

August, 2024

# JIVAN

NEWS AND VIEWS OF JESUITS IN INDIA



**Dreams for a new India**

| Roman Encounters

| "You are wonderful!"





# All because of You

My childhood was stolen  
When others played with their toys  
I looked at the stars above  
And sang the hymn of the universe  
When they sang twinkle twinkle

My teenage was robbed  
When boys found comfort together  
I was lonely as one can be  
When they struggled with their identity  
I was even more confused

My youth was snatched  
When young men played the lover's part  
I could never fall in love  
Coz you are a jealous lover

Now in my mature days  
When little children run to their father's arms  
I embrace the whole world  
For none belongs to me personally

Yes, I am a senior now, but  
There is no wife nor children  
No hearth to call my home  
As a nomad I roam

Looking back I have no regrets  
In my loss I have found  
In my emptiness I am fulfilled  
All because of YOU.



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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.

## Value of holidays

I enjoyed reading Fr. Emma SJ's article 'Holidays can make us normal humans and saner Jesuits' in the May-June 24 issue of *Jivan*. Most people prioritize their jobs and lose sight of the reason why they are here on earth. This article demonstrates to readers the value of holidays and how they help people be more productive in the future. Fr Emma recalls that those days the Jesuit Fathers went on a lengthy walk through the woodland and spent their summer vacation in the hills. Why did they disappear? It is true that spending time in the forest or hill, in close proximity to nature, enhances our wellbeing. "Forest bathing," in Japan, means spending more time in the midst of trees. We should learn to take time away from our work in order to enjoy nature and foster well-being.

| Tony Ajith, SJ | Chennai

## Touched by the story

Honey bees perish, but new life emerges. Sparrows fade away, yet new sparrows take flight. This is the cycle of life. This profound insight in Sch. Ashish Kumar Beero's short story, published in the May-June '24 issue of *Jivan*, captivated me. It enabled me to be ever grateful and comprehend my life a little better. The ebbs and flows are part and parcel of one's life. One can be neither blissful all the time nor distressed all the time. One is born again after a new experience. This insight invigorates me to face my desolations in a positive way, hoping that God will make me a new person through my day-to-day experiences. I am deeply touched by this story. Let me urge the author to share many more of his insights through his stories.

| L. Lourdes Antonio, NSJ | Dindigul

## Grateful to the Jesuits

Since *Jivan* is a magazine for South Asian Jesuits, I thought of sharing my experiences of two Jesuits, who belong to two different Provinces. The first is Fr. William Sequeira (KAR). I met him in 2002 when he was the Director of Dhyanya Ashrama, Mount St. Joseph, Bengaluru. Fr. William offered to guide my individual retreat. The days of the retreat, marked by solitude and silence, were tough, but I spent most of the time in my favourite chapel there, used by the novices. He led me to forgive myself, forgive my family, particularly my parents, for their shortcomings which had grave repercussions on my tender psyche. The exercise brought me both inner and physical pain and tears. But at the end of those eight days, I felt within me a great unburdening and slowly an inner freedom. That year I could travel home for Christmas holidays to feel part of a home. I realized that my heart of stone was now a heart of flesh - the heart where my God dwelt. It was easier to face and accept the brokenness of my life. I became healthier not just physically, but also emotionally and psychologically.

The other Jesuit is Fr. S. Ignacimuthu (MDU). As a former Vice Chancellor of Bharathiar University, he had come from Chennai to Coimbatore to give a talk. He asked me to meet him at the Coimbatore airport, as he was waiting to catch his flight to Chennai. He guided me regarding my very chaotic and stormy preparation for Ph.D. In 2014 he visited our home in Fort Cochin and met me and my mother. He was a mentor who made me realize I needed to do serious research and guided me how to do it. Both these men, like countless other Jesuits, do whatever they do for the Greater Glory of God. When we celebrate on 31 July the feast of St. Ignatius, I will thank God for these two Jesuits and all the other Jesuits, who must have guided numerous individuals like me.

| Reena R. Nelson | Fort Cochin

**Prayer  
Intentions  
for August'24**

### FOR POLITICAL LEADERS

We pray that political leaders be at the service of their own people, working for integral human development and for the common good, especially caring for the poor and those who have lost their jobs.



**Pope's Worldwide  
Prayer Network**



pic courtesy: reuters.com





## WHAT DO YOU SAY?

STANY D'SOUZA, SJ  
President, JCSA

### Are you an 'Aim-day-co'?

You have surely heard this story about a woman missionary who had been doing the work of evangelization among a group of indigenous people. After a few years of her ministry among them, they gave her a new name: "Aim-day-co".

The Chief of the tribe, explaining the name, said: "In our tribe, when we see anyone taking a wrong route/road, we call out "Aim-day-co". It means, "Turn this way!" When you came from a far-away land, you found us all on the wrong road, and you stood and said "Turn this Way" ... May God bless "Aim-day-co!"

On 5 July we observed the third death anniversary of Fr Stan Swamy. He was indeed an "Aim-day-co!" to many, especially to the indigenous people of Jharkhand. He lived with them, listened to them, learnt from them, and one day, stood up and said: "Turn this way". Thanks to him they learnt to evolve and assert their identity and rights.

He was "Aim-day-co!" to the Jesuits as well. By imitating the poor and humble Christ, he challenged us to 'Turn this way'. He encouraged us to seek and find God among the poor, who participate in the Crucifixion of the Lord daily, and in reconciliation and justice.

He was an "Aim-day-co!" to the Church and the civil society. Through the strength of his conviction, compassion and commitment, he proclaimed: 'Turn this way'. Many heeded his call and became strength and support to the poor.

He was certainly "Aim-day-co!" to those in power. He made choices in favour of the poor and indigenous people, and said: 'Turn this way'. Of course, the powers did not listen to him. He was harassed, humiliated and hounded and finally, he succumbed to a custodial death.

Incidentally, another "Aim-day-co" has emerged in Indian political scene today. When masculinity was defined as domination and domineering, as elite centric, Rahul Gandhi stood up and said: "Turn this way!" He reframed masculinity as inclusive, integral, poor centric and development-oriented.

As this issue of *Jivan* reaches your hand, we will be celebrating the Independence Day of our country. It is an opportune time to ask the question: Am I an "Aim-day-co"? To be an "Aim-day-co" one needs the strength of character, courage of conviction and clarity of vision, which can only be nurtured by the deep waters. One needs to know the Lord intimately, love him ardently so as to follow him closely. Shall we make an effort this year and become an "Aim-day-co"? What do you say?



## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

M.A. JOE ANTONY, SJ  
Editor

### So precious, so fragile

I am writing this on the day when 'the breaking news' is about the U.S. President Joe Biden deciding, at last, to quit the presidential race. It must have been a painful decision for him and his family but it is a great relief to his party and nation, and to some extent, for the entire world. The reason is well-known. What the U.S. is witnessing at the moment is not a battle between two individuals for political power but a battle between democracy and dictatorship, between facts and blatant lies, between decency and vulgarity, between values and a brazen disregard for values and principles.

What is truly frightening is not the unprecedented antics of a shrewd politician who seems totally unfit for the job of governing a powerful nation but the support he seems to enjoy from a large number of American voters. Since Trump's own choice for his running mate, J.D. Vance once wondered if Trump was America's Hitler, the American voters should recall what happened in and to his country, when Hitler managed to become its ruler.

You should read, therefore, Lancy Lobo's article, which is one of the three 'Special's we are offering you in this issue. Lancy says, "The architects of modern India conceptualized an idea of India where national unity, parliamentary democracy, secularism, industrialization, and scientific temper abound. They envisaged the reign of parliamentary morality in the country. Today, we see a new idea emerging in India wherein these principles have taken a severe beating." (See p. 7-8)

International Youth Day, celebrated on 12 August, as well as one of our UAPs invite us to think of ministering to youth. Talking about this ministry's joys and challenges, Bala Kumar Bollineni says, "It is a privilege to witness the spark of divine potential ignited in the hearts of young people. As they grapple with questions about life, purpose, and faith, we have the opportunity to offer guidance, support, and companionship... However, the path is not without its obstacles." (See p. 9-10)

The third article is the 'Friendship Day Special' (See p. 11-12), which celebrates the heartwarming friendship between a young and eager 24-year-old and a seasoned, saintly 82-year-old Jesuit.

I am happy to announce a new column called 'Roman Encounters.' Our Roman correspondent, who wishes to remain anonymous, will, for *Jivan's* sake, meet a significant Jesuit who lives in or comes to Rome and ask him a few questions important to him and us. Read it (p. 13-14) and tell me what you think.

# St. Xavier's, Jaipur receives UNESCO Green College Award

St. Xavier's College, Jaipur, an ISO 14001 organization for Environmental Management System (EMS), has been honoured with the prestigious UNESCO Green College Award 2024 for its outstanding efforts in environmental conservation and sustainable development. The award will be presented at the 8th NYC Green School Conference 2024 during the 79th U.N. General Assembly Session on 23-24 September 2024, in New York, U.S.A.

This recognition underscores the college's unwavering commitment to creating an oasis in the desert of Rajasthan. The vision of the college – "to ignite young minds with transformative education to become global citizens with Competence, Character, and Compassion" encapsulates the three pillars of sustainability, inclusivity and human dignity.

SXC, Jaipur is committed to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs) of Jesuits which include "healing the broken world". The faculty and staff helped in realizing the green vision of Fr. Xavier Savarimuthu, SJ, Principal, and turned the campus a green campus. Concretely what helped the College win this prestigious award are:

**A. Biodiversity Preservation:** A lush green campus that promotes biodiversity by creating a habitat for native flora and fauna. 122 plant species are being cultivated and at least 30 species of birds have been identified within the campus and documented -The college actively participates in tree-planting drives.

**B. Waste Management and Recycling:** Waste Management measures such as Bio-composting, Vermi-Composting and installation of Incinerators reduce the college's ecological footprint.

**C. Green Energy and Energy Efficient Practices:** - A 300 KW capacity solar plant is installed to meet the institution's energy demands - Sensor-based energy efficient lighting and use of energy efficient equipment help in conserving energy - The institution encourages all its stakeholders to carpool or use electric vehicles while commuting to reduce carbon footprint.



**D. Sustainable Curriculum Integration:** - Environmental studies and sustainability-related courses are integrated into the curriculum - Students engage in research projects related to climate change and conservation - International Conferences on themes like "Evolving Ecological Concerns" and "The Sustainable Development Perspectives" have been organised annually - Workshops and Seminars empower all the stakeholders to take responsibility for their actions and work towards achieving a sustainable future.

