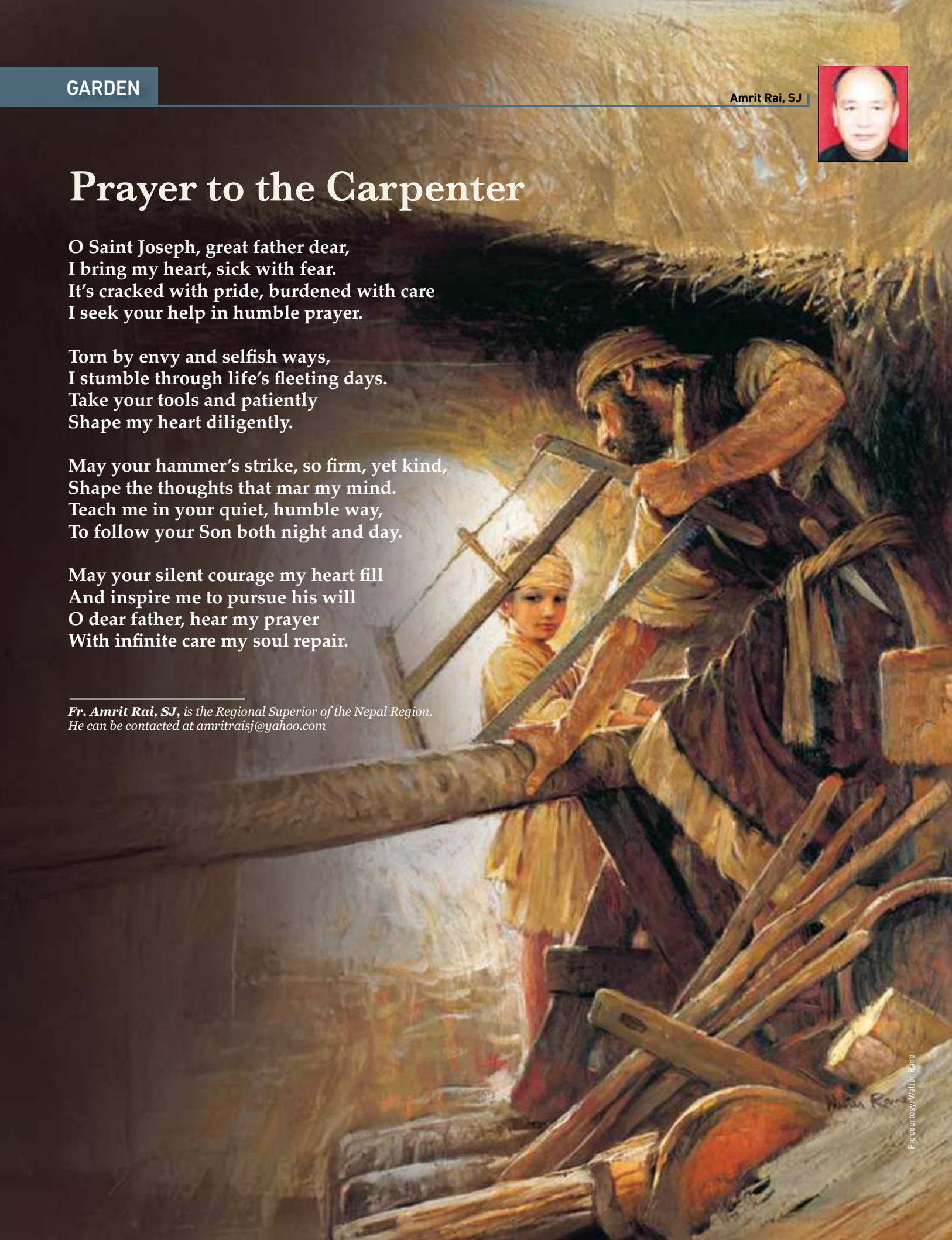
O Saint Joseph, great father dear,
I bring my heart, sick with fear.
It's cracked with pride, burdened with care
I seek your help in humble prayer.

Torn by envy and selfish ways,
I stumble through life's fleeting days.
Take your tools and patiently
Shape my heart diligently.

May your hammer's strike, so firm, yet kind,
Shape the thoughts that mar my mind.
Teach me in your quiet, humble way,
To follow your Son both night and day.

May your silent courage my heart fill
And inspire me to pursue his will
O dear father, hear my prayer
With infinite care my soul repair.

*Fr. Amrit Rai, SJ, is the Regional Superior of the Nepal Region.
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As a service of information for the South Asian Jesuit Conference, JIVAN is sent to Jesuits and their colleagues, collaborators and friends. Articles appearing in JIVAN express the views of the authors and not of the Jesuit Conference of South Asia. All material sent for publication may be edited for reasons of space, clarity or policy. Readers are requested to donate generously towards Jesuit ministries.

He lets us shine

The article “Defying Darkness with Christmas Lights” by Ron Rolheiser, OMI, elucidated the purpose of having lights during the Christmas season. Where there is light, there is no darkness. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad has this well-known prayer: *Asato Maa Sad-Gamaya, Tamaso Maa Jyotir-Gamaya*, which means, “Lead me from the unreal to the real, lead me from darkness to light.” For us Christians, the light symbolizes Jesus, who said, “I am the light of the world” (Mt 5;14). He is the resplendent star of hope. When we hold him in our hearts, we shine; we move out of darkness and ignorance. Illuminated by Jesus’ radiant rays of justice, peace, and hope, we are called to illuminate others.

| Sch. Micheal Paul SJ | Trivandrum

The need to carry forward our legacy

I visited the Golden Temple in Amritsar during my cultural tour. As I was walking on the streets, I could hear auto and taxi drivers calling out “Wagah Border! Wagah Border!” They were trying to gather enough tourists for a trip to the Wagah Border, which is 40 km away. Tourists like to watch the ceremony of the lowering of the national flags of India and Pakistan. Each driver required



a group of ten to fifteen people to make the trip feasible. So for hours, they kept shouting, “Wagah Border! Wagah Border!” continuously until they got enough tourists.

I was annoyed in the beginning but I soon realized their persistent calls were calls for their livelihood – to support themselves and their families. Their determination moved us. I pondered the similarities between the drivers’ efforts and the Jesuit calls for vocation promotion. It struck me that just like those drivers, our vocation promoters too kept calling out for people who would join us. But it is not merely the responsibility of the vocation promoter, we all should actively promote Jesuit vocations, as we need to carry forward the Jesuit mission into the future.

Fr. Arturo Sosa reminds us that the promotion of the Jesuit vocation “is part of our way of proceeding, an essential characteristic of our Jesuit culture and identity.” If there are no new vocations, there will not be anyone to continue our mission. Pedro Arrupe said: “The survival of the Society and the efficacy of its service in the Church depend largely on the number and quality of vocations.” The drivers called out repeatedly for the people they needed, because their families depended on them. We need to tirelessly keep calling out to our youth to join the Jesuits, if we realize that the future of our Jesuit family depended on new vocations.

| Zenith Lawrance M. SJ | New Delhi

Prayer Intentions for March '25

For families in crisis.
 Let us pray that broken families might discover the cure for their wounds through forgiveness, rediscovering each other's gifts, even in their differences.

Pop's Worldwide Prayer Network

Pic courtesy: dcc.law



WHAT DO YOU SAY?

STANY D'SOUZA, SJ
President, JCSA

What about religious leaders?

A newspaper headline summarized the Delhi election results this way: AAP ousted, Cong stuck at zero, Voters hand over capital's keys to BJP after 27 years.' All the media are flooded with analyses and conclusions. The person who is at the centre of all discussion and dissection is Mr Kejriwal, the former Chief Minister of Delhi.

In her column titled, 'This was no election, but a referendum,' Tavleen Singh aggressively argues that it was not the Aam Aadmi Party that lost but Kejriwal. She states that he indeed began well. "When he was elected with a thundering majority, he promised people everything that they longed for: 'clear air to breathe, clean water in the Yamuna, clean politicians and a clean slate on which to write a new chapter...' To the surprise of many they did not remain mere promises."

"The government schools improved. Mohalla clinics became clean and impressive. He was indeed an alternative to a 'cynical and corrupt political culture'. But then something went totally wrong. He was arrested." According to Tavleen, it was 'ambition and narcissism' that destroyed Kejriwal. A person who dressed like the Aam aadmi built a magnificent new house. A person who freely mingled with ordinary people was surrounded by sycophants. He began to refashion his image as a national leader.

"The result was obvious for Tavleen. Delhi deteriorated. Yamuna's water became dirtier. Garbage mountains appeared and the streets of Delhi became filthier. In other words, Kejriwal proved that 'he is just like other politicians. Not a symbol of hope, a new political culture or a dream'. Mr Vishwas, a former AAP leader and poet said, 'I have no sympathy for a man who crushed the dreams of AAP party workers... He used those dreams for his personal ambitions.' Mr Prashant Bhushan too makes a similar remark, 'he turned the party into a 'supremo-dominated' and 'corrupt' organization.'

Of course, there could be other reasons for the debacle of AAP and the rise of the BJP in Delhi. But one point is clear. Unbridled narcissism and ambition can destroy anybody, Kejriwal included. What about religious leaders? It has and it will. Hence, it is a time of introspection and renewal.

Soon we begin the holy season of Lent. Of course, we have a model in Christ, who was poor and humble, and who neither gave in to the allurements of the world nor gave up his style of leadership. Undoubtedly, it was not easy for him. Shall we make efforts to tread the pathway of our master? What do you say?



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

M.A. JOE ANTONY, SJ
Editor

Let us rejoice!

Are we truly brothers and 'friends in the Lord'? Or are these just terms we have learnt to use, although we know in our hearts that they mean hardly anything? One way to check is to see what you really feel when a fellow Jesuit, or a Jesuit institution, succeeds or achieves something noteworthy. If you really have a sense of belonging to this *societas amoris*, then you will rejoice, feel truly happy and elated, and express generously your appreciation. If this does not happen, then your claim is hollow, won't you agree?

