

Crossian Connect

SISTERS OF THE CROSS OF CHAVANOD

Issue No. 5/2024



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Dear Sisters,

I send heartfelt greetings to each one of you. I trust that you are actively preparing for the upcoming Provincial/Delegation Chapters and, on a broader scale, for the General Chapter 2025, centred around the captivating and purposeful theme, "Pilgrims and Prophets of Paschal Hope."

In this same vein, permit me to pose a question: if someone were to ask you, "Are you a human being?" How would you respond? Typically, we would all answer affirmatively, distinguishing ourselves from other creatures in God's creation. Unlike animals, humans possess the gift of self-knowledge, a self-reflection nature that sets us apart.

But what does it mean to be self-reflective, and how does it impact our lives? The renowned philosopher Socrates implores us to "Know thyself," emphasizing the value of self-knowledge. Understanding oneself involves recognizing one's roots, and acknowledging that our origin is not solely from our mother's womb. Rather, our roots lie in God, who created us in His image and likeness, as expressed in Jeremiah 1:5.

Acknowledging this truth leads us to a deeper understanding of our relationship with God. St. Augustine's words resonate: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord and our heart is restless until it rests in you." True satisfaction comes not from worldly knowledge but from understanding ourselves i.e. knowing God in and through who I am and, in doing so, discovering God. The intrinsic relationship between God and ourselves is permanent, contrasting with the impermanence of worldly life.

While life in this world is temporary, our spiritual essence transcends death, depending on our relationship with God. This dichotomy is beautifully expressed by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's insight: "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."

As the new year 2024 has been unfolded, I hope it will lead you to a profound understanding of your true self on this journey as Pilgrims and Prophets of Paschal Hope. Additionally, as we enter the season of Lent, let us practice transcending ourselves, fostering a deeper connection with the transcendent being that is God and moving beyond our selfish selves.

Representing Sr. Elizabeth and the General Team, a special appreciation to our *Crossian Connect* editorial team – Sr. Judy Gomez, Sr. Elsy John and Sr. Jiji Mathew whose collaborative and tireless efforts have shaped this edition. God Bless!



Sr. Maria D'Mello
General Bursar

PILGRIMS AND PROPHETS OF PASCHAL HOPE



Sr. Elsy John
For the Communication Team

Very Dear Sisters,

The year 2024 has just begun and the team for **Crossian Connect** is here with its next issue. It had been so pleasant and meaningful journeying with you. The previous issues narrated how our sisters during the unprecedented worldwide pandemic had become wounded healers, good Samaritans, courageous nightingales, empathetic counsellors, altruistic guardians, round the clock volunteers and dedicated guards. Around the globe there was only one caste, one religion, one language, one gender, - the humanity and the world was flooded with endless kindness.

When the offices and institutions especially educational institutions could function from home, there was a great rejoicing and people celebrated the development of science. When the young and old alike learned to use android phones and browsed internet they saluted the progress of technology. Availability of vaccines helped people to lounge and whisper with pride 'nothing can defeat us!' Such was the confidence laid on science and technology. The **Crossian Connect** did make a publication of these developments and sent up not only prayers of praises but also appreciation and gratitude for those made it possible. Our series also presented how as a

Congregation we responded with extensive action plans and conscious effort to the call of Pope Francis for immediate action to protect our common home. The present issue will once again bring out the life and mission of the Sisters of the Cross spread out in five continents. In these pages the readers will not only know the developments and progress, expansion and effectiveness of our missions but also the struggles and difficulties encountered, challenges and threats posed. What credits them is their triumph over all the odds by holding high the banner of the Cross. Walking the way of the Cross our sisters have revealed the merciful love of the Father to all.

The year 2024 is so important and significant for every member of the church and especially for the Sisters of the Cross. This is a year of preparation for the jubilee 2025. Our Pope has already given us the motto on 3rd January - a motto he said, "that can be summed up in two words: Pilgrims of hope." Pope Francis has set in motion the preparations for the Jubilee Year 2025, which he believes "can contribute greatly to restoring a climate of hope and trust as a prelude to the renewal and rebirth that we so urgently desire" after two years of pandemic and suffering. Pope Francis emphasized for conversion which is "the spiritual dimension of the Jubilee". At par with the motto of the Jubilee year 2025, our Congregation has also chosen the theme for our General Chapter 2025 - 'Pilgrims and Prophets of Paschal Hope'. Our General team has already initiated us into the theme and helped us enter into this great event in the Congregation by input sessions, write ups, various levels of sharing and so on. We are assured that this

journey which we have embarked will lead us to identify urgent necessities and current challenges of the world, Church and the Congregation and respond authentically through our universal mission.

A pilgrim is one who under takes a journey towards a definite place with a specific purpose after having much inward and outward preparation. In the Church I am a pilgrim walking towards the Kingdom. The Bible presents to us prophets as persons chosen by God to speak for God. "Pope Francis says "A prophet is he who, by virtue of baptism, helps others read the present under the action of the Holy Spirit," which helps people "understand God's plans and align yourselves" with them. The Paschal Hope seems to me something like a light at the end of a tunnel. I walk through the dark tunnels of struggles and difficulties, limitations and deprivations, challenges and risks without being disappointed and distressed, like my Jesus who walked the way of the Cross and at the end finding the light - the Hope, the resurrection. When I put together these my simple thoughts and reflections on the theme, I am overwhelmed and enthusiastic to participate in these great events. Let us all prepare ourselves well and experience the metanoia - a transformative change of heart; especially a spiritual conversion.

I along with my team members Sr. Judy Gomez and Sr. Jiji Mathew express deepest gratitude for sharing your experiences, hopes and aspirations. I wish all the readers of **Crossian Connect** a good time of reading, refreshing and reimagining our consecrated life!