**E. Community Outreach:** -The college collaborates with local communities of the five adopted villages, raising awareness about environmental issues under the Lab-to-Land and Knowledge Sharing Programmes.

The UNESCO Green Award recognizes the institution's holistic approach to sustainability. The college's distinctive Jesuit character inspires its commitment to environmental stewardship. St. Xavier's College, Jaipur remains steadfast in: a. Expanding green spaces within the campus. b. Promoting research on climate resilience. c. Bridging the rural-urban divide by empowering marginalized communities.

This award acknowledges the institution's hard work and dedication and its belief that we can ignite minds, transform lives, and protect our planet. ❖

Atiqa Kelsy







# Dreams for a new India



Pic courtesy: in.pinterest.com

India has been governed in the past by two dominant blocks, viz. UPA and NDA. UPA was dominated by Congress and regional parties (now known as INDIA block) and BJP with allied parties (now known as NDA).

**The dark shadow of corruption:** The NDA, under the promise of *Achhe Din*, pledged to eradicate the cancer of corruption that has plagued India's economy, politics, and every other sector. However, the reality has been starkly different. Corruption has not only persisted but has thrived under the BJP's rule. The party has cunningly used regulatory institutions like CBI, ED, IT, and the judiciary to shield its corruption and, simultaneously, painted the opposition, the Congress and the INDIA block as the epitome of corruption. Hence, what continues is corruption under any regime. All political parties are united in bribery. Corruption is institutionalized and made to look inevitable. This rampant corruption is not just a political issue but a societal one, seeping into every aspect of our lives and aggravating inequalities and injustices. From the quality of education to the availability of healthcare, corruption casts a dark shadow on our daily lives. This should be a cause for alarm for every citizen, as it undermines the very fabric of our society and demands our collective attention.

**Thievery, Bribery and Corruption:** Consider the insightful perspective of a seventh-grade student on the economic impact of thievery. He wrote: "Thieves, surprisingly, are the backbone of our country's economy. The need for safes, cupboards, and locks directly results from their existence, providing work for the companies that produce them. Thieves also drive the production of grills, doors, locks, gates, and compound walls, creating jobs for many. Their actions, such as stealing mobile phones, laptops, electronic devices, bicycles, and vehicles, necessitate the purchase of new ones, further stimulating the economy."

"Because of thieves, many get jobs as security guards and watchmen. Because of thieves, CCTVs, metal detectors, and cyber cells exist. Because of thieves, police, patrol cars, batons, rifles, revolvers, and bullets must be manufactured. Because of thieves, there are courts, judges, lawyers, clerks, jails, and jailers. With its crucial role in society, the media reports the thievery of well-known politicians, industrialists, bureaucrats, etc."

However, this 'stimulation' comes at a high cost to society and the economy. It is imperative that we, as a society, take a stand against thievery and work towards a more secure and prosperous future for all,

thereby ensuring our collective responsibility and motivation for change. Replace the word 'thievery' with corruption, and one can appreciate how our beloved country's economy, politics, and governance run. Thievery and corruption are not sins anymore; these are admired and glorified. Think of well-known figures like Lalit Modi, Nirav Modi, Mehul Chokshi and Vijay Mallya, who have fled the country. There are billionaires who flee the country every week to live abroad. The Panama Papers exposed the super-rich who invested their money in shady places. Add to these the black money stashed in Swiss Banks, the electoral bonds, the PM Cares Fund. These are witnesses for thievery or unaccountability. The collapse of bridges, flyovers, buildings, and poor roads are examples of the cost of thievery to the society.

The high penalties laid on the masses for petty infringements and high taxes on the poor are modern-day thievery. The corporations snatching lands for mining from tribals is thievery. Lavish and vulgar spending on weddings is thievery. Banks and industries are exempted under Non-Performing Assets (NPA) but not farmers' loans. Demanding innumerable proofs and certificates from the illiterate masses is a kind of legalized thievery. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called many of the policies and actions of the regime as legalized plunder. Persons with criminal records criminalise the economy, justice, and also democracy.

**Moral Corruption:** Thievery and corruption extend to the downgrading of values enshrined in the Constitution. The architects of modern India during the Freedom Movement conceptualized an idea of India where national unity, parliamentary democracy, secularism, industrialization, and scientific temper abound. They envisaged the reign of parliamentary morality in the country.

Today, we see a new idea emerging in India wherein these above principles have taken a severe beating. National unity is meant only Hindu unity at the exclusion of non-Hindus. Parliamentary democracy is thwarted as opposition is not tolerated. Any opposition to the regime is considered anti-national. The prime identity is not that of a citizen but is ethno-religious, caste, language, region, etc. The pluralistic nature of Hinduism itself has taken a beating. Secularism, which treated citizenship identity as supreme, is being challenged.

Religious demography has been brought into dividing people as majoritarian and minoritarian.

The minorities are excluded and discriminated against on religious grounds and economic platforms. 800 million people are below the hunger index, while some claim India is becoming a superpower. All wish for economic growth, but they also want equitable distribution of the benefits of this growth. The divide between rich and poor has sharpened despite phenomenal agricultural, industrial, and manufacturing growth. Elections at local, regional, and national levels bring in gestures of democracy, but substantive democracy is eluding, and the rights of citizens are not quickly delivered.

### **My Wish for the Independence Day 2024:**

First and foremost, I wish that the new India in the next five years becomes corruption-free. Corruption has been eating the material and moral fabric of India like white ants. Then, the new idea of India that I wish on this Independence Day is wherein the four major contradictions or dilemmas be resolved, viz., Hinduism and Hindutva; majoritarianism and minoritarianism; growth and equity; electoral vs. substantive democracy. In this new India all Indians will be seen as citizens, cherishing cultural diversity, enjoying the benefits of growth equally, and securing fundamental rights.

This dream for a new India can only be achieved by instilling Constitutional morality, reducing thievery in material sectors, and promoting constitutional values. We need a morally upright India where the sense of sin and immorality in the public and private spheres is acute.

Civic literacy and citizenship education must be promoted to reduce thievery and corruption and raise our Indian nation to glory. The Happiness Index can only rise from an honest citizenry and transparent governance. No number of CCTVs can eliminate corruption, thievery and crimes, until internal moral CCTVs take over the conscience of citizens.

This should closely resemble the concept of the Kingdom of God, whereby inequalities of caste, class, and gender are mightily diluted. Mahatma Gandhi has spoken of the seven sins that need our attention to realise the Kingdom of God: Wealth without work, Pleasure without conscience, Knowledge without character, Commerce without morality, Science without humanity, Religion without sacrifice and Politics without principle. ❖

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## Youth Apostolate Offers Boundless Joy and Unexpected Challenges

International Youth Day, celebrated annually on 12 August, serves as a poignant reminder of the pivotal role young people play in shaping our world. We are called to accompany and empower this generation, recognizing their potential and addressing their challenges. One of the Universal Apostolic Preferences of Society of Jesus - 'Journeying with and Accompanying Youth' underscores this commitment, inviting us to walk alongside young people on their path to faith, hope, and love.

Being involved in youth apostolate is an exhilarating journey filled with boundless joy and unexpected challenges. It is a privilege to witness the spark of divine potential ignited in the hearts of young people. As they grapple with questions about life, purpose, and faith, we have the opportunity

to offer guidance, support, and companionship. Their enthusiasm, creativity, and unyielding optimism are contagious, inspiring us to dream big and strive for a better world.

However, the path is not without its obstacles. The complexities of the modern world, with its rapid technological advancements and social pressures, can sometimes overshadow the deeper aspirations of young people. We encounter disillusionment, apathy, and a sense of hopelessness in some, while others struggle with finding their place in a seemingly chaotic world. Yet, amidst these challenges, we find an even greater opportunity to share the transformative power of the Gospel.

I believe that all of us should instill the YES Philosophy into our young minds where they shout



Pic courtesy: novelteams.com

out- “YES, I have dreams. YES, I am capable of fulfilling my dreams. YES, I can and I will be the dream I want to be.” It serves as a powerful framework for understanding the youthful spirit. It echoes the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, who emphasized individual freedom and responsibility. Youth, in this context, is a period of radical choice, where individuals are confronted with the daunting task of creating their own meaning and purpose in life.

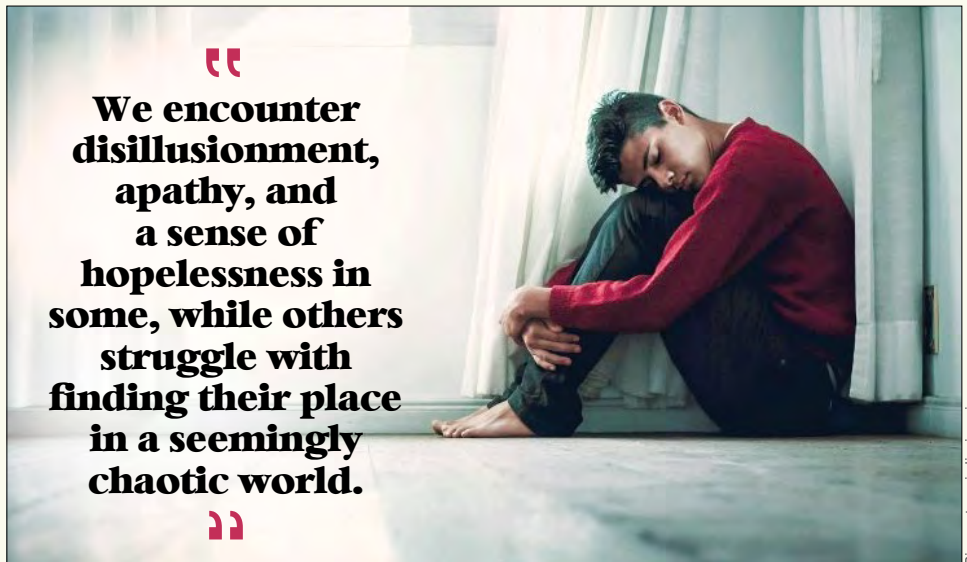
This YES philosophy resonates deeply with the spirit of youth apostolate. It acknowledges the dreams that reside within every young person, affirming their inherent capability to achieve them. It is a call to action, empowering them to embrace their potential and take ownership of their lives. By fostering a culture of ‘YES’ we create an environment where young people feel supported, encouraged, and believed in.

We must recognize that opportunities are the catalysts that transform dreams into reality. Providing young people with platforms to express themselves, develop their talents, and serve their communities is essential. It is through these experiences that they discover their unique gifts and purpose in life.