Check, therefore, what you feel when you read in this issue about a remarkable milestone that our brothers of the Dumka-Raiganj province are celebrating this month. We are delighted to highlight the province's centenary in this issue through a comprehensive interview with the Provincial of the Dumka-Raiganj province, Fr Stephen C. Koitharayil, SJ and an article by Fr P.A. Chacko, SJ.

What exactly are our Jesuits of DR celebrating? Says Fr. Stephen, "We are celebrating the growth of the tiny seed that was sown in Majlisipur on 9 March, 1925... It is God's showers of blessings over the last 100 years that we are gratefully celebrating."

In his reminiscences, P.A. Chacko recalls an interesting detail. Talking of the conditions the pioneering missionaries faced, he says, "On their village tours, they were at home with the simple accommodation the poor tribals graciously offered. Often, it was the veranda of the house, sometimes near the cattle shed. One missionary recounted that he was once awakened in the middle of the night by a forceful spray of water..." Read Chacko's article to find out where this "forceful spray of water" came from.

This issue brings you also the results of the *Jivan* Short Story Contest-2024 (p.6). Let me express my heartfelt thanks to the two eminently qualified members of the Jury – Fr. Francis Peter, SJ and Dr Magdalene Abraham. The first prize of Rs 4,000 goes to Sch M Pavingaolou Anthony, SJ (KHM), who is a second-year student of Philosophy at Jnana Deepa Institute, Pune. He hails from the troubled State of Manipur. He reveals that what happens in his prize-winning story is closely related to his own high school experiences. "I decided to write about a part of my high school life, capturing moments that were formative and significant to me." Read his story on p.19,20 and learn about the other prize winners and those who came up with the 'meritorious stories' on p.6.



The prize goes to...

Are you eager to learn the results of the Jivan Short Story Contest – 2024? The number of entries we received this year was, in fact, a very pleasant surprise. But why? This time we invited a different kind of story. Till last year the contestants had no restriction whatever. They could choose the plot and the characters and begin and end the story the way they wanted. This time the initial five paragraphs of the story were given, when we announced the contest and invited stories. The person who wrote those initial five paragraphs is **Fr Francis Peter, SJ**, an expert in ELT (English Language Teaching) and veteran professor of English Literature.



Therefore the contestants were given three main characters and the beginning of the story and were asked to take the story forward to its logical conclusion. Obviously, there was no one logical conclusion.

Whatever they came up with should be a plausible continuation of the first part that was given. This is why we were happily surprised that we received this time 41 stories. *Jivan* thanks all the Rectors or Superiors

or Directors of our Formation Houses, and Institutions who helped by encouraging their wards to participate.

The names of the writers were not given to the Jury to avoid any possible bias. They were given only the number assigned to each story. The Jury this time consisted of two eminently qualified persons. One was, quite naturally, the person who wrote the beginning of the story – **Fr Francis Peter, SJ**, who has spent more than four decades in the field of higher education. The other member of the Jury was **Dr Magdalene Abraham**, who retired as an Associate Professor in the Research Centre of English at Fatima College, Madurai. A product of the University of Delhi, she received the Best Teacher Award from the English Education Society, New Delhi in 1989. She was a Fulbright Scholar at the New School University, New York in 2002 and went to Japan as a member of the Rotary International Exchange Programme.



The two members of the Jury independently evaluated the stories, and then compared the grades they had given to each story and, finally, chose the three winners and rated four stories as 'meritorious'.

The first prize of Rs 4,000 goes to **Sch M Pavingaolou Anthony, SJ (KHM)**, who is a second-year student of Philosophy at Jnana Deepa Institute, Pune. He hails from the troubled State of Manipur.



The second prize of Rs 2,500 goes to **Fr. Arul Gnanapragasam, SJ, (MDU)**, who is currently a teaching faculty at Vidyaniketan, the South Indian Common Juniorate, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.



The third prize of Rs.1,000 goes to **Sch. Jayanth Christy, SJ (KAR)** presently doing his juniorate at Vidyaniketan, Thiruvananthapuram.



The three stories the Jury chose as 'meritorious' were written by **Arun Arogyaraj SSP, Sch. Samborlang Nongkynrih, SJ (KHM)**, and **Sch. Lakra Sudhir, SJ (PAT)**.

While this issue carries Pavingaolou Anthony, SJ's story that won the first prize, two other stories that won the second and third prizes, as well as the three meritorious stories will be published in *Jivan*.

We recall with gratitude what makes these awards possible year after year – the thoughtful grant made by the Mascarenhas brothers - Fio and Frazer, SJ – in memory of their dear parents, Francis and Flora Mascarenhas. ❖

- Editor

A Century of Service and Empowerment in the Santal Mission



In an exclusive interview to Jivan, Fr. Stephen C. Koitharayil, SJ, Provincial of the Dumka-Raiganj province, talks to Tom Kattathara, SJ on the 100 years of the valiant Santal Mission.

Fr. Provincial, the centenary celebration is certainly a once-in-a-lifetime moment. What exactly are you celebrating?

We are celebrating the growth of the tiny seed that was sown in Majlispur on 9 March, 1925. That seed has sprouted and grown into a fruitful tree. Today we have three dioceses – Dumka, Raiganj and Purnea. It is God’s showers of blessings over the last 100 years that we gratefully celebrate. The past has been challenging. In fact Fr. Debono, the legendary pioneer of our Mission, wrote in his diary about the challenges he faced initially, “All the beginnings are hard, and the greater the sufferings are now, the greater the blessings will be on this Mission.” This firm faith has been the driving spirit of the mission. It is this spirit of self-sacrifice of countless missionaries, religious and catechists and countless other collaborators is what we are celebrating. It has indeed been a century of service to and empowerment of the Santal people.

Completing a hundred years is certainly a remarkable event. What, in your opinion, are the memorable milestones in the growth of the Jesuit mission among the Santals?

Of course, the first major milestone is Fr. Debono getting settled at Majlispur on 9 th March 1925. But more significant is the winning of a false case filed against him by the Muslim Zamindars at the Kishanganj sub-divisional court. They accused him of conversions and land acquisition. The court’s verdict, pronounced on 17 June 1926, was in Fr Debono’s favour. Later on 16 August the District Court in Purnea upheld that judgment. That made Fr. Debono to be a hero among the Santals for he had fought the powerful Zamindars and defeated



them in court of law and got them back their land from the oppressive Zamindars. That gave him an impetus to lead a movement to get the land that belonged to the tribals from the powerful Zamindars. He wrote in his diary, “The oppression of our people is worse than ever this year... I should go to several places to have justice done to our people.” Ever since, the missionaries have taken up the cause of the oppressed people. Dumka-Raiganj province has distinguished itself in standing with and working for the marginalised tribals – be it Santals or Paharias.

The next important milestone is the young Fr. Benjamin Cauchi leaving the familiar environs of Majlispur and crossing the River Ganges on 6 January 1930 to start the missionary work in Santal Parganas. Initially from a tent at Hiranpur Bazar to a hut in Kasturi village to a proper house and property at Monglapara and finally at Torai was indeed a historic move. Torai became the epicentre of Santal

Mission from which Mundli, Guhijori, Dudhani and several other parishes were established.

Another important milestone was the Santal mission being raised to a dependent region of Calcutta province, with Fr. Josph Portelli as its first Major Superior. And immediately after a very significant chapter in our education ministry was added in 1957 St. Xavier's, Sahibganj was established. That was our attempt to bring English medium education to Santals. Hundreds of professionals and high officials who have passed through the hallowed portals of St. Xavier's now serve in all parts of the world.

Another very significant milestone in the journey of the Santal Region was the decision to extend our work to the Paharias at Satia. It was pioneered by Fr.



P.A. Chacko. So far, as the name indicated, the Santal Region was almost exclusively focusing on the Santals. Finally, the sign of the mission coming of age was when Fr. General raised Santal Region into Dumka-Raiganj province in 1989. The province then embarked on an expansion and consolidation phase in the

last 30 years. In the last few years we have embarked on a journey to reimagining and restructuring our ministries, keeping the UAP's and PAPs in mind. I feel we need to expand and consolidate our social action ministry in order to accompany the marginalized who are forced to migrate for survival. Our people continue to be martyrs of 'development'.

Does the name 'the Santal Mission' hold you back from reaching out to all those in need? Does it hamper the spread of the service of the mission to all peoples?

The name 'Santal Mission' was from an era when 'Missions' were mostly identified with geographical groupings or people. We had Bengal Mission, Patna Mission etc. For most of our Maltese pioneers India was limited to Santal Parganas. So naturally the mission was identified with Santals. But that did not prevent the pioneers from reaching out to other groups like the Bengalis in Islampur



area, Scheduled Caste groups like the Rajbanshis, popularly called Puliya. But the name initially did limit our focus mostly to the Santals. That is why starting of the Paharia mission at Satia in 1983 was a very significant step. Today the name is identified with the area of our mission and not any particular group of people.

This mission of the Jesuits has grown into three dioceses, which have their own priests in addition to religious men and women working in these dioceses. How are Jesuits able to qualitatively contribute to the growth of these dioceses now?

Thank God, all the three dioceses have grown and they have a large number of clergy and religious working to take the mission forward. Today our role is to pioneer into new areas and innovative ways of carrying out our mission. St. Ignatius wanted the Society to go into areas where others do not venture into. We have not focused much on Jamtara district. We need to venture into such areas. We have also pioneered some innovative ministries. The unique ministry of alternative healing that we carry out

“ We are celebrating the growth of the tiny seed that was sown in Majlispur on 9 March, 1925. ”

at Kalidanga, Rampurhat, the Paharia outreach through Satia, Bathbanga and Banpokharia, venturing into higher education through our degree college at Maharo and the recent initiative of starting a pastoral outreach to Paharias through Garki in Mariampahar, and having a Jesuit dedicated full time to promote Peace and Reconciliation work are all innovations that show that the province is living up to the charism of going where others do not, and moving to more 'frontier ministries'.