THE BEGINNINGS OF MAHER

Sr. Lucy Kurien
Province of Pune

Every new beginning has a history and so it is the same with Maher. I wish to share my experience of starting Maher. It began in the year 1997 after a woman and her baby died as her husband doused her with kerosene. Engulfed in flames of fire, she looked into my eyes and pleaded to save her. But I was helpless. After seeking the Divine and going through the process of discernment, I dedicated my life to the safety of women and children. I am grateful to the late Sr. Noelline Pinto who has been my inspiration and mentor in many ways.

Maher has grown from one small home that provided safety and shelter to two women and three children on the first night to 68 residential homes. Presently, we have extended to seven Indian states through outreach programmes in more than 90 villages. This noble work has received many prestigious local, national, and International awards. I have met Presidents, Celebrities, business leaders, and even Pope Francis. I have faced many challenges and difficulties all alone. I had no one to go to but God alone. At times Fr. Francis D'sa SJ, would understand the problem a little but he could help very little.

Gradually I realized that if Maher was to provide shelter for women in India, the organization would need to embrace interfaith principles to be inclusive. While this worked well for the women and children, it resulted in many problems.

The villagers thought that because I am a Catholic nun, my aim was to convert the women and children. On

one occasion, a group of men from a nearby village came to Maher. I was away and the children offered them tea. When I returned, I found the children talking with the men. One of the men told me as they were leaving, that they had come to harm me.

I thank the sisters of our Congregation, for their trust in me and the freedom they gave me to start Maher on my own. The fact that I was a single woman living on my own with women and children ran counter to Indian norms. But we maintained high standards of conduct, even in the most difficult times, and slowly with love and compassion, began to earn the respect of the surrounding people.

Starting Maher with a meager sum was another challenge. In order to feed the growing number of women and children at Maher, I would even go to the market and pick up the discarded vegetables and grains. One day, a man from the market delivered vegetables at Maher's doorsteps explaining that "a rich man is paying for it." Later I learnt that there was no rich man but rather the same shop vendor who donated the vegetables. His generosity touched our hearts and he was made the Chief Guest when Maher began to host programmes.

Born in Kerala in a rural community, I did not know to speak Marathi, the local language, nor could I understand many of the village customs. As Maher started progressing, we employed the staff who possessed the knowledge about the culture, such as social workers and trustees of the Maher Board, the President being Hirabegum Mulla.

My faith in God grew stronger with each challenge that I faced. The fearless religion that Fr. Tony D'Mello taught me, turned to be a reality in my life. The lack of money and support deepened my trust in the Divine Providence. Every day begins and ends with interfaith prayer at Maher. Each person is encouraged to practice their faith, however, when we gather as a community we pray to the Divine. If one enters Maher you will see a painting with a flame in the center surrounded by symbols from each of the world's major religions. In our home, it is common for Hindu, Muslim, and Christian children to live peacefully together. Over time I came to understand that despite our differences, love is at the heart of world's faith traditions. I thank my dear parents who instilled in me a deep faith in God. As strong as my Catholic faith is, at Maher 'Love is our Religion.'

The increasing tragic circumstances prompted Maher to extend its wings further, sheltering around 800 to 1,000 youth. 35 children's homes were established. Since inception, Maher has housed 4,500 children. When they are grown up, the children attend school. More than 390 have completed college and are working as engineers, executives, nurses, lawyers, police officers, social workers, teachers and many more.

Maher has been a home to 4,600 women in the past 26 years. While family reunification is always a goal, it has sometimes been impossible. Some of the women have chosen to complete professional training and now work as nurses, social workers,

and caretakers. In 2011, a growing number of men living on the streets caught the attention of Maher's social workers and thus the first home for men was created.

I am grateful to the donors of Europe and United Kingdom for helping to build Maher in the early days. In the past 20 years, many people and companies in India and from the U.S.

and other countries around the world have heard the story of Maher and have been inspired to provide support to our non-governmental organization.

Dear sisters, all of us at Maher are ever grateful to you for your prayers and support. I feel deeply indebted to Sr. Meena who has stood by me at all times. I also extend my gratitude to

our sisters who have visited us and given of their services at Maher. Now in my 26th year as Director, I have learned that people will always find food and a place to sleep but what they need most is 'love'. Above all, I lift my heart in gratitude to God who has journeyed with me right from the inception of Maher until now.

EMBRACING THE PROPHETIC MISSION AS A CROSSIAN PILGRIM

Sr. Alzira Furtado
Province of Pune



As Crossian pilgrims, we are called to live a life of service to the Lord and to His people. We are called to be a light in the darkness and to bring hope to the hopeless. We are called to be a prophetic voice in the world and to challenge the injustice that we face.

"The vocation of the religious is to be a prophet, a herald of the good news of salvation." - Pope Francis. Our Foundress Mother Claudine Echernier, was a prophetic voice in her time. She challenged the social norms of her day and dedicated her life to serving the poor and the marginalized. She is a role model for us as we strive to be prophetic in our own lives.

"Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15). Today, we live in a world that is full of challenges. We see poverty, hunger, war, and injustice all around us. It can be difficult to know how to respond to all of this suffering. But as Crossian pilgrims, we are called to be a beacon of hope in the world.

My life is a pilgrimage, a sacred journey dedicated to serve the Lord with unwavering zeal and prophetic conviction. As a religious, I have

vowed my life to Jesus Christ, my Master, Savior, and Redeemer. It is my profound privilege to serve Him, to love Him unconditionally, and to proclaim His love to all whom I encounter.

In my role as a teacher, I have had numerous opportunities to fulfill my prophetic calling. I stand firm in my adherence to principles and values, embodying the role of a prophet and at the same time, being a symbol of love and compassion. Even when faced with the challenge of students' unbecoming behaviour, I have been empathetic and understanding, guiding them towards discipline with love.