The YES philosophy is not merely a slogan but a profound invitation to embrace life with enthusiasm and hope. It is a reminder that, even in the face of adversity, we have the power to choose joy, resilience, and faith. As youth ministers, we are called to be beacons of hope, guiding young people towards a future filled with meaning and purpose.

By accompanying young people on their journey, we not only invest in their future but also enrich our own lives. Their questions challenge us to deepen our own faith, their dreams inspire us to be more ambitious, and their struggles remind us of the power of compassion and solidarity.

The challenges faced by today’s youth are complex and multifaceted. Sherry Turkle, in her book, *Alone Together*, highlights the impact of technology on human connection. The digital age, while offering unprecedented access to information, has also led to



**“  
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finding their place  
in a seemingly  
chaotic world.  
”**

Pic courtesy: indiaai.gov.in

increased isolation and a sense of disconnection. This phenomenon, coupled with economic uncertainty and social inequality, creates a backdrop of anxiety and disillusionment for many young people.

Youth apostolate, therefore, is not merely about providing religious instruction but about offering a holistic accompaniment. It involves creating spaces where young people can explore their identity, values, and spirituality in dialogue with the Christian tradition. As Karl Rahner suggests, the contemporary experience of faith is marked by a ‘religious sense’ that seeks meaning and transcendence. Youth apostolate can cultivate this religious sense by offering opportunities for prayer, reflection, and service.

In the words of Pope Francis, “Young people are not the future of the Church, but its present.” This realization necessitates a deep philosophical exploration of their experiences, aspirations, and the role of the Church in their lives. Let us embrace this reality with open hearts and minds, creating spaces where young people feel welcomed, loved, and challenged to become the best versions of themselves. By doing so, we contribute to building a more just, compassionate, and hopeful world.

Therefore not merely the Jesuits, but the entire Church should vigorously move in the direction of investing a major chunk of our resources of every kind in youth and for youth. ❖

*Fr Bala Kumar Bollineni, SJ, (AND) is Founder-Director, Youth Empowering Service-Jesuits (YES-J) and a Counselling Psychologist residing at Andhra Loyola College, Vijayawada.*





# “You are wonderful!”

## From Childhood Bonds to Jesuit Brotherhood

Friendship Day, celebrated on 4 August, makes me think of what Jesus said: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). Friendship is one of the most significant aspects of our human life. We long to enter into relationships and friendships because they help us bond with one another, learn from each other, grow together, and cherish God’s gift of life with happiness. This day also makes me reflect on how my friendships have evolved over time, especially during my journey as a Jesuit.

My earliest memories of friendship are the bonds of love I experienced with the members of my family and relatives, those with whom I shared a blood relationship or contact due to proximity. Friendships were formed through a sense of belonging with the people who were close to me.

Later on, when I went to school, my first close friend was someone with whom I connected because we shared similar interests. We both excelled in academics, we studied together at school and were part of the school football team. Our friendly competition enabled us to learn and grow together, forming a bond of friendship that was based on shared interests.

During my youth, the friendships I recall were with friends with whom I spent my leisure time. These were the friends with whom I went to dinners, movies, outings, treks, events, and other places where we could enjoy our time together and each other’s company. Most individuals’



Pic courtesy: pixabay.com

understanding of friendship tends to stop at this point, and had I not joined the Society of Jesus, probably my understanding of friendship would have stagnated here as well.

Friendship in the Society of Jesus has been an eye-opening experience and radically different. My encounters with people transcended geographical barriers. I discovered the joy of bonding with people from different language and cultural groups, and learned to accept and cooperate with people who had quite diverse abilities and even different temperaments. Most importantly, I discovered that friendship was about helping others experience the love of Christ we witness in the Gospels.

My fondest memory of a friend in the Society of Jesus was as a pre-novice in the year 2011. I was 24 years old and eager to enter the Society of Jesus. I encountered an 82-year-old Spaniard, Fr. Jose Maria Feliu, SJ. He was the Socius to the

Provincial and he resided in the same community. Although he was more than three times my age, yet his kind demeanor was the first seed of friendship sown. My first interactions began with him asking for my help with some office-related computer tasks. His joy was infectious, and his humor delightful. He was a role model and inspiration. Despite our many differences such as age and nationality, he showed a caring, tender, and affectionate side that transcended all other barriers.

Later, during my formation years, though we were separated by geographical distances yet there was a sense of a union of heart and mind. We would always exchange a kind word or two whenever possible. However, it was during my regency, I discovered the true meaning and treasure of friendship that Fr. Feliu shared with me. I went to him for spiritual direction as I was grappling with various realities of life as any young person does.

I remember one occasion when I bombarded him with a barrage of concerns that were plaguing me, and he listened patiently. At the end, he replied in his typical Spanish accent, “Wesley, you are wonderful!” He made me realize that friendship is about accepting others as they are and encouraging each other to keep on striving to be better, just as Jesus accepts us with our shortcomings and limitations.

Friendship is about sharing love and compassion with each other, just as our Lord generously shared His love and compassion to all those He befriended.

Friendship is about setting aside prejudices, biases, and judgments to love people as they are. True friendship makes us accept the worst in an

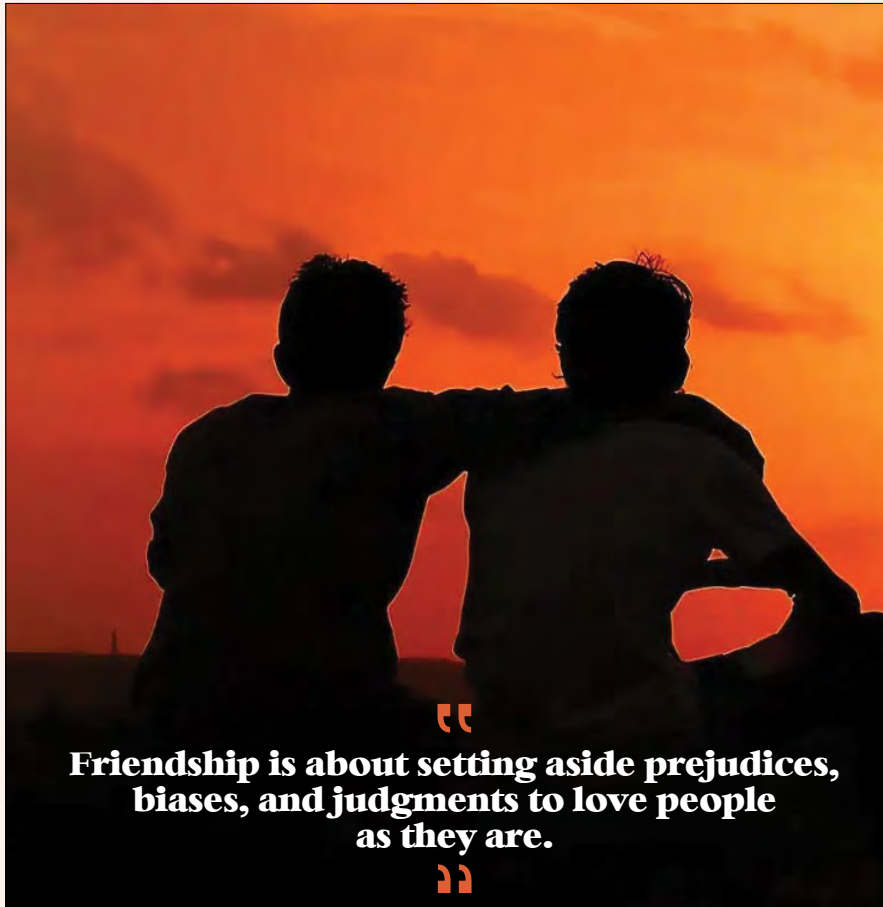
individual and most importantly helps us bring out the best that may be lying dormant within them. This is the friendship we have experienced from Jesus, and it is the friendship he invites us to share with all, especially those who are broken-hearted and marginalized.

I cherish this beautiful lesson of friendship that I have learnt as a Jesuit in the Society of Jesus because it helped me understand the love, compassion,

mercy, and acceptance of Jesus. Every friendship is invited to be founded on these values, helping each other discover the true of friendship we have experienced in Jesus.

Jesus calls us his friends. His friendship is the model for the many friendships we may acquire, as we navigate through life’s journey. We are called to share this friendship that God has revealed to us through his son Jesus. ❖

*Wesley D’Costa SJ, (BOM) is Director, Vinayalaya Retreat House, Director of Pre Novices and Co-ordinator of the Ignatian Spirituality Platform.*



“  
**Friendship is about setting aside prejudices,  
biases, and judgments to love people  
as they are.**  
”

Pic courtesy: kobbler.rs



# “At the end of each day I go to the terrace...”

**Fr. John Dardis, SJ**, one of the four Assistants ‘ad Providentiam’ at the General Curia, Rome, General Counsellor for Discernment and Apostolic Planning, talks to our Roman correspondent on his thoughts and emotions on completing 50 years as a Jesuit.

## What made you become a Jesuit?

My life changed just before Holy Week of that year. I was an innocent 17-year-old, just ending High school and heading for medical school. I wanted to be a doctor - a previous dream to be a priest was put aside during the years of adolescence. Unexpectedly, at a Mass one evening with 30 other young people – it was a discernment weekend - I was overwhelmed by a sense of God. God was real and, more importantly, God was real for me and He was calling me. I would later learn to call this ‘consolation’ – not being able to love anything except in God (Sp.Ex. 316). Next day I applied to join the Society. And here I am, 50 years later. Yes, it is my 50th anniversary, my golden jubilee as a Jesuit. I always thought that those jubilarians were old people, losing hair, teeth and memory. Well....I have lost most of my hair, I visited the dentist 4 times in the last 6 weeks and...my memory.....where did I put that toothbrush?

## How has your life as a Jesuit been?

Life since I joined the Society has been a series of challenges – I can’t deny it - but also of wonderful opportunities and many friendships. I think of my time in formation where I had to grow and change and become more rooted as a Jesuit. That was sometimes not so easy....pretty tough in fact. I think of the opportunities I had, especially the one to study communications in Syracuse University, New York and my opportunity to study theology in Toronto. Coming from a small country like Ireland, moving to the US and to Canada was an experience



of being in a different culture and of opening to new horizons. I came back to my Province with a sense of adventure and an attitude that everything was possible.

## Were you able to do anything in the field of communication?

After tertianship I went to Tanzania to work with Rwandan refugees. It was a JRS project where we were building a radio station to reach out to refugees. My training in communications matched exactly the needs of the situation. That was followed by a time back in Ireland working in communications with the Archdiocese of Dublin, then in JRS Europe as the Regional Director. After that I was appointed Provincial of Ireland and then President of the European Provincial’s Conference – the Provincial of Europe - before landing here in Rome in January 2017.