What, in your view, are the challenges the mission faces?

There are many but I firmly believe that the work we do is the enterprise of the Lord and he will always be with us, helping us face these challenges. With the Lord on our side no challenge is insurmountable. However, we need to address some of these challenges in an urgent manner. I think the primary challenge is to shift from an expansion mode to a consolidation mode. What I mean is that we need to help faith take deep roots – by encouraging family prayers, regular catechism classes for our children, regular visits to our people, reaching out to them for sacramental ministry are all ways we can help deepen the faith of our people. The second challenge we need to address urgently is the displacement of our people in the name of building mines. Expanding stone quarries and coal mines displace our people and that results in large scale migration to other parts of the country. We need to fight for these displaced people and take up cudgels on behalf of them.

Along with this challenge is also the need to address urgently the destruction of the mother earth in the name of large scale indiscriminate mining. We have begun to experience the effect of it in the rising temperatures in summer, dust, pollution of air, faltering monsoons and intense cold wave in winter. For several months in the year our rivers are just dry sand beds. A third challenge for the province, I believe, is the decreasing number of Jesuits in recent years. We need more young men

who are deeply rooted in Christ and committed to promoting justice. Vocation promotion, not through glitzy publicity materials, but through inspiring and credible life should be our calling card for young men to join us.

A fourth challenge that we face now is a severe financial crunch. It began with the prolonged lockdown at the time of the Covid pandemic and the resultant drop in our schools and hostels. Most of our institutions are for the poor and are located in very remote and rural areas. They are not self-reliant. To make matters worse, our FCRA permit was cancelled by the present government at the Centre. So keeping our fees affordable for our poor beneficiaries and sustaining our institutions financially is a major challenge.

“There are many challenges but I firmly believe that the work we do is the enterprise of the Lord and he will always be with us, helping us face these challenges.”

As ‘the Centenary provincial’, do you have a vision for the next 100 years?

There is a song in Santali about Santal Parganas: *Santal Pargana Sona disom...* - Santal Parganas is a land of gold... But this golden land that we inherited has now been made into a dust bowl of stone and coal dust. Forests have disappeared, paddy fields and hills have been

ground into stone dust and coal mines have altered our beautiful landscape into hollow dark pits. The people who lived in peaceful self-administering and socially cohesive villages have disappeared and outsiders have come in, ready to exploit whatever resources are left here.

My dream is that we are committed to working hard to salvage this beautiful land from such unmitigated tragedy and make it again a 'sona disom' truly a golden land for our people – the indigenous and marginalized people. Our people keep rejecting the attempt of the vested interests to divide the tribals according to religion and consolidate their identity as indigenous people who have right over our *Jal, Jameen and Jungle*. I wish that we Jesuits play a pro-active role in this process of restoring the dignity of our people and land. ❖



Can building decarbonization help mitigate climate change?

The climate is changing globally at an unprecedented rate. The Global Precipitation Climatology Centre (GPCC) continues to record increasing rainfall and lasting dry spells each year. Floods, tornados, heat waves, and droughts caused severe damage and threatened people's lives all over the globe last year. The most recent report from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) stated that, during 2023, there were over 20 million weather-related internal displacements.

Can something be done to prevent this from happening again and again?

Most scientists agree that human-produced greenhouse gases (GHGs) are causing climate change. Humanity stands at a crucial crossroads: it must lower its GHG emissions before climate change reaches its tipping point and becomes irreversible for centuries. Now, more than ever, our society must commit to embracing a more sustainable development that respects human lives, especially the poorest ones, and the environment.

Although there has been progress in climate action, such as the EU reducing GHG emissions by over 30% since 1990, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) reports that the measures adopted by countries since the 2015 Paris Agreement have proven insufficient to decrease global GHG emissions. The growing gap from GHG emission targets, combined with the disappointing outcomes from the Conferences of Parties, led to skepticism about successfully containing climate change.

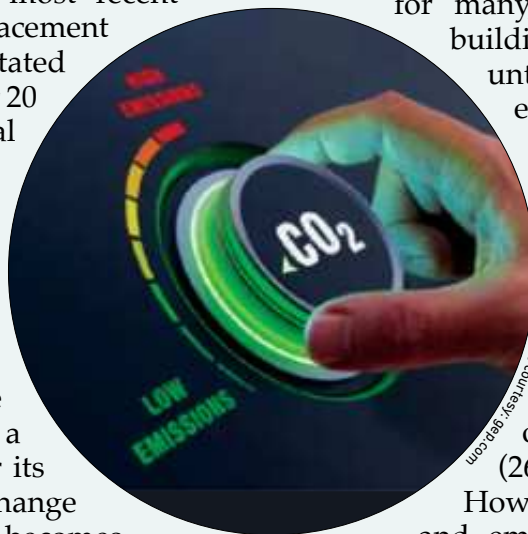
Many are arguing that, at this point, humanity should adapt to live in a hotter world instead. Some are even planning to colonize Mars and the Moon, maybe judging life on Earth as doomed already. We cannot but wonder: if climate change won't be

contained, what will become of those who cannot adapt or escape to another planet? Is there any hope left for stopping this crisis?

If political negotiations and lack of global cooperation have made "top-down" approaches to climate change less effective and quite frustrating for many, "bottom-up" actions such as building decarbonization may represent untapped possibilities to curb GHG emissions.

Buildings are responsible for 6% of global GHG emissions, according to the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Their contribution to GHG emissions may seem marginal compared to others, such as power production (26%) or transportation (15%).

However, when factoring in indirect and embodied GHG emissions tied to buildings and building construction, their share skyrockets to potentially over 30% of total GHG emissions. It is evident that, to mitigate climate change effectively, we must commit to decarbonizing our buildings.



So, what does it mean to decarbonize buildings? Is it something within our reach? Building decarbonization means reducing and potentially eliminating the GHG emissions generated by buildings at each stage of their life cycle. GHG emissions from buildings may fall into two types. The emissions produced by operating a building are known as operational carbon, while the GHG emissions generated during the rest of its life cycle are called embodied carbon. Thanks to technological advancements, it is possible to design and construct Nearly-Zero Emission Buildings (NZEB), which are newly constructed buildings that have zero operational and minimal embodied carbon. These buildings are highly energy-efficient, operate solely on carbon-free energy, and result from optimized design-construction processes that minimize waste from construction materials.

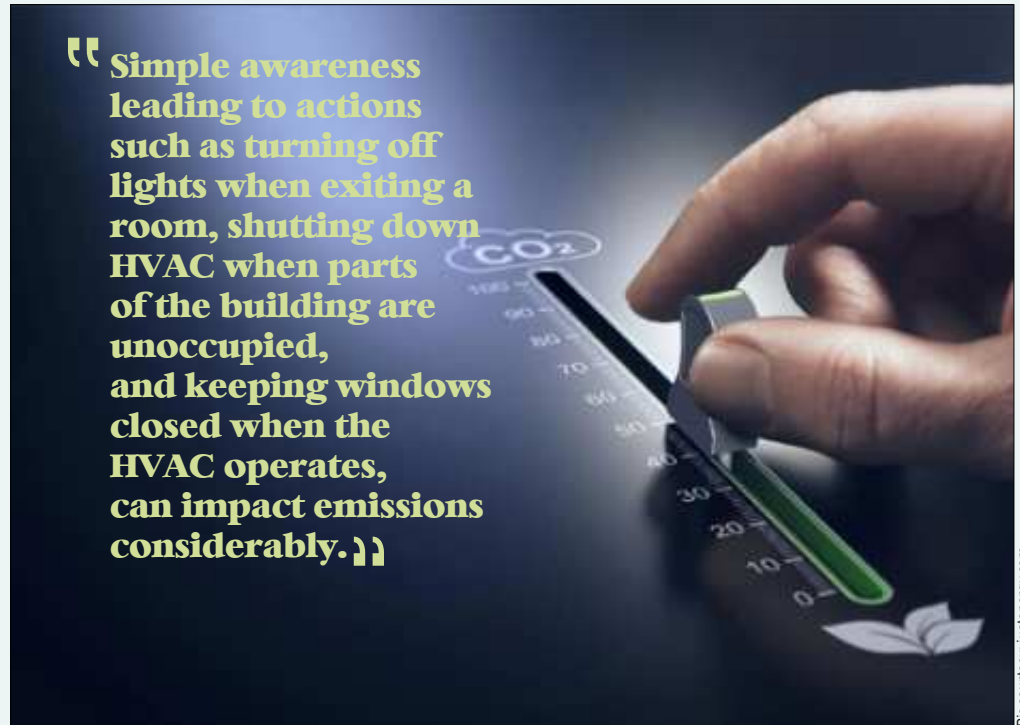
At present, turning an existing building into a NZEB requires high upfront costs. Installing PV panels, building insulation or heat pumps can be expensive and not affordable for many. However, it is possible to reach significant reductions in GHG emissions without major initial costs.

For instance, a key factor in building decarbonization is carbon-free energy. Building owners can purchase carbon-free electricity from a local supplier with a minimal investment. This action could lead to a significant reduction in GHG emissions, sometimes saving up to 50%!

Another critical aspect to consider in building decarbonization is energy efficiency. Incorrect thermostat settings, often caused by poor maintenance or faulty installation, may result in wasted energy. Setting the thermostat to achieve both comfort and energy efficiency or installing programmable thermostats that automatically regulate temperatures based on building use can lower energy demand. Air leaks can be another

significant cause of energy waste. Simply sealing cracks can help to conserve energy and, at the same time, improve indoor comfort. Checking that lamps and luminaires mount LED bulbs is another not-so-expensive way to achieve energy savings.

Finally, people's behavior can highly affect building GHG emissions. Simple awareness leading



to actions such as turning off lights when exiting a room, shutting down HVAC when parts of the building are unoccupied, and keeping windows closed when the HVAC operates, can impact GHG emissions considerably. For instance, a documented case showed that tenants' awareness helped to save as much as 20% of GHG emissions.