There have been instances where teachers have compromised true values in the face of unjust evaluation systems. However, I have remained steadfast in my commitment to fairness and impartiality, standing alone if necessary to ensure that students are evaluated with justice and compassion. I believe that even the smallest acts of righteousness, performed with exceptional dedication, resonate with the prophetic voice. Standing for justice and kindness is an unwavering

testament to the prophetic way.

Within community life, I strive to embody the prophetic spirit through my unshakable advocacy for righteousness and justice. During evaluations and meetings, I serve as a voice for fairness and integrity. In my place of work, I stand as a champion for justice, ensuring that ethical principles guide every decision and action.

My path as a Crossian pilgrim is marked by a commitment to living out the prophetic mission. This mission entails:

- Raising my voice against injustice and oppression to uphold the rights of the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed, ensuring that their cries are heard and their dignity is respected.
- Challenging the social norms that perpetuate injustice by questioning the status quo and work tirelessly to dismantle the systems and structures that nurture injustice, thus striving to create a more equitable and just society.
- Embracing a life of simplicity and humility: I will model a lifestyle

that is not defined by material possessions or consumerism, demonstrating that true fulfilment lies in serving others and embodying the values of the Lord.

- Practising compassion and forgiveness: I will be a source of healing and reconciliation in a world often marred by conflict and division, extending compassion and forgiveness to all, regardless of their transgressions.

As a Crossian pilgrim, I embrace my calling to be a prophetic voice in my missionary endeavours by being a joyful witness of the Lord's life-giving experience, and sharing His love and compassion with all whom I encounter.

A prophet in today's world is called to be: **Proclaimer of God's Word**, a conduit of divine grace, **Revealing the unseen**, guiding humanity with wisdom's embrace, **Oracle of truth**, messenger of hope, whose words

ignite the soul's spark, **Pleading** for the faithful in darkness, illuminating the path through the ark, **Harbinger of change**, herald of a new dawn, whose voice echoes through the ages, never to be withdrawn, **Embodiment of peace**, builder of bridges, whose words mend and heal, the societal ridges, **Teacher of righteousness**, guide to salvation, whose wisdom lights the way, leading to liberation.



SERVICE TO HUMANITY IS SERVICE TO GOD

Sr. Joan Mariyal
Province of Trichy

“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). Seeing God in people is the motivation for POORNA Social Work Centre in Palani, an organization which embraces the needy with open arms. The vision and initiative of Sr. Alphonse Raj, ably supported and sustained by several sisters since its inception in 1996, is bearing tangible fruits. Professional Commitment has been the key to its success in offering shelter to the poor and needy in and around Palani.

Our Target Group

We reach out to the Women, Children, Students, Tribals, Sanitary Workers, Transgender and Gypsies in Palani and its vicinity. Jesus who volunteered to help the neglected sections of the society and Mother Claudine, our Foundress, who expressed this aspect in dynamic acts are our inspirations. We respond to the needs of the people and reveal the merciful and compassionate love of God through our service to the weaker section of the society.

Focus on Women

Women in and around our locality are being empowered through various programmes and monthly meetings. They are taught to realize their strengths and abilities, to enable them to live their lives with dignity in this fragmented society. They are made to become aware of their own rights, handle their emotions positively and think in a broader way, so that they manage their life-situations and problems at home as well as in their working places efficiently. Several of our activities are innovative and are aimed at equipping the women with leadership qualities. They are offered tailoring courses in order to make

them self-reliant. So far 25 Self Help Groups have been successfully formed, through which 250 women are benefited every year. They are encouraged to save their income, and loans are provided to start small scale business, like petty shops and vending fruits and vegetables.



Vocational training programmes are conducted to teach them how to start income-generating businesses. POORNA gives due importance to the emotional side of women. It offers free counselling to those who come with a heavy heart and confused mind. The result is consolation and solace, and they are helped to tackle their personal and family problems. Thus, family animation remains as one of the priorities of POORNA.

Focus on Children

Developing social awareness is an integral part of a child's growth and its transition to adulthood. It is crucial that social awareness instincts are instilled in the children from an early age in order to build a good and healthy environment in the school as well as in the society. It would help them be empathetic and kind towards others as they grow older. Several programmes on social awareness and other activities for children are organized in the schools and in the villages. The children are trained in ecological awareness to plant trees, drop seed ball, avoid plastics etc. They are also trained in moral etiquette, identify social causes to determine how others feel, understanding and expressing gratitude, developing positive relationships, effective communication, leadership, seeking and offering support and help when needed, team work and collaboration, skills in problem-solving. Other useful activities like Drawing Therapy, Meditation, Laughing Therapy, Clay Therapy and Journal Writing are conducted to promote positive mental health among students. Psychological help is given to the students to control their anger, improve their concentration, develop a spirit of gratitude, identify their hidden talents and to develop leadership qualities.

Focus on Environment and Ecology

Through POORNA, we reach out to the villages and create awareness about protecting the environment, to



plant saplings and to save nature. Awareness programmes are conducted through dance, drama and songs to protect and promote care for our common home and celebrate the seasons of creation. Children in the villages are given awareness on Ecology and environment, global warming and climatic changes and the stand they need to take in order to preserve the earth for the future. There is a positive response from the children and students of the villages, as they join hands with our Centre to preserve nature.

Focus on the Tribal women and the Transgender

The tribal women in and around Palani hills are being educated through our Centre on caring for the Mother Earth. World Conservation Day was celebrated with the tribal women during which eco-consciousness was created in them, and they were made aware of the hazards of using plastic bags and the importance of planting trees and creating herbal garden. The difficulties faced by the transgenders

are addressed. They are also motivated to lead a healthy and decent life in our society. They are conscientized to contribute to the protection of the environment.