## What about your life in Rome?

Adjusting to life in Rome had its challenges too – not least learning Italian. I came here knowing not much more than how to say ‘spaghetti’, ‘cappuchino’ and ‘buongiorno’. The Curia is a busy place as we help the General to lead forward the Society of 15,000 Jesuits and countless mission partners. Every day brings something unexpected. Every day I have to learn something

new. Keeping up with technology and the digital world is a constant battle and the 'cloud' is still so often a 'cloud of unknowing' for me. Thank God for younger Jesuits here at the Curia like Vivian Richard from the Karnataka Province and Benedict Mayaki from Africa North West who rescue me time and again.

### What would you like to say to young Jesuits?

In the world just now, there are so many problems. And inside ourselves we also have to grow and deal with our own issues. At the end of each day I go to the terrace and try to let God speak to me, try to give Him space. Usually, it ends up being a time of gratitude and peace – a real gift. God wants to give us consolation. We just have to open ourselves and give Him the space. To live in gratitude is a profound gift. From that we get a sense of perspective, a sense of humour, a delight in small things, a finding of God in all things.



And I have to mention close Jesuit friends – two or three – with whom I can speak without filters, with total transparency. That sometimes-painful exercise of honesty and transparency has carried me through so much. To young Jesuits I say: “find one or two close Jesuit friends – you don't need a huge crowd - with whom you can practice total transparency”. It is a pathway to God, to being a joyful Jesuit. It also gives you contentment in community because you won't expect the impossible from fellow Jesuits because you



know that a few people in the Society know and love you deeply. No-one can live without deep and trusting friendship.

Years ago, I tried to protect myself, to give the image of being 'a perfect Jesuit'. It was a time of isolation. Now, aware of my weaknesses, I am less proud, joyfully dependent and, I hope, growing in humility. I am happier.

Overall, after 50 years, I am grateful. I do pray and have always done so, sometimes with consolation and joy, at other times more out of a sense of duty. Recently in a conversation with my Spiritual Director he encouraged me to pray more. I said “I am too busy”. He responded in a way that made me realize that being 'too busy' was not an excuse but rather part of the problem. Yes, even now after 50 years, I need to be reminded to put God first, to really put Him first and not to sacrifice the relationship with Him on the deceptive altars of success or achievement. Yes, even we jubilarians need to be converted, supported, challenged and loved. When I was in Dumka recently giving some workshops, they invited me to join their jubilee celebration. That was a real grace. The Society is indeed a universal and fraternal brotherhood. I say a big thank you to all who have supported and loved me over these fifty years including so many in South Asia. May the Lord bless and guide you and give you much consolation. ❖



## Jamshedpur Youth Meet

In the serene campus of XIM University, Bhubaneswar, more than 236 youth attended the JAM MAG+S-2024, organized by the Jamshedpur Province Youth Commission under the guidance of Fr Niranjan Minj, helped by Frs Neelam Kerketta, Bipin Kujur, Julian Ekka and Biranchi Soreng. Its theme was 'Embrace Mag+s - Ignite the Fire Within.'

At the break of every dawn, the youth immersed themselves in meditation, and experienced the transformative power of stillness and mindfulness. Every day the Eucharistic celebration united hearts and minds in communion and the Sacrament of Reconciliation brought them peace and comfort. The youth delved into main aspects of Ignatian spirituality. They visited the home run by the Missionaries of Charity in Jalna in the outskirts of Bhubaneswar, and experienced the simple joys of companionship and presence, making the day a little brighter for the inmates - the mentally challenged, victims of leprosy and the elderly. There they discovered the true essence of Ignatian spirituality - to find God in all things and to love unconditionally, especially those who need it most.

Every day the youth prayed the Examen, a practice championed by St. Ignatius of Loyola. A pivotal aspect of the gathering was the Mag+s Circle, a forum for dialogue and exchange of God experiences. It offered the youth a sacred space to share, listen, and connect with mutual respect.



Fr. Tony Uvari, SJ, Vice Chancellor of XIM University, warmly welcomed the youth. Fr. Jerry Cutinha, SJ, Provincial of Jamshedpur Province, delivered the keynote address which called for leadership in social transformation. Archbishop John Barwa, SVD, of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar, spoke on 'Leadership of Jesus and Creating a Hope-Filled Future.' Fr. Bipin Kujur spoke on 'Sustainable Leadership for Tomorrow', emphasizing integrity, transparency, and inclusivity.

Fr. Jerome Sequeira, Director, Human Life Centre, Bhubaneswar, delved into the realm of Artificial Intelligence, unraveling its promises as well as the challenges it poses. Fr. Alwyn Rodrigues made a presentation on 'Social Media and Youth Today', highlighting both the positive potential and the dangers of social media.

As the curtains drew on JAM MAG+S-2024, the Jamshedpur province and its Youth Commission feel satisfied that seeds of transformation have been sown, heralding a dawn of empowered leadership and societal renewal.

Vernard Antony, SJ (DUM)

## Youth ministers meet in Kathmandu

The Jesuit Youth Ministry of South Asia (JYMSA) held its annual meeting for 2024 on 02-05 May 2024 at Godavari, Kathmandu, Nepal. There were 15 Jesuit Youth Coordinators from various provinces of the South Asia Assistancy. The meeting began with the Eucharist by Fr. Amrit Rai, SJ, Reginal Superior of Nepal Region. He invited us to reflect on the need to kindle the spirit of Jesus among the youth today. Then Fr Vijay SJ shared about the history of Nepal Catholic Church and Nepal Youth ministry. Miss Titi Ghale, a member of IMCS, Nepal, enthralled us with her personal sharing on 'Youth addiction to drugs and alcohol.'

Fr Stany D'Souza SJ, President, JCSA, celebrated the Eucharist on 05 May. He motivated the JYMSA

Coordinators to reach out to the unreached, unorganized youth with more focus and vigor. On the final day, we had zonal level discussions on action plans to make the youth ministry more vibrant. JYMSA has decided on 'Anti-Addiction Program' (AAP) as the focus area for the year 2024-2025.

JYMSA is grateful to the Nepal Region Jesuits, especially Fr. Amrit Rai, SJ, for the wonderful generosity they extended to us. We thank the Superior of Godavari Ashram community, Jesuit Communities in Kathmandu, and Fr Tej Kalyan, SJ, the local organizer. The participants thanked the outgoing JYMSA secretary, Fr Arbind Beck, SJ (HAZ) and welcomed the new JYMSA secretary, Fr Vernard Antony, SJ (DUM).

Parthasarathi, SJ (CEN)

# Can we ever get rid of caste?

## Youth Conclave on the Principles of Dr. Ambedkar

“I was thrilled to be part of this Yuva Samvad or Youth Conclave on the principles of Dr. Ambedkar. It has broadened my horizon to view various speeches and writings of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar and understand these in the contemporary perspective. I knew him only as the framer of the Indian Constitution. But now I am inspired to know his views on liberty, fraternity and equality.” This was the enthusiastic response of Madhukar Kumar of Patna district, Bihar who participated in the event organised by the civil society of Bihar.

Xavier Institute of Social Research and St. Xavier’s College of Management and Technology, Patna, Bihar, Patna Jesuit centres of higher learning in collaboration with the Patna Women’s College, a centre of higher learning run by the Avila Carmelite Nuns of Patna in partnership with over 15 civil society organisations and individuals of Bihar jointly organized a ‘Youth Conclave on the Principles of Dr. Ambedkar’ on 14 April, 2024, Ambedkar Jayanti Day.

Over 230 youth from various parts of Bihar participated in this conclave. Its objective was to provide the youth of Bihar a platform to share their

views; to allow them to raise questions, search for answers and to exhibit their talents in various ways; to get to know the principles of Dr. Ambedkar so that they spread these among the people; to uphold the Constitution of India which was painstakingly written by Dr. Ambedkar.

The day began with the recitation of the Preambles of the Constitution. The youth stressed the importance of social, economic and political justice as enshrined in the Constitution. They also stressed their resolve to keep India a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic.

This was followed by a *nukkad* or street play from a youth group of Bihar, called Ambedkar Student Front. The play focused on how unscientific principles and practices still continue to have a debilitating impact on the rural masses due to which they are not able to develop themselves. The play also ended with the hope that we can improve the situation if the youth are ready to play a major role in bringing in positive change.

When the play was over, all the participants paid a floral tribute to the picture of Dr. Ambedkar. After that a book titled, *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar ke Vaicharik Dharohar*, (The Basic Thoughts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar)







was released. This book includes 6 essential writings and speeches of Dr. Ambedkar. One of the most important essays in this collection is 'Annihilation of Caste'. Around 8 people worked day and night for 4 days to translate the material from English to Hindi and get it printed. This 120- page- document could become a resource material for creating social consciousness. All the individuals involved in its making were felicitated, and a copy was given to all the participants.

The next session was on 'Ideological and Operational Principles of Dr. Ambedkar'. The primary focus was 'Annihilation of Caste' and the importance of constitutional values. The session included discussions on caste, religion, and their interconnection. Professor Pushpendra, the one leading the Master Class, said, "Jaat who hai jo jaati nahi," It means, 'Caste is something you can never get rid of.' The interactive session helped the youth understand the salient features of Ambedkar's ideology.

After the lunch, snippets from Jabbar Patel's movie, *Jai Bhim Comrade* and *Dr. Ambedkar* were screened. These snippets highlighted important instances from Ambedkar's life, like his education in

America and England, launching of his famous news periodical, *Mooknayak*, the *Mahar Satyagrah*, and his incomparable contribution to the drafting of the Constitution. After the film, the youth engaged in a lively discussion.

In the concluding session, the participants assembled in the open air theatre of Patna Women's College to take a pledge to practice what Dr Ambedkar advocated in order to bring lasting changes in the Indian society and polity. Group photos were taken. Slogans were shouted. The event ended with a resolve to meet again.

Though the Patna Jesuits took the lead in organizing this Youth Conclave, it was so successful because they partnered with several groups and institutions. All those who were part of this contributed voluntarily. The Conclave proved to be a rare opportunity to the youth of Bihar to come together to talk about their situation and the social transformation they dream of. The success of the programme inspired all the organizers to decide to organize such events for and by the youth every 3 months. ❖

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Prakash Louis, SJ (PAT)



## Those ten difficult days

Does being a religious make any difference when you are left all alone gazing at the moving ceiling fan when you are sick? I was totally broken, devastated and crushed in my spirit when I had to be hospitalized for 10 days because of a pancreatic infection. Seconds were like months and minutes were like years. Even after many years of formation, hearing spiritual talks, listening to sermons and meditating over sickness and suffering, I thought of it only when I was lying down all alone by myself in the hospital ward.