Building decarbonization is not just a responsibility for a few. Many low-hanging fruits are within reach for any building owner who wants to reduce global GHG emissions. So much is possible—if only we could believe it! ❖

Source: <https://dimensions.faith/can-building-decarbonization-help-mitigate-climate-change/>

Davide Dell'Oro, SJ, is an Italian Jesuit committed to promoting ecological justice and environmental sustainability. He is currently a visiting scholar at the Polytechnic University of Milan.

Launched: a three-year process to study Jesuit Brothers

On 25 January '25, the International Commission on the Jesuit Brother (ICJB) completed its inaugural meeting in Rome. The week-long meeting launched an ambitious three-year process to deepen the identity, formation, and vocation promotion of the Jesuit Brother.

Established by Fr General Arturo Sosa, the ICJB builds on the work of the International Assembly of Jesuit Brothers that was held in Rome in July 2022. One way that the ICJB seeks to advance the fruits of the Assembly is by broadening the conversation about Jesuit Brothers to include not only Brothers from all parts of the universal Society, but also priests, religious women, and lay partners on mission. Toward this end, the ICJB itself was constituted with a diverse membership, including six Jesuit

and for the many Brothers who have shaped his own vocation. He encouraged the Commission to return to our Sources to understand better how the first Jesuits imagined that consecrated lay religious could be “coadjutors” helping or “co-helping” the rest of the body.

The next three days of the Commission continued a process of discernment, focusing on the themes of identity and mission, the formation of Brothers, and vocation promotion. After initial presentations each morning, the ICJB followed a process of prayer, spiritual conversation, and reflection. Especially appreciated were inputs from Br Wenceslao Soto Artuñedo, SJ and Br Brent Gordon, SJ who provided insightful historical analysis of the brother's vocation, and shared their own vocation stories.



Brothers, one from each Conference – Raymund Belleza, SJ (JCAP), Davidson Braga Santos, SJ (CPAL), Théophile Désarmeaux, SJ (JCEP), James Boynton, SJ (JCCU), Thomas Vaz, SJ (JCSA), and James Edema, SJ (JCAM) – a religious sister, Noelle Corscadden, IBVM, a lay woman, Jennie Hickey, and two Jesuit priests, Clemens Blattert, SJ and Mark Ravizza, SJ. This diversity greatly enhanced the conversation of the ICJB.

The Commission's meeting began with a day of prayer and sharing, led by Fr. General. He started by noting that his reasons for establishing the Commission stem not from worry, but from gratitude for the vocation of the Jesuit Brother

The final step of the meeting drew together the fruits of the previous days and developed a plan of action for the year ahead. Central to this plan was the desire to expand the conversation and to continue to listen to the Spirit speaking through Brother Jesuits, partners on mission, and the wider society. To accomplish this goal, a new moderator was elected – Br Davidson Braga Santos, SJ – and three working groups were formed for three different tasks. The ICJB will continue to meet monthly by Zoom and it invites anyone with feedback or suggestions to reach out to any of the members of the Commission. ❖

Source: <https://www.jesuits.global/>



Centenary reminiscences

The Santal Mission, the foster child of the Sicilian and Maltese missionaries in eastern India, turns a centenarian in 2025. The foster child was well groomed, well pampered and well nourished by them before they handed it over to their Indian counterparts on a platter.

The pioneer, Fr. Anthony Debono, blew the bugle as a clarion call to march towards India. And there came valiant soldiers in Ignatian style to troop into the hinterlands of the tribal belt. Since Fr. Debono planted himself among the Santal tribal community in the northern part of West Bengal, the apostolate became known as the Santal Mission.

Except for three or four of our early pioneers, I have known the rest at close quarters. They were men with intent. Lack of roads, lack of transport facilities or the remoteness of villages did not deter them. As far as the mode of travel was concerned, they took to bullock carts initially; then slowly graduated to cycles and horse carriages; later to motorbikes and finally to four wheelers.

On their village tours, they were at home with the simple accommodation the poor tribals graciously offered. Often, it was the veranda of the house, sometimes near the cattle shed. One missionary recounted that he was once awakened in the middle of the night by a forceful spray of water. The cow nearby was relieving itself! On tours, the accompanying catechist would be sagacious enough to make a surveillance of the surroundings to identify a secure bushy place for the Father to relieve himself in the morning. But whatever be such inconveniences, what the missionary relished was the warm welcome he invariably received.

The Santals have a beautiful custom of receiving their guest with warmth and affection. After making him sit on a portable type of rope-stringed cot, the lady of the house approaches with a *lota* of water and a brass plate. She requests the guest to place his right foot and then the left foot in the plate. Then she washes his legs, wipes them and, as final touch, she gives a soothing massage with mustard oil. The pricks and pains of the long-distance travel evaporate

immediately. That over, she greets him! Following her, the family members come forward and greet the guest. Only after the ceremony, conversation begins between the family members and the guest. The feet washing and oil massage may look queer to some.

But the idea is that usually their guests or relatives have walked a long distance to visit them. When they are given such a welcome treat, they feel much refreshed.

I remember my own experience once. Someone approached the parish priest with a request for a sick call. As a newly ordained priest I was asked by him to go and help out. When I asked him for the direction, he said that the distance

to the village was about five kilometres. He also said that negotiating the hilly path on foot would be difficult. Therefore, he suggested that I ride the pony of the assistant parish priest who was out of station. I told him, "Fr. I have never ridden a horse or a pony." He said reassuringly: "Don't worry; the catechist will guide you." The catechist helped me



climb the pony. Surprisingly, the pony then turned to opposite direction. What a joke! Going along, we had to negotiate a paddy field. When the pony saw a pool of water along the ridge it was walking on, it hop-stepped over the water leaving me in the mud pool. The women who were working in the fields nearby had a hearty laugh! Since it was a long ride, occasionally I would let the catechist ride the pony. On reaching the village, I felt exhausted. But the feet wash and oil massage made me forget the fall and its impact. The head of the family volunteered to give me even a body massage due to my body pain. Refreshed, I was able to lead the prayer service.

The Santals are known for their hospitality, which our missionaries received and relished. Equally, the tribals welcomed and received the Word of God with great generosity and openness of heart. The fervour they showed as new followers of Jesus enthused the missionaries to give their life in service with great commitment. They were simple, amiable, and friendly. The music in their heart reverberated in their cheerfulness and joviality. Their spirituality was simple but inviting. They did not arm themselves with liberation theology. But the gospel they preached and lived by was liberating. That touched the listeners. They did not invite the people to follow them, but, like John the Baptist, they pointed to Jesus the liberator. The seed of the Good News our missionaries planted in the lives of people became fruit-bearing in thirtyfold, eightyfold and hundredfold in the years that followed. Now at the time of the centenary, it is like a great banyan tree with its root hanging and reaching the ground.

I saw my missionary colleagues quite creative in their approach. One showed a curious creativity by carrying the dead body of a TB affected person behind him on the bike from the hospital since no taxi drivers obliged. Another was so overactive that, after a night's travel, he rode to a village for Mass and dozed off while riding. The bushy growth alongside the road helped him get away with merely minor scratches. Another, annoyed with the catechist for his late arrival, took him as the pillion rider on his springless Royal Enfield to give him a bumpy ride. After a few kilometres on a bumpy road, he looked back. There was no pillion rider, as the catechist had fallen off somewhere far behind.

They started educational institutions that opened their doors to one and all, especially the socially disadvantaged people. Parish ministry and educational apostolate went hand in hand. In emergencies like natural calamities or the Indo-Pak war of 1971, they engaged in relief and rehabilitation on a war footing.

Disseminating the Gospel also meant that people's social needs also called for attention. Thanks to his close contact with the people, our pioneer Fr. Debono came across many instances of exploitation and injustice suffered by the poor Santals at the hands of extortionist moneylenders and landlords. He reached out to free them from the clutches of the exploiters. He incurred the wrath of the powerful exploiters and



was victimized with a court case on false charges. Once he was even betrayed by a young man whom he had helped as an orphan.

The Mission became Santal Region under Calcutta Province. Later, as the number of members grew, we had our umbilical cord detached and we became a new Province called Dumka-Raiganj Province. From 1960s on, European missionaries stopped coming. Meanwhile, the steady growth of Indian and local vocations helped with necessary manpower. The credit goes to our senior missionaries who encouraged local vocations. It is to their credit that, as we enter the centenary, we have had five Indian Provincials and an Indian Jesuit bishop.

Today, except for one remaining Maltese priest, Fr. Paul Aquilina, the Province is in Indian hands. We feel grateful to God and to our veteran missionaries who laid the solid foundation of our Mission. We also have the feeling of being challenged with an onerous task of taking our vision-mission ahead requiring commitment, discernment and Ignatian zeal. We have miles to go. ❖

Puthuparambil Chacko, SJ (DUM) is a social worker and an activist. He is best known as the pioneer, who extended the Jesuit mission to the Pahariyas, a hill tribe. He is at present the Director of Arrupe Tribal Cultural Centre, Bhogadih.

“I always left India with much hope”

José Cecilio Magadia, SJ, is a General Counsellor, who resides at the General Curia. A Filipino, Magadia talks to our Roman Correspondent.

Tell us about what made you become a Jesuit.

Many elements came into play that led to my entrance into the novitiate in 1980. One was the political context. The Philippines was under a dictatorship at that time, and the Church was one of the few institutions where fearless voices that challenged the regime were heard. Of those voices, those of the Jesuits were among the most eloquent, most intelligent. Another element was a point of personal history. I studied in the same Jesuit institution, the Ateneo de Manila, from kindergarten to high school. I got to know many Jesuits through the years, some pleasant and some unpleasant, yet all with the same seeming singleness of purpose that was admirable. But a third element, and most important of all, was the awakening of a desire for a special kind of peace – not so much the absence of noise, but more a calmness and tenderness, which I felt in the silence of a retreat.