Orientation on "Save the Nature" was conducted for the Tailoring students of our institute. They were taught the importance of planting saplings at home and protecting the environment by avoiding plastics, using herbal products and eating natural foods and fruits. They were also motivated to spend time with the nature to gain more positive energy and learn from nature. In remembrance of the patron saint of Ecology few saplings were planted in our Centre and the Tailoring Centre.

The small acts which we do with great love for the needy in the society gives great joy for us to do more for them. It motivates us to face the challenges of doing good with hope and courage. Trusting in the Divine Providence like our Mother Claudine and our early sisters, we move forward in reaching out to those in the peripheries.



GROOMING THE PROMISED FUTURE

Sr. Bency Sebastian

Province of Tenali

During the recent World Youth Day, in Madrid a young Russian girl asked the prelate, what it means to be a numerary assistant and he responded, it means being the driving force for the apostolic work throughout the world.

The apostolic and missionary life of the Sisters of the Cross at Kollipara in the Province of Tenali unfolds the process of becoming a driving force for the work of God denotes as the anecdote. In this *Crossian Connect* I pen down how we began to be the transforming agents to connect people to God, through the education ministry. Nevertheless, our sisters had setbacks in their decision to serve the Lord. We plunged into the unknown to educate the most vulnerable especially during the pandemic. We moved with a strong commitment as called as God's messengers with humility and servanthood. A fire of love lit in our hearts, we became a blessing to the students, teachers and parents even though in few occasions our missionary venture turned to be risky, tedious and frustrating but our experience of God's love powerfully led us. For instance, while I was grooming my students as best human beings, I encountered all kinds of formidable struggles in my interaction with the students and the parents, almost it is like letting go of my total self, here I love to proclaim the power of the word of God along with St. Paul the apostle "For when I am weak then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). In 2020 the nation was facing socio political unrest, economic crisis, communal violence and the large part of that year

was spent under lockdown due to the life threatening virus. This caused huge impact on the life of the millions of kids, at closure of educational institutions. We, the sisters and teachers learnt to adopt with the pandemic, which altered our life style. Unity of spirit brought us under one umbrella to master E-Learning which was an indispensable factor in sharing the information and knowledge. As teachers today we face unavoidable consequences of this closure of school, the learning gap and in the classroom we have a generation who suffers learning loss, productivity loss and psychological and emotional imbalance. I started to introspect myself and decided to commit myself to the cause. I felt an

enormous energy within me from the Master JESUS to transform my students.

Holy Cross English Medium School, Kollipara is celebrating its silver jubilee marking 25 years of service in the field of education. Indeed, it is a moment to reflect on its journey and express gratitude to Almighty God. It is a momentous occasion to acknowledge the vision of the founders, dedication of the sisters who served the institution, the staff who joined us to reach our goal and the students who contribute towards academic excellence. At the onset I take pride to share with you some of the best moments in the life of our students.



They are encouraged to share what they have with those who have not; they are extremely eager to help with those who are in the periphery. Every year they visit orphanages, the institute of blind at Vijayawada, night shelter aged home at Tenali and ashram at Ponnur where there are orphans, mentally retarded, widows, old and the sick and thereby inculcate the virtue of charity, human respect and dignity. The school arranges activities based study on plants, farming through field trips. The energetic students create a vegetable

garden in the school campus to mark the season of creation.

Swatch Bharath project introduced in the school is named as Holy Cross Green and Clean Programme and it is implemented once a week for all classes. Students engage in cleaning, planting and watering the plants and promote greenery around the campus.

The school has taken a pledge to promote ethnic, constitutional, cultural and moral values in all our celebrations. The campus ministry is active in promoting faith in God and

respecting every religion. In recent years we have introduced counselling sessions in the school to enhance all round development of the child.

Every year Children's Day is celebrated by inviting the children from the JANGAS community. They share the stage with Holy Cross students and are given space to exhibit their talents. Thus, through education we pledge to transform the society by transforming ourselves and spreading the light of knowledge.

MY EXPERIENCE OF THE WORLD YOUTH DAY 2023 IN LISBON

SR. INES OBAMI
Province of France



World Youth Day is a global gathering where young people deepen their faith, experience the universality of the Catholic Church and commit their lives to Christ alongside hundreds of thousands of like-minded peers. Along with St. Peter, I would like to say, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here' (Mt 17:4). Indeed, how good and touching this experience of staying, praying, sharing, and listening together is! As I return to my country, one question dwells in me: 'What will I take back as I resume my daily activities, and how am I going to resemble Mother Mary in the midst of the youth I am going to serve?'

'Mary arose and went out with haste' (Lk 1:26). This was the theme chosen for the 2023 World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, from 1st to 6th August 2023. Nevertheless, first, from 27th to 31st July, we had the opportunity to prepare ourselves to live these moments of grace with trust, to listen to the Word of God, and to receive with obedient faith the various messages which the holy Father Pope Francis wanted to bring

to the young people of the world, messages in which the place of the

Virgin Mary could not be overlooked because of the chosen theme.



Indeed, after the Annunciation, Mary could have withdrawn into herself, into her own worries and fears due to her new situation of becoming the mother of the Saviour. Instead, she had put all her trust in God with Elizabeth at the forefront of her mind. She acted without hesitation, got up eagerly, and visited Elizabeth. By citing the example of Mary, Pope Francis invited us to rise up and be missionaries who carry the light of the Gospel wherever we are present because God is with us. He called us to trust Him and rely on His providence because God never abandons those who trust Him. ‘Arise and fear not’ were the last words of Jesus on the mountains to encourage his frightened disciples.