We say that God suffers with the suffering, that He feels the pain and experiences it. But I was unable to feel God's nearness, because all I could experience was pain, severe pain. Many will not understand this, unless they themselves experience it. I remember reading an anecdote in which a nun tells another nun, who is sick, "Sister, be strong. Remember that our Lord Jesus Christ too suffered." The sick Sister replied, "He suffered only for a few hours and not for days and months like me."

Despite my immense physical and emotional pain, what kept me going were my strong faith, trust, hope and love in Him. Did I experience desolation? Of course, I did. Day after day, I kept looking at the Cross, and shedding bitter tears looking at myself lying with pain, desolate, and helpless. But I didn't give up.

Everybody around me tried to boost my strength with their positivity. They fed me with words of encouragement, and brought a smile on my face and made me hopeful. It was a fight of 'hope against

hope'. Day in and day out, people came to see me, and spoke words of hope and support, friends made their visits, relatives phoned me, Jesuits offered support and above all my mother accompanied me sitting right next to me. I pictured Mary at the foot of the Cross.



Pic courtesy: yudamed.com

Now when I look back, I think that during those days of pain, although I could not feel it, God was indeed present through all those caring people who were really there when I needed them the most. Loneliness was a harrowing experience, because I did not realize or appreciate the presence of those who cared for me.

I vowed within myself that I would ever be grateful and loyal to the Society for the unconditional love and support it showered on me.

What would I like to tell others in the light of this experience? 'Do not lose hope even in the darkest of times.' The most invaluable lesson that I learnt through this humbling experience is to really care for our body, for our physical health. Although we spend a lot of time, caring for our soul and intellect, we must invest more time in taking care of our physical health. 'Health is wealth'. ❖

“  
**I was unable  
 to feel God's  
 nearness,  
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 was pain,  
 severe pain.**  
 ”

Sch. Emmanuel Akilan, SJ, (MDU), is now studying M.Sc. Counselling Psychology at Montfort College, Bengaluru.





## Christmas in the Red Lanes

The streets were water-logged. I followed Chando in the rain, unsuccessfully trying to keep away the rain drops with an umbrella swayed by wind and passing vehicles. “This is the situation here for the last three days,” murmured Chando, casually looking over her head to her right. “We never had rains before in December. It’s all the effect of the climate change, they say.” Even in this rain two prettily made-up faces waited outside a dingy room under umbrellas.

This was not my first visit to this red-light area. But still, I could feel a kind of creepiness around. I remembered the first time I came here three months ago.

Chando had told me about her work and how people like me would feel the first time. Still, I was not prepared for what I saw. Dozens of women, young and old, were lining the old over-bridge as our bus crossed a dirty, smelly canal and stopped at the Kalighat junction. Scores of them were waiting for customers in front of shops, in small groups, eyeing the men walking on the road. I had tried to grab the hand of Chando as if I was afraid I will be grabbed by one of them. “Don’t worry,” she had said. “They all know me and they know that the people who come with me won’t be their customers”.

“Ah! Here comes the elder sister!” shouted a small voice as we reached the two-storied structure off the main road. Chando picked up a small girl who came running down the corridor. “How are you, little one?” she whispered to her. “Ready for your dance today?” Some men sitting on the top floor of the building made some incomprehensible comment and laughed loudly. “We will never be in peace unless we buy that floor

too,” Chando said to me glancing towards them. “Those men give us endless trouble. First of all, they tried to stop us from buying this floor of the building. Now they try to intimidate us in every way possible. I never feel safe in this place.”

Chando had started ministering to the sex workers of Kalighat four years ago, when her religious congregation made a decision that they should do more than just teaching the children of



Pic courtesy: economicstimes.indiatimes.com

sex workers. The plunge had been pretty tough. Just nobody trusted them when they entered these gullies then. She was helped by a social worker who had some experience of working in this lane; but every time somebody offered her a cup of tea, she would find it very difficult to accept it. It took her months to finally feel at home in this place, and since then they have become her people.

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As I entered the building, I noticed that the entrance leading to a large room was decorated with colourful balloons. The women who were squatting on the floor chatting sprang to their feet when they saw the stranger, and the young girls who were making a 'Happy Christmas' backdrop on the black board at the other end stopped and looked. "This Father is our chief guest today," announced Chando. "He is from Dhyan Ashram. Do you remember our camps in Dhyan Ashram?" "Yes, Sister," the chorus came as the faces lit up and the girls made a beeline to touch my feet as a show of respect. "They all love Dhyan Ashram," Chando said, "but we don't have those camps anymore. They miss them."

The hall was filling up pretty fast. I tried to find some familiar faces from my visit three months ago. "How are you, Father?" a voice said from behind.

"Ah, Runadi, I am fine," I returned her beaming smile. "Thank you. How are you?"

Runadi is one of the helpers of the Sisters. She has lived in this street all her life, and was 'no more taking customers' as she had told me the last time when she took me to her small room by the side of a dirty canal. It had rained heavily for the previous three days and the small gullies leading to her little room were either flooded or slimy with black dirt and garbage. I felt I would throw up. I wondered how the 'customers' who came to these rooms felt. Runadi gave me a broad smile revealing teeth stained by betel juice and tobacco. "Everything is going well by your blessings," she said.

After the introduction and a prayer by Chando, the cultural programs started. I sat next to the Superior of Chando's religious community, who gave me a running commentary on who is who. Four chubby-looking Nepali girls performed a dance to a popular Bollywood number. "They are all minor girls, you know," my commentator told me. "They look chubby like that because of all the hormones they give them to look older". They looked happy and carefree as they danced away and I wondered what they were actually feeling.

Eventually when it was my turn to make a speech as the chief guest of their Christmas programme, I was at a loss for words, though my carefully-written speech was in my shirt pocket. I wondered about

the significance of God becoming human for these women and children. Finally I managed to say something.

At the end of the program, the Sisters distributed packets of biriyani that they had ordered from a shop. While most of the women dispersed with the packets, some stayed back to help the Sisters to put the hall back in order. "We will have a break for a week," said Chando. "And then we will resume classes for them here - reading and writing, some tailoring etc. I don't know how much they will learn and whether they will quit this life to do something else eventually. But we want to motivate them to at least send their daughters to our hostels so that they can escape from this hell. Unfortunately, many of these women look at their daughters as good business material. It's easy money, you know."

The rain stopped and the sun had come up as we walked back to the bus stop. The road was crowded now with many devotees walking towards the Kali temple at the end of the road, while some dragged along eyeing the inviting faces behind the open windows of those dingy rooms. What a road, I thought to myself. 'Whatever you want to buy on earth, you can buy it all here!' Then I looked at Chando walking silently ahead of me, immersed in her own thoughts. 'Angels walk on this earth, dirtying their feet, bringing a little bit of heaven here', I thought, and a smile escaped my lips.

#### *Post Script:*

- \* Kalighat, located in South Kolkata, is one of the prominent red-light areas in Kolkata. It is situated near a famous Kali temple and is home to over 2000 sex workers, many of them trafficked from Nepal.
- \* The congregation of Sisters Adorers take it as their mission to minister to the women in distress, especially sex workers, helping them find employment and education for their daughters.
- \* Several of their students from Kalighat have now finished their studies and have moved on in life. ❖

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*Sajeev Painunkal, SJ (CCU) is Co-Tertian Instructor at Arrupe House, International Tertiarity, Kandy, Sri Lanka. He can be contacted at sajeevsj@gmail.com.*





# In ways I never envisaged

**M**y journey commenced on 10 February 2021, with a call from Bator. Bator is actually Fr Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ, the president of JCAM. He followed it up immediately with an email containing the proposal explaining the concept and terms of reference of Fr. General's Commission on the Role and Responsibilities of Women in the Society of Jesus.

In true Ignatian fashion, instilled in me through my membership in CLC and interactions with the Jesuits, I engaged in personal and communal discernment with my family, local CLC community, and my spiritual director. The answer became evident, and I wholeheartedly accepted the nomination. This decision was to be held in confidence until the formal announcement on International Women's Day, 8 March 2021. In an ideal scenario, devoid of the constraints of Covid-19, this announcement might have taken place with the commission members gathered in Rome alongside Fr. General.

With physical meetings out of the question, we commenced our interactions virtually, acquainting ourselves with one another as we grappled with the magnitude of the tasks ahead. The Commission was established under the auspices of the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat in Rome, with Xavier Jeyaraj, SJ, as the Secretary, organising

our inaugural meeting with Fr. General on 25 March 2021. Our initial encounter was brief, yet cordial. Subsequently, he graciously organized and moderated the ensuing six meetings, during which we engaged in several rounds of sharing to foster getting to know each other better before we felt comfortable enough to let him go.



Pic courtesy: jcapsj.org

Donna Andrade was unanimously selected as our inaugural moderator. Our meetings were marked by intriguing dynamics that captivate me. Each session stretched beyond the initially allotted time frame of two hours, often extending into three-hour discussions. Simon, SJ, from Korea, consistently bore the brunt of these sessions, frequently retiring to bed well past midnight. These meetings served dual but important purposes: shaping our collective identity as a commission, including developing terminologies that can be understood only by fellow members, and charting the most effective course of action, which meant conducting a worldwide survey with the support of an institutional research partner.

Our interactions were marked by attentive listening aimed at fostering comprehension and collaboration. The array of talents and contributions was astounding: from research expertise to adept facilitation of meetings (that

meant several co-moderators with different roles) for enhanced efficiency, members readily offered and assumed various responsibilities.

A particularly poignant moment for me was the acknowledgment by all that coordinating the research process within JCAM alone was untenable. Consequently, I was entrusted with the task of recruiting a Jesuit proficient in French (given that more than half of JCAM is French-speaking) who would also be clearly well-versed in the internal dynamics of the Society. The President of JCAM and the Socius, Jean Baptiste, SJ, extended unwavering support throughout, as did all the provincials of JCAM.

Anticipation brimmed as we prepared for our inaugural physical meeting in Rome. Crafting the agenda consumed considerable time. The excitement was palpable as each member arrived at the Curia. A day of communal prayer and reflection ensued. The adage 'work hard, play hard' came to life in our shared experiences. Meeting Fr. Sosa, both individually and with his council, was a privilege, reaffirming his commitment to our endeavours and granting us the latitude to explore and recommend initiatives touching every facet of the Society.