“ More memorable were the personal contacts in India - the warmth of families, the smiles of children, the energy, the religiosity. ”

What are some of the blessings you received as a Jesuit?

Quite many blessings: Friendships in ministry, opportunities for service, wider visions and wider horizons, growth in compassion, being with real brothers in this least Society of Jesus, a deepening of prayer and faith in God. Life in the Society has also

brought many exciting openings to new worlds, new cultures, new languages – studies in the US, meetings in one or another of our countries in Asia Pacific, and then, with the assignment to Rome came encounters in corners of the earth I did not know existed. It was then, when I was called to be General Counsellor for Formation, that I had a chance to visit South Asia.

What was your experience of India?

Before my first visit, my image of India was of a single nation in one vast subcontinent. I was in for a surprise. The discovery of so many different languages and cultures, an intricate mix of nations really, was mind-blowing for outsiders like me. The different colors and smells, the exotic flavors and foods, the dancing at celebrations, the exciting crowded train rides, the mass of humanity in big city centers. But more memorable were the personal contacts – the



warmth of families, the smiles of children, the energy, the religiosity.

Since my visits were mainly to formation centers, I always left India with much hope. I met novices and tertians, and many other young Jesuits in the different levels between. I talked to professors, pre-novitiate directors, formation coordinators, local superiors. I found myself in conversations, both formal and informal, where many questions were asked – about why I came and what I do, about the Philippines, about the Society, about ministries, about Rome and Father General, about formation in other parts of the world, about the Church and the Pope.



The enthusiasm and keen interest among young Jesuits was invigorating – the desire to be with the poor, the laughter in communities, the inculturated liturgies. But I was also gratified to meet Jesuits in ministry, who had finished their initial formation,



many of whom had that humility to appreciate that they were players in a team, and to be content in that whatever they did was their small contribution to the bigger mission of bringing the healing message of the Gospel into a wounded world.

What do you think of India's future?

I am confident that those in formation today will meet some of these edifying and inspiring brothers in their future lives in the apostolate – men like Fr. Stan Swamy, whom I never personally met, but who has been a powerful prophetic presence in my own life.

My last visit to India was in 2017. That was a long time ago now, and I am not sure when I can go back. When I look back to the whole exhilarating experience of those days, I also realize now that those young Jesuits I met were already living in a political context that was less and less hospitable, and more threatening. I imagine that they will have to learn to embrace uncertainties – and I pray that this will not lead them to overwhelming fear, or despair, or to a kind of paralysis, in a life of less courage, less daring, less creativity.

But uncertainties can lead to something else – to an even deeper certainty – that God is always there, in the smallest details of our lives, in the darkest corners of our hearts. Last week, Father General inaugurated a new Jesuit center in the city of Chernivtsi in Ukraine. The center is called the “Space of Hope” – a center providing psychological and spiritual support for Ukrainians traumatized by the terrible war. Similarly, I am certain that the uncertainties in India will make the young Jesuits of India courageous and hopeful. ❖

The Will of Amrita Pritam

a poem by Amrita Pritam

Amrita Pritam (31 August 1919 – 31 October 2005) was an Indian novelist, essayist and poet, who wrote in Punjabi and Hindi. A prominent figure in Punjabi literature, she is the recipient of the 1956 Sahitya Akademi Award. Her body of work comprised over 100 books of poetry, fiction, biographies, essays, a collection of Punjabi folk songs and an autobiography that were all translated into several Indian and foreign languages.



Pic courtesy: thetalentedindian.com

Fully conscious and in good health
I am writing today my will ...

After my death
Ransack my room
Search each item
That is scattered
Unlocked
Everywhere in my house

Donate my dreams
To all those women
Who between the confines of
The kitchen and the bedroom
Have lost their world
Have forgotten years ago
What it is to dream



Pic courtesy: prokerala.com

Scatter my laughter
Among the inmates of old-age homes
Whose children
Are lost
To the glittering cities of America



Pic courtesy: lawnm.com

There are some colours
Lying on my table
With them dye the sari of the girl
Whose border is edged
With the blood of her man
Who wrapped in the tricolor
Was laid to rest last evening



Pic courtesy: thebrorant.blogspot.com



Pic courtesy: samayam.com

Give my tears
To all the poets
Every drop
Will birth a poem
I promise

My honour and my reputation
Are for the woman
Who prostitutes her body
So her daughter can get an education

Make sure you catch the youth
Of the country, everyone
And inject them
With my indignation
They will need it
Come the revolution



Pic courtesy: educationmatters.in

My ecstasy
Belongs to
That Sufi
Who
Abandoning everything
Has set off in search of God

Finally
What's left
My envy
My greed
My anger
My lies
My selfishness
These
Simply
Cremate with me.



Pic courtesy: google.com



Turning the tide

Shyam was a smart young boy with great ambitions studying in a semi urban school. He fared well in studies and was quite liked by his teachers and classmates. Stepping into school finals, his one consuming desire was to make his last year in school eventful. He wanted to be acclaimed and remembered as a hero. Eager to draw attention to himself, he began sporting a punky hairstyle, get dressed in gaudy colours, and was seen hanging out with the town's riffraff. Boisterous and defiant, he soon acquired notoriety.

Shyam started skipping classes, attracting attention to himself for all the wrong reasons. Those who knew him thought that an intelligent, affable student was slowly but surely heading to perdition.

As the year was coming to a close, his class teacher, when preparing his character certificate, left a blank against the column: character. "I know you have performed consistently well in your studies in the past. Twice you were elected class captain and had led many group activities. You were a diligent sportsman winning medals, at least till the last year. My concern is

about what you have turned out to be this last quarter. There have been many and frequent complaints about you. Some negative remarks mentioned include defiance, absenteeism, aggression, challenges teachers, disturbing class. Shyam, I don't really know how to grade your character. Last year I would have readily awarded 'Excellent' for your character. But your recent conduct has been diametrically opposed to what you have been all these years. I don't know what to do. Therefore, I am leaving this column blank. I shudder to think of the consequences of the label 'Poor' against your character. It's a stigma you'll carry all your life. Opportunities would be denied, all doors will be closed. I don't want your future ruined. Yet, in conscience I can't help you. So, I'm forwarding all our records of your years in this school to the principal. Let the Principal take the call."

Shyam took some time to process what his teacher had said. With tears flowing down his cheeks and shaking all over. The weight of his teacher's words pressed down on him like a heavy blanket. "How did I let this happen? I never wanted to be labelled a

‘troublemaker,’” he thought. He wanted to be a hero but now ended up feeling like the villain of his own story.

He knocked on the principal’s door. “Come in, Shyam,” a calm voice called from inside. Mr. John, the principal, looked up from his desk. “I read the report from your teacher. You’ve always been a good student. What’s going on?”

Shyam looked down at his shoes, unsure of how to begin. “I want people to notice me. I’ve always been a good student, but it doesn’t feel like enough anymore.” His voice trembled as he spoke.

Mr. John leaned back in his chair. “Ah, I see the desire for recognition. But Shyam, you must be careful how you seek it. True greatness doesn’t come from wearing fashionable clothes or hanging out with rowdy friends.”

Shyam responded in an agitated tone, “Sir, I have tried, but no one notices me unless I do something dramatic.”

Mr. John’s expression softened. “That’s where you are making a mistake. You’re confusing attention with respect. Attention is fleeting, but true respect is earned through integrity, valuing others, and doing the right thing, even when it’s hard. Let me share a story to illustrate this point.”

He paused and continued, “Once, there was a potter renowned for his beautiful work. One day, eager for attention, he crafted a pot with bright colours and intricate designs. However, in his rush to impress, he ignored the quality and strength of the material. When he finally showed it to others, the pot shattered under its weight. From this, he learned that true beauty comes from strength and substance, not just decoration.”

Shyam listened attentively, processing the story. Mr. John added, “Shyam, take some time to reflect. What do you truly want? Is it empty glory or true respect?” Shyam sat silently before asking, “So, you’re saying I’ve been focusing too much on what people think of me?”

Mr. John responded. “Exactly. You have a great deal of potential, but you’ve been chasing external validation instead of nurturing your inner strength.” He leaned forward, speaking in a gentle tone. “Shyam, your name represents wisdom, cheerfulness, and strength. Don’t let your mistakes define you. As Soren Kierkegaard said, ‘Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.’ Learn from your past, but don’t let it hold you back.”

Mr. John stood up, his voice firm again. “I’m giving you two months to prove that you can turn things around before I finalize your character certificate. I hope you live up to your name.”

As Shyam left the office, he felt lighter, as if a weight had been lifted. He wasn’t sure what the future held, but he was ready to face it with honesty and a renewed sense of purpose. His friends were

waiting near the gate. Ravi, who had introduced him to the gang, sneered, “So, did Mr. John give you money for the bar, or did he tell you to cry even louder?”

Shyam hesitated, still processing his principal’s words. “I don’t know,” he mumbled, struggling to explain himself. Ajay, the eldest among the group, shrugged. “Chill, man. Don’t let the principal change who you are. Life is about enjoying every moment. Come on, let’s hit the bar.” As they walked toward the bar, Shyam thought, “My parents work so hard to pay for my school and hostel fees, hoping I’ll have a better future. How can I betray their trust? What am I doing?”

Shyam then spoke firmly, “I’m sorry, guys, but I can’t go with you anymore.” He turned abruptly and walked back toward the hostel.

That night, as he lay down on his bed, he realized that change doesn’t happen overnight, but it had to start somewhere, and that somewhere was now. ❖

“**Attention is fleeting, but true respect is earned through integrity, valuing others, and doing the right thing, even when it’s hard.**”

Sch M Pavingaolou Anthony, SJ (KHM) is a second-year student of Philosophy at Jnana Deepa, Pune.



The first person whom Jesus learnt to call ‘Abba’

The most important model of faith for us Christians is the holiest of all couples - Joseph and Mary. This month we celebrate the Feasts of both - Joseph on 19 and Mary on 25 March, but here we will look at Joseph, the man of faith, par excellence.