Dear friends, let us remember Pope Francis’ final words at WYD: “As young people, you have great dreams, but you often fear that they may not come true; sometimes you think you are not up to the challenge, which is a kind of pessimism that you can overcome at times. As young people, you may be tempted to lose heart, think you fall short or disguise your pain with a smile. As young people, you want to challenge the world,

work for justice and peace, and devote all your life and energy to this cause with creativity, but it still seems insufficient. Yet, the Church and the world need you, the young, as much as the earth needs rain. To all of you, dear young people, who are the present and the future, to all of you, Jesus now says, ‘Have no fear; do not be discouraged’”.

So it was with immense joy that I embarked on this wonderful adventure with my divine Spouse, Jesus Christ. Like the Blessed Virgin, I hastened to participate in the WYD celebrations. During those days, I discovered that this event was an opportunity to discern my vocation, an experience of pilgrimage, a missionary experience, a celebration of faith and a time of spiritual renewal. In two weeks, I had the joy of visiting three European countries: France, Spain and Portugal. I thank God, who blessed me to visit and allowed me to pray confidently in two shrines dedicated to our Blessed Virgin Mary: Lourdes (France) and Fatima (Portugal).

The Portuguese welcomed us generously in Lisbon, and Pope

Francis met more than one million young people worldwide. With 43,000 young people and 75 bishops present, France was the third most represented country behind Spain and Italy. Dear readers, may I invite you to take the Virgin Mary as a model, as the Pope said to the young people of the world at the WYD in Lisbon. ‘The Mother of the Lord is the model of young people on the move, not immobile in front of the mirror contemplating their own image. Her gaze is always outward’.

I cannot conclude the above testimony without thanking Sr. Maryline and her Councillors for offering me the opportunity to participate in the WYD, which enabled me to have a lively and joyful experience of faith and communion. It also gave me the opportunity to pray fervently, sing, listen to the Word of God, adore Him in the Blessed Sacrament and pray the Stations of the Cross together with Pope Francis and the young people from all over the world. May the Lord bless us hundred fold! Glory and praise to you, Lord, for the gift of life and the protection throughout the WYD.



THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Sr. Solange Tselikeme
Delegation of Central Africa

The second anniversary of the presence of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was celebrated on 16th November 2023 without any significant fanfare.

Let us backtrack a bit: in 2021, Sr. Francoise Kimbwaswa arrived in this country in search of a place to look for a small community of two sisters who aimed to conduct research to establish a foundation in the DRC.

It was Francoise who welcomed me, and on 16th November 2021, we were officially welcomed. Sr. Eugenie Kipoy, the Delegation Superior of Central Africa, was also present. She had come to get a first-hand impression of this new mission, to encourage and reassure us, and to ease our integration into the daily life of the



Congolese. It is no coincidence that Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Brazzaville, the capital of Congo, are the nearest capitals in the world. Therefore, it is important to understand why this proximity is an opportunity for the sisters. Congo-Brazzaville was the first African country to welcome the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod 65 years ago. Therefore, in addition to the fact that the headquarters of the delegation is in Brazzaville, Congo is an important asset for this new presence of the Sisters of the Cross in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The journey from Congo takes 15 minutes; sometimes, it takes seven minutes if you are on a fast canoe called « Air France ». It is, therefore, easy for the sisters to travel between Brazzaville and Kinshasa and vice versa to attend formation programmes, assemblies, meetings, etc. organised in the delegation.

How far have we really progressed after two years?

Studying the project was the main activity during the first year. Then, with two sisters, Francoise and I, our community of the Sisters of the Cross was canonically erected in the Archdiocese of Kinshasa in DRC on 16th November 2022. Right away, we received our first assignment: I was assigned to teach French at a Jesuit High School, whereas Sr. Francoise was in charge of the canteen at Kabambar Higher Secondary School, which belongs to the ICM Sisters who are at the service of education in two prestigious institutions of the capital city. The high school is for boys, and the higher secondary school is for girls. The High School Boboto and the Higher Secondary School Kabambare are two elite schools with two common characteristics: catering to the wealthy population striving for excellence. Living daily with the pupils, parents, and colleagues is a wonderful experience. There have been many difficulties in the integration process, but with God's

grace, we have stood firm throughout the academic year. We have already started the 2023-2024 academic year with tremendous enthusiasm and commitment. I teach catechism for two hours a week at Boboto High School in addition to my teaching responsibilities, i.e., from 1.00 pm after my duty hours. The catechists in Boboto do not work alone. They belong to the large family of the Sacred Heart parish, where the high school is located, another beautiful place where they work with 100 catechists. At the beginning of the year, we had many activities: the 'Messe d'envoi' for the catechists of the deanery, the inaugural Mass of the pastoral year celebrated by the cardinal archbishop of Kinshasa and above all, the beautiful retreat preached by the parish priest to equip the catechists for the new catechetical year. It was an opportunity to pray together, evaluate the past year of catechesis, become aware of the magnitude of the responsibility and adapt the didactics of catechesis to the most modern and appropriate methods. The parish priest, a Jesuit, summed up the meaning of catechesis in a laconic statement, "it is to make the catechised to love someone (Jesus) whom we love." The "sending out on a mission" at the parish level occurred on Sunday, 4th October, during a Eucharistic celebration. Indeed, it is possible to marvel at the extraordinary faith journey and even the professionalism evident in this account.

Besides our teaching career, we are also committed to increasing the production of vegetables in our garden. It is a daunting task: Kinshasa has a humid tropical climate with heavy rain and high temperatures. This poses a considerable challenge in the field of agriculture. Our house is a small island so it is almost

impossible to have a garden. During the rainy season, Kinshasa is more like a swamp, which makes it difficult for us to grow crops. As a result, we are forced to buy vegetables, which are generally of poor quality and are very expensive. It takes a little ingenuity to get by. To begin with, we have opted for soilless cultivation, but as this is limited, we have channelled the water and raised the garden tables on slits so that the plants could escape the floods. We plan to fertilise the soil with organic waste such as ashes, biodegradable wastes, leaves of avocados, or mango trees and all the other trees growing in our land. We are at the beginning of rainy season, and cabbages, tomatoes, spinach, maize, sweet potatoes, banana trees, and many other vegetables have already started sprouting. Picking and preparing fresh vegetables from our garden is always a great pleasure and a reassuring activity.