I eagerly anticipate our next gathering, not merely for the work but for the bonds we continue to forge. The unwavering support of the Jesuits on the Commission has been profoundly touching. While bidding farewell to Donna and Maria del Carmen was bittersweet, we wholeheartedly welcomed Joao, Alejandra, Jenene, and Ana into our midst. Each member brings unique gifts, seamlessly integrating into



Pic courtesy: ignatiansolidarity.net

our collective, while ensuring Donna and Carmen remain connected through our WhatsApp group, leaving the door open for their participation whenever circumstances permit.

Learning that we cannot respond to requests for information, particularly from the press, was a sobering realization. A naive release of research findings to a magazine was exploited for motives we had not been aware of, compelling us to adopt a more guarded stance. However, we remain committed to transparency, releasing information promptly when feasible.

The potential the Commission's recommendations will hold for better acceptance and collaboration with women in the Society of Jesus, and in the Church, is my constant prayer as we head towards completing our task. Given the chance to embark on this journey anew, I would leap at the opportunity. Beyond professional growth, I have gleaned invaluable life lessons, enriching my personal and spiritual landscape in ways I never envisaged. ❖

*Catherine Waiyaki is an active member of the Christian Life Community, having served as a National President Kenya Executive Committee for two terms. She moderates the Commission for roles and responsibilities of Women in the Society of Jesus.*





# What are you running away from?

**Film:** *I Can Only Imagine*

**Director:** Andrew Erwin & Jon Erwin

**Run time:** 110 minutes

Adapted from the life-story of the American Gospel songwriter and singer Bart Marshall Millard, this movie presents the theme of family relationships, human brokenness, forgiveness, and reconciliation through faith. Millard is the lead voice of the Gospel music band named 'Mercy Me' and has been nominated for Grammy award for his solo performance.

The title of the move is taken from his first popular hit that came out in 1999 and included in the album 'Almost There.' Bart grew up unhappy and lonely in a broken family in rural Texas the son of Arthur Wesley, who happens to be an abusive father and a football star. In his early boyhood his mother abandoned the family. He found escape in pop music and his companionship with Shannon, his neighbourhood girl, who was later to be his wife.

Arthur, his father, forced him to enroll in the school football team against his will hoping to make him a football star. This came to a sudden halt when a serious field accident left him confined to a wheelchair. Bart enrolled as a technician for the school choir. Discovering his passion for singing, his teacher put him in the church choir. Despite his reluctance, his voice trainer forced him to perform in a musical drama at school. His performance wins him public acclamation. Arthur, who hated church, now sick with cancer, violently opposes his son's church going. Their quarrel ended with Arthur smashing a dinner plate on Bart's head injuring him.

After a sad goodbye to Shannon, Bart takes to the road, ending up in Oklahoma as the leader of the new music group 'Mercy Me.' The studio manager, Scott Bricknell, is critical of his rendition. He complains that his voice lacks authenticity and sounds fake. Bricknell's question, "What are you running away from?", sets Bart thinking. Realizing that despite his Christian faith his soul needs healing on account of the wounds of childhood, he takes a bold step returning to his father, who is dying alone in his home. Arthur has now returned to the faith he had once shunned, and been awaiting his son's return. The father and son are reunited in an emotional scene and experience mutual forgiveness.



They rediscover the depth of mutual love. Bart realizes that the man whom he had once hated was the now the one he wanted to be like.

Reading through his abandoned journals, he discovers a recurrent phrase he used to write: "I can only imagine." He attends lovingly to his father during the last moments singing the famous hymn, 'Amazing Grace'. At that inspired moment he composes the song mentioned in the title. This song, dedicated to his Dad, was to become Bart's first hit song. He is soon reunited with Shannon and the final sequences play "I can only imagine". ❖

*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.*

# VRO marches ahead, following its founder's principles

Late Fr Michael Antony Windey, SJ, the founder of Village Reconstruction Organization (VRO), India, was born on 28 April 1921 in Buggenhout, Belgium. He dedicated his life to rural development in India. Inspired by Gandhi's Sarvodaya and Anthyodaya philosophy and motivated by Jayaprakash Narayan's Total Revolution, he founded the Village Reconstruction Organization, a non-governmental organization with the motto, "Better Villages for a Better World". Since its establishment in 1971, VRO has constructed 100 villages and 28,000 houses for tribals, Dalits, and the poor, regardless of their religion. Today, VRO operates in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Orissa, and Tamil Nadu.

Fr Windey's work, based on seven Gandhian principles for rural development, continues to inspire community development workers.

The first principle is that the community should be the agent of development, aiming to lift them from poverty and take responsibility for their future. Progress is a shared process, emphasizing cultural liberation, societal change, and partnership in ownership.

The second principle is development is a qualitative challenge. In Fr Windey's own words, development is defined as "doing things together better than before, so we can all share". Quality of life encompasses health, education, employment, social relations, security, environment, landscape, and cultural heritage. Villagers should take into account their local resources, such as agricultural land, forests, and livestock. These resources play a crucial role in shaping rural livelihoods and well-being. Rural quality of life extends beyond physical amenities.

The third principle is about authentic community development. It focuses on inclusivity, participation, and sustainability. This approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of various aspects of community life and celebrates diversity. The VRO also emphasizes community participation and qualitative well-being in rural development, moving beyond mere material progress.

The fourth principle emphasizes the importance of indigenous and integral development in rural areas. Villagers must consider local resources, environmental context, and social needs, avoiding imitating urban standards.

The fifth principle states that development is growth. Social growth is analogous to biological growth, emerging organically and spreading in various directions.

The VRO program consists of three fluid stages: physical, socioeconomic, and community-building. Key initiatives include tree-planting festivals, comprehensive community health programs, learning estates, cooperative federations, and leadership training.

The sixth principle is that the development process is a chain reaction. Initially, two or three nuclei villages are developed, preferably located within walking distance (approximately 5.5 km) from each other. These clusters are



strategically situated near central villages or smaller towns to attract attention. Cluster formation enhances operational efficiency and reduces costs. Over time, nearly all villages attract other communities to adjoining sites. Gradually, these communities merge into larger and more viable units, forming an inter-village federation.

Finally, social service needs presence and identification. The VRO animator and change agent reside in the community continuously and share their living conditions. This makes the villagers feel that the animator himself is affected by the success or failure of the community. Thus, they become partners in development.

This approach of the Village Reconstruction Organization represents a paradigm shift in rural development philosophy. The VRO's holistic approach to rural development serves as a potent reminder that true progress is not measured solely by economic indicators but by the richness of community life, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the empowerment of individuals to shape their own destinies. ❖

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

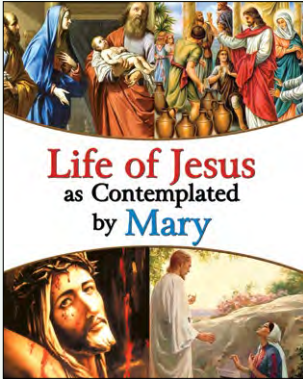
S. Emmanuel, SJ (AND) & K. Velangani Raju, SJ (AND)





## To enhance our prayer life

Fr Fio Mascarenhas, SJ talks about a book he and Dr Renu R. Silvano have come up with.



*Life Of Jesus, As Contemplated By Mary*  
By Drs Renu Rita Silvano OCV and Fiorello Mascarenhas, SJ  
Pauline Publications, Mumbai  
Pages: 144  
Price: ₹ 199/-

### What made you and Dr Renu think of such a book?

This book is born of our great desire to make this, still not well-known, Ignatian Prayer Method, to millions of well-meaning lay people, Sisters, and priests (including Jesuits?) who are struggling to “meditate” daily by using only “cold reason” to draw insights and conclusions from whatever Gospel

text they or the day’s liturgy has chosen for them. So our aim is to enhance our prayer life. It is not a “historical novel” to be read fast to pass the time! This book should come under “Catholic and Ignatian Spirituality.”

### How did you two collaborate to come up with such a contemplative work?

Renu contemplated the major events in the life of Christ and wrote the first draft, I then edited it into the 4 parts (the Mysteries of the Rosary) and inserted some biblical and theological comments.

### How will your book benefit the readers?

Janina Gomes, the veteran Catholic journalist, writes in her review, “This book is a significant contribution to Christian literature, and will help the innumerable devout Catholics who recite the Rosary daily by rote and mechanically to encounter Jesus, through the eyes of Mary.” Our own hope as co-authors is that, as the characters of each scene come alive, the readers will be blessed with their own personal “gift of contemplative prayer,” and grow to love Jesus more, to know him better, and to follow him more closely. ❖

Fr Fio Mascarenhas SJ, is a retired Bible teacher, and is available for retreats and seminars. He can be contacted at [frfiomas@gmail.com](mailto:frfiomas@gmail.com)



## To protect and promote our democracy

Fr George Mlakuzhyil, SJ talks about the new book he and his team have come up with.



*Revitalizing The Democratic Soul of India*  
Ed. by Augustine Perumalil, SJ  
Publisher: Media House, Delhi  
Pages: 167  
Price: ₹ 225/-

### How did this book come about?

In 2023 I proposed the book to the members of the newly formed “Inclusive, Interdisciplinary, Intellectual Apostolate” (IIIA) Team and they readily agreed to write seven scholarly articles on the most crucial issues affecting the Indian democracy today. This book is the happy outcome of the collective effort of these seven Jesuit scholars.

### The blurb says the book is an anthology of articles written by seven scholars. Who are these scholars?

The seven Jesuit scholars are Augustine Perumalil, Lancy Lobo, Anil D’Almeida, John Chathanatt, Job Kozhamthadam, Joseph Victor Edwin and George Mlakuzhyil.

### Who will benefit from the book?

All Indian citizens, especially the poor, the Dalits, the Tribals, the Minorities and all those who are concerned about the gradual deterioration of Indian democracy, particularly in the last ten years and who are determined to prevent it from becoming a Hindu Rashtra will be the primary beneficiaries of this book. The wise Indian voters, who have taught the autocratic NDA government a lesson this time, will find the book enlightening and rewarding. It will help them become aware of the manifold dangers to our democracy. It will also inspire them to protect and promote our secular, socialist and egalitarian democracy. ❖

Fr. George Mlakuzhyil, SJ (DEL) is a Researcher and Writer who resides at St. Xavier’s, Delhi. He can be contacted at [georgemlakuzhy@gmail.com](mailto:georgemlakuzhy@gmail.com).

# International Seminar on Faith Formation in our Schools

Thirteen delegates from the South Asian Conference participated in the Second International Seminar (II Seminar JESEDU-Jogja2024) at De Britto College, Yogyakarta, Indonesia on 24-28 June 2024. The seminar was organized by the Jesuit Schools Association of Indonesia (ASJI) and the Indonesian Province of the Society of Jesus with the support of the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific (JCAP) and the Secretariat for Education of the Society of Jesus.