First, what is the virtue of Faith? Vatican II's *Dei Verbum* (n.5) explains: “The obedience of faith must be given to God as He reveals Himself. By this obedience, man freely commits himself entirely to God, making the full submission of his intellect and will to the God who reveals, and willingly assenting to the revelation given by him.”

Commenting on this text, Pope St John Paul II wrote: “This statement, which touches the very essence of faith, is perfectly applicable to Joseph of Nazareth” (*Apostolic Letter, Redemptoris Custos*, 1989). Indeed, with childlike faith, when faced with the problem of his wife's pregnancy before they lived

together – instead of following his own humane plan (“being a just man, and unwilling to put her to shame, he resolved to send her away quietly” – Mt 1:19), Joseph “did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took Mary as his wife” (v. 24).

He fully obeyed the angel a second time when he was told to “take the child and his mother by night” and so “he departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod” (Mt.2:14 f).

There were no limits to Joseph's faith, hope and love. God also blessed Joseph with special graces in order to equip him for the twin vocation of husband and father. In his prayer time (also at other times), Joseph “experienced the love of God poured into his heart by the Holy Spirit (cfr. Rom 5:5), so that this same love could then overflow through him to his wife and divine child.

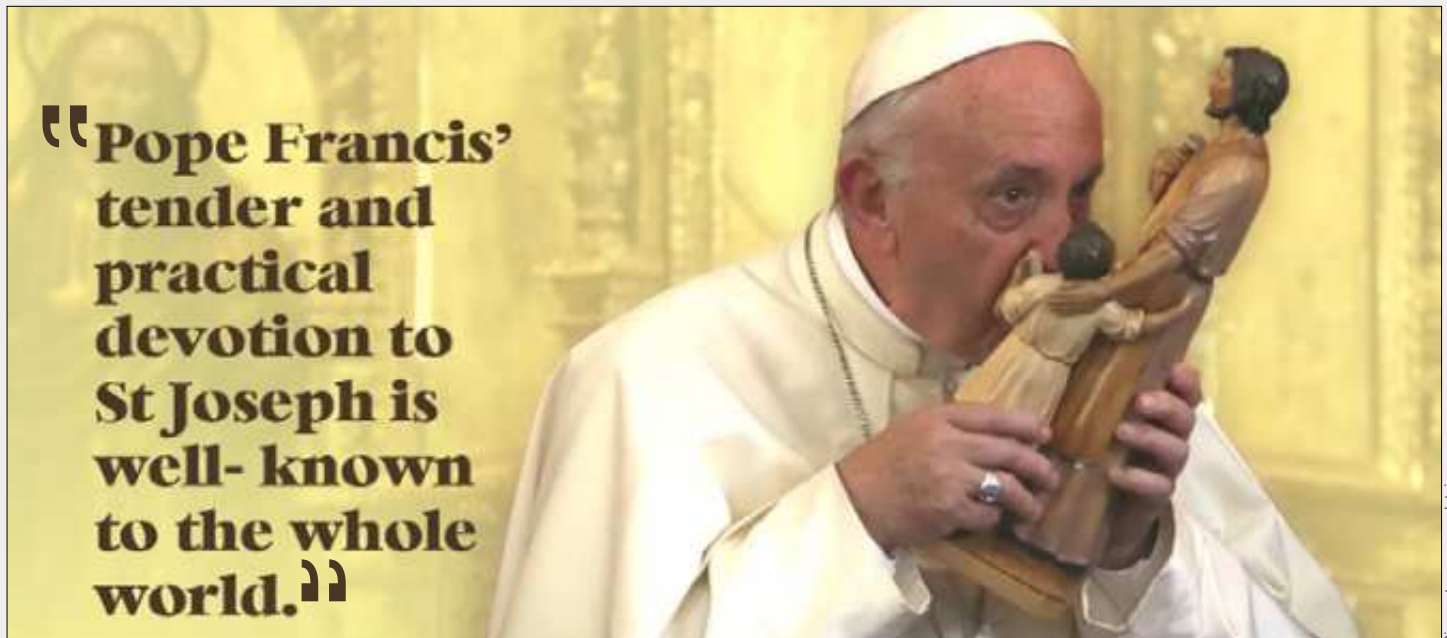


The Holy Spirit also prepared Joseph to be, with Mary, the first teacher of the boy Jesus, so Joseph obviously received also the messianic gifts of “wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude and the fear of the Lord” (Is.11:1). Also, the line, Jesus “was obedient to them” (Lk.2:51) means, according to John Paul II, that Jesus shared in the work of Joseph and became known as ‘the carpenter’s son.’ So the Church also celebrates another feast of St Joseph, the Worker on 1 May.

The first person whom Jesus learnt to call ‘Abba’ was St Joseph, and the child Jesus’ first experiences of masculine, paternal love came from the delighted, loving embraces of his foster Daddy, Joseph. John Paul II also pointed out, “Joseph was told by the angel to name the child; thus Joseph declares his own legal fatherhood over Jesus. A son’s circumcision was the first religious obligation of a Jewish father, and with this ceremony (Lk.2:21) Joseph exercised

shares in authentic human fatherhood and the mission of a father in the family... ‘Your father and I... have been looking for you’. This is no conventional phrase: Mary’s words to Jesus show the complete reality of the mystery of the family of Nazareth. From the beginning, Joseph accepted with the ‘obedience of faith’ his human fatherhood over Jesus. And thus, following the light of the Holy Spirit, he certainly came to discover ever more fully the indescribable gift that was his human fatherhood.”

The purpose of John Paul II’s 1989 Apostolic Letter was “so that all may grow in devotion to the patron of the universal Church ... that the whole Christian people will not only turn to St Joseph with greater fervor and invoke his patronage with greater trust, but also will always keep before their eyes his humble, mature way of serving, and of taking part in the plan of salvation.”




his right and duty with regard to Jesus... At this event, Joseph named the child, ‘Jesus’: the significance of this name, the only name in which there is salvation, had been revealed to Joseph by the angel: ‘You shall call the child Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins’ (Mt.1:21)”.

In the Holy Family, Joseph is the father: his fatherhood is not one that derives from begetting offspring; but neither is it an ‘apparent’ or merely ‘substitute’ fatherhood. Rather, it is one that fully

Our dear brother-Jesuit Pope Francis also wrote an inspiring Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde* (2020). His personal example of a tender and practical devotion to St Joseph is well-known to the whole world. May each of us too be blessed with a tender and practical devotion to St Joseph, Patron of the Universal Society of Jesus! ❖

Fiorello Mascarenhas, now 81, celebrates his Priestly Golden Jubilee this year. He is a prolific author (28 books) and speaker on biblical and Ignatian Spirituality. He can be contacted at: frfiomas@gmail.com.



Hope and uncertainty as A new Syria is born

(In this interview given to Vatican News in December 2024 **Vincent de Beaucoudrey, SJ**, Director, Jesuit Refugee Service in Syria, talks, from his own experience, about Syria today.)

What is happening in Syria?

In Damascus, after the fall of the regime and the flight of President Bashar al- Assad, there were scenes of jubilation. They are gradually giving way to a return to normal life, as the new authorities take charge and reassure the population about their intentions and the future of the country. Despite his group's close historical ties to radical Islamism, Abu Mohammad al- Jolani, the leader of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) rebels, and the new strongman of the country, claims he wants to build a "plural" Syria, where all communities will have their place.

You are in Damascus now. What differences do you see between the situation you were in three years ago in Homs and today in Damascus?

There are many significant differences. But, deep down, there are also many similarities, of course. Politically, it's completely different. The worries are not the same. But the fact remains that the country

is in ruins, the economy is in ruins, and many people have left. Today, we are in a great deal of uncertainty. That's what defines Syria today: uncertainty - the fact that every day you have to change your plans and you don't know what tomorrow will bring. Everything changed in ten days. This uncertainty can generate hope; it can provoke a certain joy because things are changing, and we wanted them to change. But it also creates fear.

Are the Syrians you meet on a daily basis expressing themselves more freely in recent days?

Yes, there are topics on which people are speaking more freely. Now, you can talk about Sednaya - the prison where political prisoners of the regime were held - without any problem. You can talk about military conscription. You can even laugh, though nervously, about the police excesses of the fallen regime. But there are still other things that remain complicated. It's still difficult to talk about how to be

so different and form one people together. It's still complicated to address religious differences...A bit like before.

Many Christians have left. Some may try to return, as many Syrians have done in recent days. But do we have any assurance, or at least some hope, that Christians will be able, for example, to celebrate Christmas in peace in a few days?

Yes, if we're talking in the short term, I think we can say yes. What the new authorities are saying is that they want to form a Syria with the Christians, and that everyone has their place. In Aleppo, where they've been for ten days now, they allowed Christmas decorations in the churches, on the façades, etc. So, in the short term, yes. The anxiety lies in the long term, in the direction the country will take. This anxiety exists because the country is not yet stabilized.

Do you think there are more reasons to hope than to worry today?

I'm not entirely sure. But we are Christians, so the challenge is to bet on hope.

Have you met any refugees who have made the journey back and come to Damascus?

The teams I work with, yes. But these are people who haven't come from far away. They're arriving from Lebanon or Turkey, where they were living in poor conditions in camps. They were in situations where they couldn't return for political reasons, but they hadn't built a life elsewhere.

Today, can we hope that, if international sanctions are lifted, the country can begin to rebuild? Or does this reconstruction have to happen under the weight of the international sanctions against Syria?

The international community saddens me a bit because it's saying that the return of refugees is no longer an issue before lifting the sanctions and opening embassies in Syria. If they believe the country is safe,



Pic courtesy: middleeastmonitor.com

they should reopen their embassies, establish ties, get to know the situation, lift the sanctions, and only then say that refugees can or must return. That's the first thing. The second is that lifting the sanctions is indeed a necessary step. We also need people to invest—not just through humanitarian aid, but also with commercial investments, investments to revive Syrian industry and trade. From here, it's shocking to see countries building walls before reopening embassies and removing sanctions.