This anniversary also coincides with the 30th anniversary of Sr. Francoise Kimbwa, the first Sister of the Cross of Congolese origin from DRC. There are currently eight sisters from DRC in the delegation of Central Africa. On 16th November, with Sr. Perseverance, the new missionary to DRC, we thanked God for this journey filled with the presence of God in everything that has happened over the past years. We thank God for the many vocations from this country and for the future ones, if God willing, because Congo is a fertile land for vocation.





EMBRACING YOUTHFULNESS IN OLD AGE

Sr. Gerardin Jayam

Province of Madurai

“Life unfolds in three phases: birth, growth, and decline, each a mysterious facet of existence originating from the divine source.” – Francis Xavier Nguyen Thuan.

Seven years ago, my retirement journey began, marking the end of my career as a teacher at Holy Cross College (Autonomous) in Nagercoil. While retirement typically symbolizes a time for reflection and change, for me, it was an opportunity to embark on a new and enriching chapter in life. This transformative journey was triggered by a serendipitous encounter in 2008, during an ongoing formation programme, when Sr. Alphonse Raj shared her mission of caring for HIV/AIDS patients. Her dedication deeply moved me, igniting a fervent desire to serve AIDS patients during my retirement. To prepare for this mission, I initiated monthly visits to AIDS patients at Catherine Booth Hospital, despite the constraints of my academic commitments.

However, life has a way of unfolding in unexpected ways, often diverging from our own plans. As Isaiah 55:8 wisely states, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.” In 2010, I had the opportunity to attend a conference in Ernakulam, Kerala, organized by the Xavier Board of Higher Education. Little did I know that this event would significantly impact my life, for by then, I had been chosen to assume the role of principal at Holy Cross College, commencing in June 2010. Following the conference, my intention was to visit our Provincialate Community in Angamaly before returning to Nagercoil at 9.45 pm.

A fateful accident at 10.00 pm on my way to Trichur railway station disrupted my path.

The unexpected incident forced me to confront my vulnerability, teaching me the virtues of humility, patience, and kindness, and revealing latent talents that lay dormant within me. The accident confined me to a bed for five months, two in Kerala and three in Nagercoil. As I gradually recuperated, I became aware that my mobility was no longer as unrestricted as before, necessitating assistance for various personal tasks. Throughout this challenging period, I came to rely on the support of others, all the while sensing the guiding hand of God in my activities at the college from 2010 to 2015.

Before my accident, I had a weekly habit of visiting my neighbours’ homes, fostering connections with the local community. However, my mobility limitations of post-injury pushed me to seek solace and creativity in alternative pursuits. I explored the realms of art and embroidery, guided by the expertise of the college staff. My quest for creativity led me to delve into painting and paper art, driven by online tutorials, and even to pursue a Montessori training course. This course offered structure and purpose to my leisure hours, enabling me to adapt to a more solitary existence. Although my artwork didn’t achieve professional heights, it enriched my life with a sense of fulfillment.

Following my retirement in 2015, I sought opportunities for spiritual growth through various centers but encountered numerous rejections. I was eventually sent to

Mariathaipuram, a village community conducive to rest and prayer. While my time there was not devoid of activity, I felt an underlying sense of emptiness. Engagements included preparing young couples for marriage, stepping in as a substitute teacher for young students, and spending my days reading magazines and newspapers. Still, something was amiss. It was during this period that I began visiting homes in my neighbourhood, relying on a walking stick for mobility, and seeking the assistance of passers by on motorcycles to reach homes that were farther away. These visits brought me immeasurable joy as I listened to the stories and experiences of people and prayed with them, transcending the barriers of caste and religion.

In 2016, I received a call to return to Holy Cross College to take on the role of the Secretary of the College. In this capacity, I initially taught M.Phil classes for three years and subsequently transitioned into a role as a guest lecturer for postgraduate students of social work starting in 2017. Although I wasn’t an expert in the field of social work, my engagement allowed me to connect with Transgender community, tribal community and refugees. The tribes who with their minimum conveniences are happier and genuine in their relationships inspired me. The transgender were ready to support their elderly and sick parents in spite of their painful experiences. Inspired by a book I was reading, *Oru Puliymarathin Kathai* (The Tale of a Tamarind Tree) by Sundara Ramasamy, I initially attempted to draft a short story but soon found myself with more material than a

traditional short story format could contain. Encouraged by staff who read my work, I expanded my writing into a novel, *Punnaimarathadiyil* (Under the Calophyllum), which was published in August 2021. This journey into Tamil Literature subsequently led to the creation of four collections of short stories *Verhalin Mozhi* (The language of the Roots), *Patchai Kudayum Thanga Chainum* (Green Umbrella and the Gold Chain), *Thenmozhi*, *Thennaiaramum* (Thenmozhi and the Coconut Tree) *Un Varavukkai...* (Waiting for your coming..) and a novel, *Mounam Pesinal* (If Silence Speaks), which explores the lives of transgender.

Though I started to relate with the transgender community in 2019 in connection with the research project of MSW students, the novel was the outcome of the reflection on ‘the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few’ (Matthew 9:37-38) What am I doing? From then on whenever I sit before the Blessed Sacrament those words of Jesus haunted me. So I visited the transgender community listening to their painful stories online and offline, celebrated Christmas with them along with the staff and students of the department of Social Work. I wanted to present their positive side of life to the society and so wrote the novel “Maunam Pesinal”. The novels delve into pertinent social issues and concerns about the environment. Through these creative endeavours, I have discovered that, despite its subtlety, God’s guiding hand continues to direct me towards a sense of fulfillment and purpose.