About 111 participants from 37 countries of the six conferences of the Society of Jesus attended the event which included the members of the Secretariat for Education and ICAJE (International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit education).



The aims of the seminar were to: - Clarify the meaning of being Catholic/Jesuit Schools at the service of the Gospel and the Church in the contexts of today - Promote in-depth faith formation in the context of interreligious and multi-convictional dialogue in the service of our mission of justice and reconciliation - Clarify the place of Ignatian Spirituality in the faith formation process for students and educators - Identify the challenges and opportunities of educating for faith within the secular/religious fundamentalist contexts.

The five-day seminar focused on four strands which helped the participants to reflect on the theme, "Educating for Faith in the 21st Century". The four strands are: - Sharing God through Ignatian Spirituality or Ignatian Spirituality as part of our faith formation and forming the Formators - Educating for Interreligious Dialogue - Forming a Resilient Faith: Teaching for In-Depth Faith Formation in Our Secular Context Today - Educating for Faith as Catholic Schools in the Ignatian Tradition Today

In his introductory address to participants assembled in Yogyakarta, Fr. General Arturo Sosa, S.J. called on the Jesuit schools "to become apostolic bridges between beautiful and God given diversity and our faith." As apostolic instruments of the Society of Jesus at the service of the Catholic Church,



he said, Jesuit schools are committed to responding faithfully and fully to this call.

The deliberations on each day were based on the Ignatian Method which included the keynote address by the speaker of the day, sharing of experiences by two participants from various regions of the world on the strand of the day, personal prayer, spiritual conversation, plenary session and a short summary of the day by a reflector. The day ended with a Eucharist.

Participants undertook a spiritual journey on the third day to three important religious places in Yogyakarta - Prambanan, Indonesia's largest Hindu temple and an UNESCO World Heritage Site, the 16th-century Kotagede Mosque and the Temple of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Ganjuran, built in the Javanese style and housing a Hindu statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, depicting Jesus as a Javanese king.

On the last day, all participants were divided into six Conference groups and asked to reflect upon three questions given by the organizing committee. All the thirteen delegates from South Asia participated in the Ignatian Conversation on 28 June and came up with concrete suggestions to deepen the education for faith in our schools, colleges and universities. The organizing committee has come up with a vision statement of the seminar which is being sent to all Jesuit Educators and their collaborators.

All the delegates from South Asia actively took part in the seminar and positively contributed through their timely interventions and observations. Most of the delegates were assigned with some responsibility or other and they carried out those responsibilities well. We also made sure that the South Asian voice is heard by all. The meeting evoked a wonderful feeling of universality of our life and mission with all its struggles and challenges. The delegates are grateful to Fr. Stan D'Souza, SJ, the POSA for allowing us to attend this important global event. ❖

John Ravi, SJ (DEL)



## Anand Pereira, SJ (KHM)

Fr Anand Pereira was born in Mangalore on 19 March 1968. He joined the Karnataka Province on 10 July 1986 and as a young Jesuit, he eagerly volunteered to serve in the Kohima Mission. Upon his arrival in Jakhama in 1994, Fr Anand developed a deep affection for the people and made a lifelong commitment to serving the community in Nagaland and other states of North-east India. On 30 December 2000, he was ordained a priest.

Of his 24 years of priestly service, nearly two-thirds were dedicated to serving the people of Chakhesang and Southern Angami area in Nagaland. He was Director of the Pastoral Centre and Principal of three village schools and St Paul's Institute of Education and St Paul's High School in Phesama, Nagaland. In 2009, he went to the U.S. and earned a Master's in Counselling and a Ph.D in Education from Creighton University. He returned to Northeast India in 2013

and served as the Superior of St Paul's, the Region Consultor and Region Coordinator for Formation, Principal of St Xavier's Higher Secondary School in Moirang, Manipur. In 2019, he became the Superior of Jesuit Community in Guwahati, Assam, and the Region Development Director. Since 2023, he was serving as the Superior of the Arunachal Mission of the Jesuits.

Fr Anand brought many people closer to God through his convincing preaching, sacramental ministry, visiting people in their homes and praying for them in their struggles. A Jesuit to the core, and a man of passion and depth, he shaped numerous batches of scholastics, many of whom are young priests today. We will remain grateful to Fr Anand for the impact he made on our lives and on the lives of the people he served in the Kohima Region.

|| Melvil V. Pereira, SJ



## Anthony Chelakat, SJ (DEL)

Fr. Tony was born on 7 February 1935 in Koothallu, Kottayam, Kerala. Joining the Jesuit order, he embraced the values of social justice, and spiritual depth with unwavering commitment.

He shouldered many responsibilities as superior, administrator, formator, educator, teacher, social worker, and gardener. He inspired the formees under his care not only to excel academically but also to grow as compassionate and ethical individuals.

One of Fr. Tony's most remarkable qualities was his ability to connect with people. He had his simple ways to make people feel at home with him. He had genuine empathy for the suffering people. A deeply spiritual person, he lived his faith in simple ways. He found joy in service, strength in prayer, and fulfilment in seeing others grow and succeed. Humble and obedient, he lived his vows.

He always addressed us, "You chaps." With a great interest in trees and a 'green hand', he planted many trees in Behror and Mahua. Today we enjoy the fruits of his labour. He had a two-sided personality, strict but gentle. His strictness was in matters that need to be rooted in the person but gentle when growth begins. He had a disciplined life as far as work and routines were concerned. He was gentle at heart which can be seen in his appreciation of arts, especially, music, dance, and movies.

Let us celebrate the many ways he enriched our lives. Let us hold onto the lessons he taught us, the love he shared, and the example he set. His legacy is not just in the words he spoke but, in the lives he touched and the positive changes he inspired.

|| Soosai Mani, SJ



## Arun de Souza, SJ (BOM)

Arun's passing over to the next world was absolutely untimely. He was at the peak of his productive years, with a huge contribution to make in the higher education apostolate. At the theoretical level, Arun was a quintessential humanities and social science person; while at the practical level, Arun was very pragmatic, disciplined and even binary in his approach. His proactiveness and decisiveness he developed during his long years of leadership as Rector of St Xavier's College, Mumbai, and later as Provincial of the Bombay Province.

In Arun's primary circle of love were his students. He shared a lot of positive energy with his students, with whom he continued to stay in touch for many years after they graduated. He educated his students to be critical, credible, creative and concise in their assignments. He also enjoyed a healthy and warm

relationship with a huge number of teaching and non-teaching staff at St Xavier's college. What the College and the higher education mission will miss in Arun's passing is his aptitude for educational and institutional leadership.

Arun was also deeply in love with his calling as a Jesuit and was faithful to the way of life of the Society. He also had a deep love for the rural areas. He wanted to invest his apostolic energy in rural-based research, and was recently appointed as the Director of the Nashik-based rural research centre run by the Jesuit NGO, Maharashtra Prabodhan Seva Mandal (MPSM).

What the Jesuits will miss is his wisdom, companionship and a pleasant, inviting, engaging and spiritually-deep co-presence.

|| Keith D'Souza, SJ





## Benjamin Ekka, SJ (JAM)

Brother Benjamin Ekka, affectionately called “Benji”, was born on 7 February 1943. He joined the Society of Jesus on 14 August 1968 at XTTI Patna and did his Juniorate at the same place. He was a trained para-medical from Holy Family, Kurji, Patna.

He served the Society in different capacities, but he served most of his life as Minister and Sub-Minister. He took care of the needs of every community member affectionately. The hallmark of his life was the love and concern he gave to all, like a mother. His ever-welcoming nature made everyone feel loved, cared and welcomed. His prayerfulness, gratitude, cheerfulness, humility, and availability will never be forgotten. During his last days, he began the “Good Morning Ministry”, welcoming every student, staff

and those who entered the school wishing them good morning with a broad smile. He lived as if everything belonged to God and gave as if nothing belonged to him till his last breath. The void left by Benji will be hard to fill, and he will be deeply missed by all who knew him personally.

Benji entered his eternal abode on 17 June 2024. The funeral Mass at Loyola School, Jamshedpur on 18 June was attended by a large number of priests, Sisters, parishioners, friends and relatives. Such a large gathering from far and wide indicated what he was to them. God grant him eternal rest in His Kingdom!

|| Gyan P. Kujur, SJ



## Francis Vazhapilly, SJ (MDU)

Having been anointed, Fr. Francis was lying on his bed, with his eyes intently looking at the Crucifix on the wall. That served as a symbol of the Jesuit life he led with his eyes and mind focused on Jesus.

Fr. Francis Vazhapilly was born in Puthenvelikkara, Ernakulam, on 5 May 1931. He joined the Society of Jesus on 16 June 1952, at Shembaganur and was ordained a priest on 19 March 1964. Wherever he lived and worked, he planted numerous trees and nurtured them. In the evenings, after tea, he would always be found in the garden, tending to the plants.

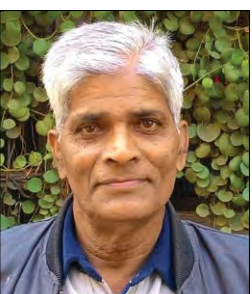
A committed and disciplined Jesuit, he followed the rules and norms strictly. He treated everyone equally, regardless of caste, colour, or religion. His reputation for fairness and integrity was well-known. In 1972 when he was the warden of Clive’s

Hostel, while trying to protect his students who were mercilessly beaten up by the police, he too was beaten up and had to be hospitalized. Later, Fr. Francis filed a case against the police and won the case.

In 1980s, amidst several challenges in Nagaland, he established St. Joseph’s College in Jakhama (1984-1991) and initiated relevant courses to meet the needs of tribal communities. Later Fr. Francis went to work at St. Xavier’s College, Nepal and ensured holistic formation of the students from 1993 to 1998.

Returning to the province, Fr. Francis was in various formation houses as registrar, teacher, and spiritual guide. Since 2018, he lived in Beschi. He breathed his last quietly on 23 June 2024. Fr. Francis Vazhapilly will continue to live in the minds and hearts of all those who lived and worked with him.

|| Maria Annaraj, SJ



## Joseph Srampickal, SJ (PAT)

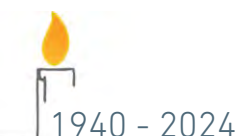
The sudden passing away of Fr. Joseph Srampickal was a great shock for all of us. Though he was in the U.S. for many years for his studies, after his return to Patna Province, he did not want to teach in big and posh institutions, but chose to serve the poor. His heart was with the poorest of the poor of Bihar.