How do you personally feel, as someone who has returned to Damascus in recent months?

My personal feeling is to try to embrace the fear and anxiety for tomorrow and live with the people through it, sometimes being terrified, including by the Israeli bombings, which,

recently, have been very intense. At the same time, I think we have to trust that it is possible that we can do it together and take the new leaders seriously - despite the history. Now those in power say they want to live in a plural Syria. Let's take that seriously. Let's try. ❖

Source: <https://www.vaticannews.va/>



Even in the darkest moments of human history

Film: *The Pianist* (2002)

Director: Roman Polanski

Run time: 150 minutes

The *Pianist* is a powerful film for its subtlety and commitment. In this biographical movie Roman Polanski tells the story of Władysław Szpilman, a young Jewish musician who survived the Nazi holocaust. It is a deeply personal work of art, since Polanski himself was a victim of the Nazi horrors in the notorious Warsaw ghetto. He lost his mother in a concentration camp. Instead of merely dramatizing the horrors of that particularly dark chapter of modern human history, the movie presents to us of the goodness of humanity that overrides racism and hate as well as the transcendent power of art through which God's grace manifests itself even in the darkest moments in history.

The story begins with the early life of Władysław Szpilman, the Jewish young man, who was an acclaimed pianist for Polish radio, before 1939 when the war broke out. He was living with his parents and siblings. Their life is disrupted when Nazi Germany invades Poland. The occupying Nazis force Szpilman and his family, along with other members of the Jewish community, to move into the infamous Warsaw Ghetto, where they endure brutality and live in extreme poverty and hunger.

We get a realistic picture of the abuse Jews faced on a daily basis from their Nazi captors and the psychological toll it takes on Szpilman and his family. His father is abused in the streets and food is scarce. Szpilman escapes the ghetto, going underground surviving on the kindness of non-Jewish friends and strangers. He faces numerous challenges, barely avoiding capture, foraging food and sleeping in abandoned buildings. While in hiding, he is witness to the ill-fated 'Warsaw Uprising' that took place in April – May 1943 through the window of a flat and its bloody suppression. Szpilman's God-given gift of music enables him to retain a sense of humanity amidst the barbarism and bloodshed that surrounds him, providing the key to his survival.

While Szpilman is hiding like a rat inside a wrecked house, Hosenfeld, a German officer, discovers him. Learning that Szpilman is a pianist, the officer invites him to play for him on a dusty piano in the building. Music helps Szpilman regain his dignity and also



allows the German officer to look beyond race and prejudice. The officer's love of music spares Szpilman's life. He befriends Szpilman, providing him with food and clothing. Szpilman survives the war and is eventually liberated by Soviet troops, while Hosenfeld is taken prisoner along with other German soldiers. The film ends with Szpilman returning to his passion for music, playing Chopin's *Piano Concerto* to a packed audience. ❖

Prof. Gigy Joseph Koottummel, former Head of the Department of English, SB College, Changanacherry is a sought-after writer, translator, columnist and actor-director of Shakespeare productions.

Deeply motivated

I was deeply motivated by reading the article “The silent symphony of service” by Fr. Bala Kumar Bollineni SJ, in the January ‘25 issue of *Jivan*. It has given me a different perception of the significant aspect of service. In addition to that, the article has broadened my eyes and heart for true service without expecting anything in return. Jesus invites us as his servants to serve his little brothers and sisters, who are in most need. Let us find God in serving others!

| Sch. Amruth Raj, SJ | Trivandrum

The best reward we can give them

The article, “I am a 77-year-old woman and I still matter” by Janina Gomes in the January ‘25 issue of *Jivan*, is an eye-opener. The elderly persons are the bridge between two generations. They share their experiences and mould us through their paternal or maternal accompaniment and support. They are the precious assets of a family. Their presence matters a lot. Having elders at home helps children experience the love of granny and grandpa. Home is the first school from where children have to learn many lessons for life. I have fond memories of how my grandparents used to share with me their experiences. When my parents were away for work, my grandparents cared for me. The best reward we can give them for all they have done for us is to respect their presence amidst us.

| Arun Kumar Thangaraj, SJ | Trivandrum

The love and grace that surround us

I read the article by Fr Emmanuel Arockiam, SJ., titled ‘The Magic of Christmas’ in the Christmas issue, and I was deeply moved by its insightful reflections. One thought that particularly resonated with me was the question, ‘How do Christians abroad celebrate Christmas?’ It made me realize that Christmas has truly become a global celebration, even among those who may not practice Christianity. The festive season has evolved into a time for reflection, where we not only celebrate but also look back with gratitude for the blessings of the past year. To me, Christmas offers hope and strength as I face life’s challenges. More than a festival, it is a guiding light, reminding us of the love and grace that surround us.

| Sukumar Pendyala, SJ | Thiruvananthapuram

Thought provoking

The article titled ‘Design Thinking and Jesuit Innovation’ by Fr. Willson Moras SJ in the October issue of *Jivan* was incredibly thought-provoking and inspiring. It motivated me to appreciate the vision of Shimano. One of the biggest challenges in today’s world is pollution, and Shimano recognized this issue clearly, encouraging others to use bicycles as a sustainable mode of transport. Secondly, the missionary zeal of the Jesuits deeply resonated with me. This article challenged me to embrace the missionary spirit and consider how to bring this mission into the realm of artificial intelligence. Above all, it reminded me to stay rooted in Christ.

| Richard, SJ | Trivandrum



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(signed)
PARMAR FRANCIS



Alphonse William, SJ (MDU)

Fr. William was born in Tiruchi on 22 February 1949. Popularly known as 'Appu Willie' he was a committed educator and he believed that all his works should be interlaced with the social thinking. For him, education and social commitment were two sides of the same coin. He used to say that teaching was God's gift. He encouraged other Jesuits to join the school ministry.

One of the new initiatives he introduced in secondary education was the Day Scholar Centre. He gave much importance to the well-being of the day scholars. He treated all with equal respect and provided all the facilities. He did the same in Oriyur. Be it day or night he accompanied the students during the study hours. In the evening, Fr. William introduced group study engaging high achievers to teach low learners and moulded

almost all of them as high achievers. He gave personal attention to struggling students in order to boost their morale to pass out meritoriously. He is one of the founders of LASAC movement. As part of his Prison Ministry at Palayamkottai, he helped many innocent victims to get acquitted through lawyers who were his former students.

Fr. Alphonse William joined the Beschi Illam community on 2 November 2021, for medical care and rest. He was suffering from multiple ailments, including Parkinsons and gradual loss of sight. He breathed his last very quietly at 7.00 a.m. on 22 December 2024. Fr. Thomas Amirtham, the Provincial, was the chief celebrant at the funeral Mass on 23 December.

|| Y.S. Yagoo SJ & L. Michael Doss, SJ



Anand Minj, SJ (RAN)

Sch. Anand Minj was called to his heavenly abode on 2 January 2025, after a brief stay in Samford Hospital, Ranchi. He was 28 years of age and had spent 6 years in the Society of Jesus – perhaps one of the youngest Jesuits to die in the Society in the recent past!

Born on 30 June 1996, in Katkayan, Majhatoli, Jharkhand, Anand entered the Novitiate in the year 1918 at Sitagarha, Hazaribag. His First Vows were postponed because of a severe skin ailment that he developed. Timely treatment began and after some time Anand recovered from his sickness. He took his First Vows on 20 December 2020 in Manresa House, Ranchi. After a year of Juniorate in Sitagarha, Hazaribag, he joined St. Xavier's College, Ranchi for his undergraduate studies. He continued to visit his doctor as and when it was

needed. In January this year, he was rushed to Constant Lievens Hospital, Mandar. It was diagnosed that some of his vital organs had been adversely affected. He was rushed to Samford Hospital, Ranchi, but, in spite of all efforts, he succumbed to his sickness on 2 January 2025.

True to his name, 'Anand' (joy), he radiated joy to others, being always ready to lend a helping hand to the needy, especially the elderly and infirm. Despite his persistent health challenges, Sch. Anand remained an active and enthusiastic member of the Manresa House community. Whether in studies or community activities, he always gave his best, leading from the front with a smile. His resilience and courage were deeply inspiring.

|| Sch. Robin Minj, SJ



Cosmas Kurikkattil, SJ (GUJ)

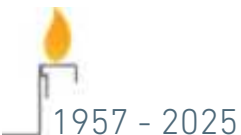
Many were shocked at the sudden death of Fr. Cosmas Kurikkattil on 11 January 2025, due to a massive heart attack. When he died he was 68 years old, having lived 50 years in the Society and 37 years as a priest. The large congregation who had gathered to bid him 'adieu' at his funeral on 13 January, is a testimony to Fr. Cosmas' popularity and the high esteem with which he was held by all.

Fr. Cosmas was an educationist. Immediately after his ordination he was appointed the Principal of St. Xavier's School in Kalol and ever since, he has been a Principal of the Jesuit Schools in Bhiloda, Mandali, and Dhandhuka. He has also had some stints in the pastoral ministry. He has always been concerned about the plight of the people and did all he could to help

alleviate their suffering. He had a generous heart always ready to help anyone in need immediately, without counting the cost. He was committed to his Jesuit vocation and to the mission entrusted to him. He believed that education was the key to empower the disadvantaged sections of society. He did all he could to ensure this.

Born on 3 January 1957 in Kummannoor, Kerala, Fr. Cosmas joined the Society on 1 July 1974. He was ordained in Pottenkad, Kerala, on 11 May, 1987. He pronounced his final vows on 3 December, 1997. He was called to his eternal and well-merited reward in his Golden Jubilee year as a Jesuit.

|| Cedric Prakash, SJ





Richard Sequeira, SJ (KAR)

A Jesuit priest whose life radiated service, wisdom, and gentle kindness, passed away on 10 January 2025, leaving a legacy of profound impact. Born in Mangalore, Fr. Richard dedicated his 90 years to God and the Society of Jesus, touching countless lives.