In my 67 years of life, I have witnessed profound transformations in the world, in people, and within myself. Each event, whether marked by joy or challenges, has played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of my journey. While material possessions may offer momentary satisfaction, I firmly believe that true purpose lies in what Jesus Christ has



to offer. Some may argue that old age often brings with it feelings of abandonment or diminished importance. However, I maintain that it is our duty to pave the way for the growth of the younger generation. Embracing this notion and learning from failures and challenges are central aspects of life.

I am convinced that I am called to live a life filled with joy, with happiness emanating from within. If I cannot find happiness within myself, I understand that no external source can provide it for me. I firmly believe that God has bestowed numerous treasures upon me, and I must have an open heart to receive them. As long as we possess the ability, we must remain active and cherish every

moment as a precious gift.

Retirement is a gift that invites us to nurture our talents. St. Paul’s words in his first letter to Timothy echo this sentiment: “Cultivate your talents. Do not neglect the gift that is in you” (1 Timothy 4:14). It is important to remember that expertise is not a prerequisite, and comparisons only serve to diminish one’s happiness. God seeks our best, not the best in the eyes of others. During moments of weakness or incapacity, it is comforting to surrender oneself to Jesus. Embracing the belief that, even in times of illness or old age, we possess the strength of Jesus and the resilience symbolized by the Cross and this provides solace and purpose.



PROUD TO BE A TEACHER

Sr. Valsa George
Province of Angamaly

I am proud to be a teacher,
For I mould the young minds,
Provide new ideas and skills;
A preacher of good news to the people around,
A builder of people both great and small,
An educator who guides the people to their destiny.
Above all, I am the disciple of Jesus Christ, whose teachings stir me and instructs me.
“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverb 22:6).

In 2020, I received a request from my Provincial to teach at our school in Ballari. The news brought a mixed feeling of happiness and worry, especially considering the intense heat that dominated most of the year. To prepare for the upcoming mission, I turned to prayer, surrendering the discomfort within me to the Lord.

While the mission filled me with happiness, there lingered a sense of fear and tension. In these moments, my strength came from

contemplating the sacrifices made by Mother Veronica Pollien and the first missionary sisters in India. Despite numerous challenges, they displayed cheerfulness and patience, willingly sacrificing their lives for the glory of God.

This reflection empowered me to adapt to the local conditions, including the heat, food, culture, and language. The initial phase of village life posed challenges, with nearly a year of battling dengue fever and diarrhea. Despite feeling weak and disheartened, I held firm in the belief that, for the sake of the mission, all adversities and insecurities must be entrusted to the Lord, facing them with faith and drawing strength from God.

Beyond the hardships, there was much to love about village life—the tight-knit community, the green fields, the rhythmic sound of bullock carts carrying workers, and the lively presence of children in the streets. I felt a calling to serve the poor, finding profound joy in experiencing the presence of God among them.

Joys and Challenges:

My Passion for teaching presented both joys and challenges. I approached my role with a clear vision, recognizing the importance of truthfulness in character building, as emphasized by Jackson Dirs. Reflecting on Arnold Tybee's insights about civilizations, I realized the gravity of my responsibility lies in shaping not just academic minds but also character development.

Despite my enthusiasm for teaching, I observed that some students were disengaged in classroom activities. Delving deeper, I discovered that 95% of the students hail from impoverished families, facing challenges such as parental ignorance of the value of education and family issues linked to alcoholism. Recognizing these difficulties, the school's sponsorship programme provided support.

Understanding that students faced personal struggles, I shifted my approach. I spent extra time with slow learners, demonstrating patience and utilizing moral science classes to inspire them. Rather than scolding, I showed them special concern, emphasizing their dignity. The classroom became a dynamic blend of roles – a parent, a teacher, a counsellor, and a mentor.

The desire to bring positive change led me to make practical decisions, recognizing the need for a holistic approach to improve children's lives. This journey increased my reliance on God, strengthening my faith in His promises. Witnessing the impact on students' lives became a source of reward, despite the challenges of



dealing with a few demotivated individuals. The fulfillment of service, giving myself wholly for the betterment of the less fortunate, brought inner peace and joy.

Call to be Skillful:

In the contemporary role of our school, academic excellence is not the sole focus. We aim to motivate and empower students to become lifelong learners, critical thinkers, and valuable contributors to a constantly evolving global society. Holy Cross

High School diligently works towards instilling strong moral values, integrating academic and extra-curricular activities for the comprehensive development of each child.

Being part of this village school brings me joy, as it boasts well-equipped facilities, including smart classrooms, a furnished computer lab, an extensive library, a spacious playground, and serene surroundings. Recognizing every child as a unique



gift from God, I express gratitude for the entrusted responsibility of molding young minds and contributing to His greater glory.

MOVING BEYOND ONESELF

Sr. Rosaline Rodrigues
Province of Amravati



“I have heard your prayers, I have seen your tears: indeed I will heal you;” (2 Kings 20:5)

Our God is a God of action: He is at work in every situation. This was true in the past; it is true today. It is true in places, where the Gospel has been embraced; and it is true in places and among people who have never heard of the Gospel of Jesus.

God is deeply aware of the human realities: dehumanizing poverty, injustice, violence, deprivation and marginalization, which people experience in every period of human history. God who is at work

in healing, redeeming and liberating the human society, invites all people of goodwill to participate in His Redemptive and Liberating work.

Jesus emptied himself and became poor, loved all unconditionally and abandoned himself to the will of the Father. He invites us today to make His sentiments and attitudes our own. He had compassion towards the poor, the hungry, the sick, the possessed and very specially women. He understood their struggles and moved beyond even to the point of breaking the pharisaic law.