From 1991 to 2011, for 20 long years, Fr. Srampickal stayed in Gaunaha in West Champaran district. Gaunaha is located on the Indo-Nepal border and is one of the most backward Blocks of Bihar. He brought about social, educational and economic transformation in about 212 villages of the Block. He devoted his entire life to the service of Tharus, Musahars, Oraons, Bengali and Burmese refugees and other backward classes. He used to cycle from village to village all day long and lived like one

of the people he served. Fr. Srampickal was a true missionary who went into the huts of the poor and marginalized and enjoyed their company. Today, it is because of him that people in Gaunaha have good education and are able to raise their voices to demand their rights. He used street plays (Nukkad Natak) as one of the most powerful instruments to get rid of child labour, child marriage, illiteracy, superstitious practices and atrocities against women.

Fr. Jacob Srampickal, SJ, his younger brother, followed him to Patna Province and became well-known for his contribution in the field of communication. Unfortunately, he passed away in 2012 at the age of 61. May God give Frs. Joe and Jacob Srampickal eternal rest!

|| Jose Thayil, SJ







## Cultivating Spiritual Practice



Pic courtesy: meclum.com

**S**t. Monica was always patient with the people around her, especially her family, and especially when ridiculed for her faith. She knew her prayers would be answered according to God's perfect timing. She prayed unceasingly for the conversion of her son, Augustine. It took decades, yet she eventually saw the fruits of her prayers. St. Monica's life was not easy, but she remained patient and steadfast in her faith. Monica stayed close to Augustine, following him to Milan and Rome. Finally, at 29, Augustine was baptized by Bishop Ambrose in 387. Because of Monica's fervent prayers, Augustine became a Christian, and a great Saint.

It is regular spiritual practice that helped St. Monica achieve this. In all religious traditions regular spiritual practice implies setting aside some time each day in stillness, silence and solitude. Spiritual practice implies training, self-discipline, and self-denial.

Spiritual practice is termed 'ascesis.' Contemporary Western organizational psychologists, and spiritual directors make the point that meditative and solitary practices help develop a healthy personality. This is because "the still-point ... the innermost core of self, can, at first, only be reached indirectly." This may happen through flashes of insight and intuition, dreams, feelings or symbols, and through bringing the mind to stillness. This crucial insight is ancient and widespread, being fundamental within the spiritual quest in Hinduism, Buddhism, Sufism, and Christianity - not to forget native religions around the world.

Psychiatrist William Glasser claims that if a spiritual practice is going to help individuals grow, it must contain the following six requirements: - a non-competitive practice, done mostly alone - a practice, not dependent on others for execution - an easy practice, not requiring much mental effort - a regular practice, for up to one hour per day (or twice a day in equal amounts of time) - a practice potentially improving mental and physical / psychic states, potentially building self-sufficiency and adaptability - a practice done without inordinate self-criticism or comparison to another's progress.

Resistance to this inner work is, it seems, natural to almost everyone. Barriers to interior growth will usually be founded in fear, lethargy, and indecision.

Disciplined spiritual practice builds positive growth, enhancing self-acceptance and patience. It assists in self-transcendence, and coming to terms with oneself. Spiritual persons sense they are complete, while understanding the inner path is a long and solitary process of building positive bonds with oneself; self-trust, meaning and order provides aptitudes that we usually associate with self-actualisation and self-transcendence. These aptitudes enable persons to build inner strength, emotional connectedness, and faith that the world is safe and trustworthy.

The aim of spiritual practice is to become whole by establishing bonds of inner friendship with the Unknown, with invisible parts of oneself, and facing one's self-rejection, often hidden from others.

Persons of spiritual practice are ready to do the work of inner regeneration, to pull away from distractions and enter solitary time for self-scrutiny, self-acceptance and self-trust. Embracing these steps may involve questioning some earlier life-decisions including: how one's adjustment to the world has been made, one's relationships entered into or departed from, one's life work, and the attitudes one brings to everyday tasks.

These persons are unafraid to reach out to others. They come to be trusted by others who see them as safe and secure individuals, whose lives convey a predictable and consistent message. Internal congruency is a significant quality that such persons manifest. ❖

*Rev. Dr. Meath Conlan is a Counsellor and Adult Educator who lives in Australia. He can be contacted at [meathconlan@icloud.com](mailto:meathconlan@icloud.com).*

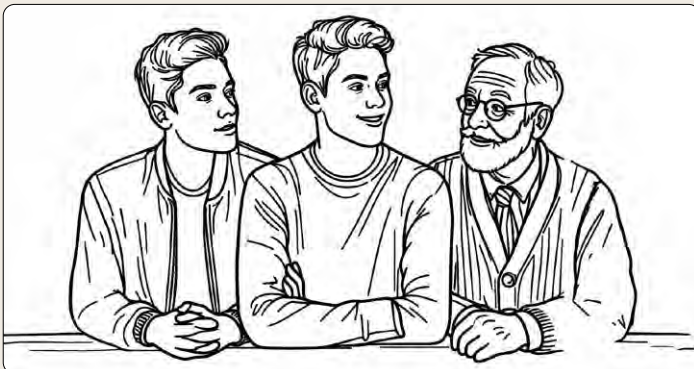


Why do these IT professionals come to the Jesuit house before meals every day?

Since Jesuits are busy, they have outsourced their 'Examination of Conscience' to IT professionals.

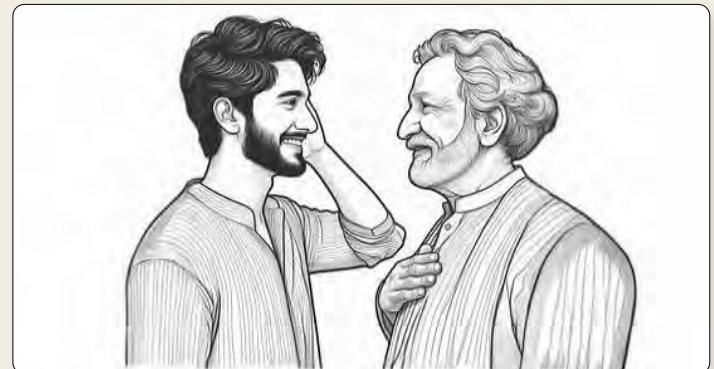


Fr Rector made a radical decision yesterday. He supplied all young Jesuits with GPS to help them locate the SJ community chapel.



Those days when a Jesuit entered the Jesuit residence his first question was: "Where is the Chapel?"

Nowadays, when a Jesuit enters the residence, his first question is: "What is the WIFI password?"



Elder Jesuit: Those days Jesuits were accused of having just brains - not a heart.

Younger Jesuit: Today we don't need brains. We have computers and smart phones.

Melwyn Pinto, SJ (KAR)

JESUIT HUMOUR

## "Fr Thomas?...Wait!"



Think of those days when the intercom was not heard of, much less the present-day mobile phone. It was a challenge for the novices in the Jesuit Novitiate at Nihilnagar to attend to the phone when they were assigned the task on holidays or during the time of siesta. Being novices even in the art of handling a phone, they often found the 'still small voice' in the phone rather mysterious. To make matters worse, the smattering of English they had thus far acquired was not adequate for comprehending or responding to the caller's query, a fact that led often to miscommunication.

It happened one day, that I dialed the novitiate number and told the operator - not knowing that he was a novice - that I wished to speak to Fr Thomas. "Fr Thomas? ... Wait!" said a hesitant voice. There was silence for a couple of minutes - presumably because the attendant had gone to fetch Fr Thomas. But presently, I heard the novice picking up the receiver and in a clear voice informing me that "Fr Thomas is no more!"





# Her heavenly glory

## *What is the Assumption of Mary?*

The Assumption of Mary is the teaching that: The Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory [Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* 44].

## *What level of authority does this teaching have?*

This teaching was infallibly defined by Pope Pius XII on Nov. 1, 1950 in the bull *Munificentissimus Deus* (“Most Bountiful God”). He explained, this is “a divinely revealed dogma.” This means that it is a dogma in the proper sense. It is thus a matter of faith that has been divinely revealed by God and that has been infallibly proposed by the Magisterium of the Church as such.

*Does that mean it is an “ex cathedra” statement and that we have to believe it?*

Yes. Since it is a dogma defined by the Pope (rather than by an ecumenical council, for example), it is also an “ex cathedra” statement (one delivered “from the chair” of Peter). Because it is infallibly defined, it calls for the definitive assent of the faithful.

## *Does the dogma require us to believe that Mary died?*

It is the common teaching that Mary did die. Although it is the common understanding of that Mary did die, and although her death is referred to in some of the sources Pius XII cited in *Munificentissimus Deus*, he deliberately refrained from defining this as a truth of the faith.

John Paul II noted that on 1 November 1950, in defining the dogma of the Assumption, Pius XII avoided using the term “resurrection” and did not take a position on the question of the Blessed Virgin’s death as a truth of faith. Pius XII’s Bull limits itself to affirming the elevation of Mary’s body to heavenly glory, declaring this truth a “divinely revealed dogma.”

## *Why should Mary die if she was free from Original Sin and its stain?*

Being free of Original Sin and its stain is not the same thing as being in a glorified, deathless condition. Jesus was also free of Original Sin and its stain, but he could—and did—die.

Expressing a common view among theologians, Ludwig Ott writes: For Mary, death, in consequence of her freedom from original sin and from personal sin, was not a consequence or punishment of sin. However, it seems fitting that Mary’s body, which was by nature mortal, should be, in conformity with that of her Divine Son, subject to the general law of death.



Pic courtesy: freepik.com

## *How did Pius XII prepare for the definition of the Assumption?*

Pius XII called for a broad consultation, inquiring among the Bishops and, through them, among the clergy and the People of God as to the possibility and opportuneness of defining the bodily assumption of Mary as a dogma of faith. The result was extremely positive: only six answers out of 1,181 showed any reservations about the revealed character of this truth.

## *How can we apply this teaching to our everyday lives?*

According to Pope Benedict XVI: By contemplating Mary in heavenly glory, we understand that the earth is not the definitive homeland for us either, and that if we live with our gaze fixed on eternal goods we will one day share in this same glory and the earth will become more beautiful.

We may be sure of it: from on high, Mary follows our footsteps with gentle concern, dispels the gloom in moments of darkness and distress, and reassures us with her motherly hand. ❖

*Courtesy: (Excerpts from an article in) the National Catholic Register*

WELL SAID

“The day a woman can walk freely on the roads at night, that day we can say that India has achieved independence.”

- Mahatma Gandhi



Picture courtesy: adobe.com