A trained mathematician, Fr. Richard's intellectual gifts extended beyond academia. He served the Karnataka Province as Socius to the Provincial, meticulously preserving its history as the Province Archivist. His keen eye for detail benefited numerous publications, ensuring clarity and accuracy through his meticulous proofreading. He also served as Rector of Jeppu Seminary, Novice Director, and Junior Instructor, shaping the formation of numerous seminarians and scholastics, inspiring them to embrace a life of service.

Fr. Richard embodied deep faith and compassion.

He lived a life of remarkable simplicity, generously sharing his time, wisdom, and love. His generosity knew no bounds, and he was always ready with a listening ear or a helping hand, especially for confessions and spiritual direction. He preferred working behind the scenes, uplifting others with quiet guidance and support. His life exemplified core Jesuit values: unwavering service to the poor and needy, and leading by example. Even in his later years, his spirit remained vibrant as his physical strength waned.

Fr. Richard's passing is deeply mourned, but his gentle spirit, profound wisdom, and boundless compassion will forever inspire. He will be deeply missed by his Jesuit brothers, his family, and all who knew him. May he rest in peace!

Charles Lasrado, SJ



Thomas (Tom) Karthanam, SJ (PAT)

Fr. Thomas Karthanam was born in Cherthala, Kerala, on 7 January 1939. He joined the Society on 1 July 1959. After his ordination on 29 April 1975, he did his M. Sc and his M. Ed from Loyola University, Chicago, USA. He was professor at Loyola college of Education, Jamshedpur, from 1984-89. Then he was the principal of St. Xavier's College of Education, Patna, from 1989-2008.

He was an exceptionally talented person. His main contribution to the Society and the Church has been in the field of higher education. As Principal of St. Xavier's College of Education, he exhibited the qualities of an excellent educationalist and administrator. He had

a very cordial relationship with the students and the teaching and clerical staff.

A man of integrity, he always had a very positive attitude and never harbored any ill feelings towards others. We have never heard him speak ill of others. He had also a great sense of humor. The key to his loving relationships with others was his deep spiritual life.

He retired to Xavier Bhawan in 2022. Fr. Thomas Karthanam passed away on 27 January 2025. In his death Patna Jesuit Province and the Church in Bihar and Jharkhand have lost a very committed, loyal and exceptionally gifted and honest Jesuit priest.

Jose Thayil, SJ



Walter Saldanha, SJ (PUN)

Fr. Walter Saldanha was born in Laheria Sarai, Bihar. He joined the Society of Jesus on 20 June 1955. After his ordination on 23 March 1968, he was missioned to the Ahmednagar district, where he spent three years. He was then assigned to Stephen Niwas, Pune, in 1971, as Director of a Scholarship Scheme to provide support to poor students for higher studies. He remained at Stephen Niwas for the next 51 years, till 2022, when he moved to the St. Vincent Jesuit residence.

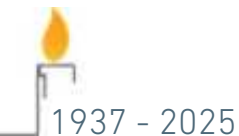
Vatican II and the General Congregation 32 changed the course of Fr. Walter's life. His single-minded commitment to 'faith that does justice' inspired him to take sides with the exploited. He decided to study law and soon began reaching out to victims of injustice, like workers in small-scale industries and those who did not receive their just

wages or dues. Since going to the court consumed a lot of time and energy, he decided to work on drafting arguments and on documenting them carefully. He then collaborated with committed advocates to take up the cases.

He served for three years as the Vice-Rector of St. Vincent community and Manager of St. Joseph Night School, and for eight years as the Manager of St. Vincent Night College. What touched and endeared him to all was his ever-ready attitude to help anyone in need.

In 2022 he had to retire from his work at Stephen Niwas and move to the St. Vincent Jesuit residence. His visits to the hospital became frequent. Eventually, he passed away peacefully early in the morning of 28 January 2025.

Robert Das, SJ & Kenneth Misquitta, SJ





The hallmark of civilization

This happened over seventy years ago. One day when the afternoon sun filtered through the towering palms encircling our outback kindergarten, the tranquility was shattered by sudden, thunderous gunshots, followed by heavy thuds that ripped into the silence.

We sat upright, rushed to the windows and saw some men, aiming their guns into the leafy palms above. With each shot, majestic sulphur-crested white cockatoos plummeted from their lofty canopy, landing without grace, their once-white wings now twisted, crumpled and broken, just meters away from us. Some, despite their injuries, attempted to fly, their wide eyes filled with confusion and fear.

Childhood innocence shattered, this gory act of destruction etched itself into my consciousness. I steadfastly believe that kindness toward all living beings is the hallmark of civilization. What I saw echoed another truth: whether against humans, or the entirety of Nature, such violence actually hurts us. All of Nature is inseparably connected to us, humans. True wisdom is to stand in wonderment before all things, see beauty everywhere and touch it with all your love.

Practice of meditation and zen can help us observe the spring flowers looking prettier; the mountain streams cascading their way to the lowlands, seem to be cooler and clearer; and as human life becomes more consciously enjoyable, because it takes in the whole cosmos. Here is an element of enlightenment for which it is undoubtedly worth striving.

Wisdom, accompanied by compassion, is expressed in everyday life when relating with one's self, other people, and Nature. Yet for many people life is consumed by a dualistic paradigm leading to stress and anxiety. Instead, Zen encourages a holistic and non-dualistic perspective in our understanding of everyday life, people and Nature. This is what is called 'buddha-nature.'

Back then, someone calculated parts of Nature were desirable, and other parts were not. The slaughter of beautiful cockatoos happened because some people thought they competed with humans.

There is much to learn here. There is a lovely verse which captures this: The spring flowers, the moon in autumn,/ The cool breezes of summer, the winter's snow;/ If idle concerns do not cloud the mind,/ This is man's happiest season.

A tiny flower blooms in your garden, grows from a single seed, and will one day return to the earth. We don't know from whence came its pretty little face, nor to where it will disappear. The self embraces heaven and earth; the self is the world, the world the self. The self enfolds heaven and earth, eternity and time. It enfolds also the mountains, rivers, the wide earth, sun and moon, and is found in a flower's pretty little face and a flock of sulphur-crested white cockatoos. ❖

Rev. Dr. Meath Conlan is a Counsellor and Adult Educator. He travels frequently to India. He can be contacted at meathconlan@icloud.com





"I am slowly getting into dementia, I agree. They don't allow me to drive anymore. Last time I drove, I went straight to my previous community and tried to settle in the room where I used to stay."



"You must be new here. I am Fr. Sam. Nice to meet you."
 "Yeah! Nice to meet you too. I have been in this community with you for the past 5 years."



"I remember we have been friends for over 50 years all the way from the novitiate. Before I leave now, may I ask, 'What is your name?'"



"For the last one hour you did manifestation of conscience of your community members. Now please tell me something about yourself."

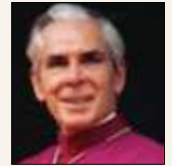
Melwyn Pinto, SJ

JESUIT HUMOUR

Faux Pas

The late Fr. Edward Hambye (1916–1990), a renowned Belgian Jesuit historian and author of *Christianity in India*, arrived in India as a scholastic with only a basic knowledge of English. Despite this, he managed to express himself in his own unique style. Reflecting on his parents' visit to India for his ordination, he shared: "Both my parents, mon père and ma mère, (my father and my mother) came to Kurseong for my ordination. They traveled by airmail. However, the airline staff were careless and sent my parents' cabbage on a different flight. My parents were very disappointed and upset. So, they went to the airport authorities and filed a suitcase."





The God of the second chance



Pic courtesy: rtpa.org

It's never too late. In Lent, we should look ahead rather than back. Though time is too precious to waste, it must never be thought that what was lost is irretrievable. Once the Divine is introduced, then comes the opportunity to make up for losses. God is the god of the second chance.

Peter denied, but he had the second chance in which to become as solid as a rock. There really is such a thing as a “second birth”. Being born again means that all that went before is not held against us. The thief on the right side of the Lord on Calvary wasted a human life, but in accepting pardon won eternal life.

Season of Love: We can think of Lent as a time to eradicate evil or cultivate virtue, a time to pull up weeds or to plant good seeds. Which is better is clear, for the Christian ideal is always positive rather than negative.

A person is great not by the ferocity of his hatred of evil, but by the intensity of his love for God. Asceticism and mortification are not the ends of a Christian life; they are only the means. The end is charity. Penance merely makes an opening in our ego in which the Light of God can pour. As we deflate ourselves, God fills us. And it is God's arrival that is the important event.

Dying daily: If we are to live for Christ, we must “die daily”. Lent is an ideal time to think about our

own death. A happy death is a masterpiece and no masterpiece is ever perfected in a day. Dubois spent seven years in making the wax model for his celebrated statue of Joan of Arc – and it stands today as a ravishing perfection of the sculptor's art. In like manner our death must appear as a ravishing perfection of the many years of labour we have given over to its mould by dying daily. Unless we die to the world with its vices and its concupiscences, we shall not spring forth into life everlasting. If we wish to save our life, we must lose it.

Happiness – not pleasure. Only God brings happiness. Lenten practices of giving up pleasures are good reminders that the purpose of life is not pleasure. The purpose of life is to attain to perfect life, all truth and undying ecstatic love – which is the definition of God. In pursuing that goal we find happiness. Pleasure is not the purpose of anything. It is the pleasure-seeker who is bored, for all pleasures diminish with repetition.

One of the best ways to get happiness is to ask ourselves, “How can I please God?” and, “Why am I not better?” ❖

WELL SAID

“As women achieve power, the barriers will fall. As society sees what women can do, as women see what women can do, there will be more women out there doing things, and we’ll all be better off for it.”

- Ruth Bader Ginsburg



Pic courtesy: ID.wp.com