Our Mother Claudine in all her actions, in all her undertakings, had only the Glory of God in view. She lived only for Him. She sought him alone; all the rest was nothing for her. (FAVOL1)

Seeing the plight of women of her time and the adolescent girls without proper moral education she was pained to think that these people would be mothers of families and what they would give to their children. This situation urged her to respond to the signs of the times promptly. Her only aim was always to bring the glory of God and the



salvation of souls through her good example and edifying words.

Every human being has the right to live with dignity and to develop integrally. This fundamental right cannot be denied by anyone in this world. The love of Christ impels me to reach out in love to those in the periphery. The widows and the abandoned women who live at the suburbs of Amravati struggle to cope up with the life that affects them physically, mentally and psychologically. When a woman becomes a widow, she loses her identity in our society. Their dreams and hopes are shattered. Many of them have no proper shelter to live in. Seeing the quantum of their misery I was moved into action.

The systematic study and research conducted by us revealed the heinous plight of these abandoned women. At the loss of their spouse, the widows are ostracized and given no space to grieve as they are laden heavily with the responsibility of taking care of their children all alone. At times they struggle to make their ends meet, as they shared their woes and pains with me, most of them had tears in their eyes.

Our constant visits and interactions helped to affirm them personally and to create a common platform where they can express their challenges and give vent to their feelings. We provide a hand holding support through building their capacities and skills with special focus on counselling. 90% of women are domestic workers who are forced to be out of their homes the whole day that affects the behaviour and life of their children. At present they have found a home in Divya Sadan and are very happy to share and support one another

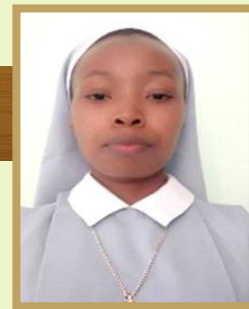
through their groups. These women are formed in the Self Help Groups where they are helped to face the challenges of life. These women further are supported with income generation programmes like selling of bangles, goat rearing, vegetable selling, and stationary shop and so on as per their skills. Some women have learnt fashion designing and beautician course that helps them to earn their livelihood. The children too are supported with educational material and motivation. The community too is made aware that it is their responsibility to support

these women who need moral and social support. This endeavor enthused me to go beyond my leisure time, and personal plans, that provides me with an opportunity to reveal to all the merciful love of the Father and the liberating power of the paschal mystery. Each one has a story to tell; each time I listen to them my heart is filled with compassion and love that unites me with the suffering humanity. Thus, I am challenged to live the mission and the charism of our Congregation.



JOY OF COMMITTING MY ENTIRE LIFE TO CHRIST

Sr. Agriphina Ndunge
Province of East Africa



"To the weak, I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). While songs fade and memories can be forgotten, within the depths of my heart resides a rhythmic melody whose every step is uniquely captivating. I relive it daily because it is vibrant, active, and



truly admirable. This is the profound joy that has filled me since the day I made my total commitment to the Lord. I can confidently say, "I came, I saw, I believe, and I live... by the power of Him who strengthens me."

St. Paul stands as my greatest motivator, embodying the choice to become all things to all people for the sake of saving others. It feels like a vivid identification with Christ, akin to the sheep our Pope Francis often refers to as having the smell of the sheep.

I vividly recall the eloquent sermon delivered on the day of my perpetual commitment, emphasizing that anyone publicly committing themselves to the Lord signifies that God is alive, and they are prepared to be a channel of living hope in witnessing gospel values. During the litany of saints, my name was mentioned, accompanied by a plea that I should not draw back to the

world, meaning a return to a life without sanctity. This moment empowered me, an outpouring of new grace strengthening me to authentically live my life in Christ and, above all, as a true daughter of the Cross.

Now, just three months after that significant day, one aspect that has been remarkably unique is that, in every moment – whether at my lowest or my highest – I have never felt alone. There's an indescribable sense of a guiding power, assisting me in living out my calling each day with deeper love, commitment, inner joy, and freedom, along with absolute trust. From this experience, I can genuinely testify that there is joy and fullness of life in the Lord.

"I press to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us" (Philippians 3:14).

THE LORD WHO HEALS ...

Sr. Catherine Msoka
Province of East Africa



Healing is like a beautiful ray of light. The true magic of healing occurs when individuals come together to work towards a common goal.

During my educational journey, there was a profound moment when I felt the Lord's presence, whispering into my soul. Whether it was meant for

me, you, or others, this revelation occurred during my field experience at St. Monica Modern Hospital in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania—a renowned private hospital managed by a devoted Catholic family.

To my surprise, every room in the hospital, regardless of its function,

housed a cross symbolizing Jesus the crucified. Some rooms even served as special spaces for prayer, complete with statues of Mother Mary and St. Joseph. Each morning, it was mandatory for all staff members to gather for prayer before commencing their duties.

Another surprise awaited me: every family member working at the hospital had their own dedicated moments of personal encounters with the Lord in the prayer room. Even the non-family staff members were invited during their free time. The sight of a nun, myself, participating in their hospital routines during my nursing studies was met with curiosity.

As I became more familiar with the environment, I had the privilege of meeting the hospital owner, who shared the inspiring story behind the institution. The tragic loss of his parents altered his dream to become a priest during his seminary days. Struggling to support his siblings, he adapted his dreams, working hard to educate himself and eventually

becoming a pharmacist. He pledged to remain a devoted Christian, fulfilling his promise by establishing the hospital. His sharing and the way he managed the hospital were truly touching and at the same time called me to introspect my call.

The turning point in my understanding of healing came when I encountered a Muslim patient suffering from blood cancer. Despite the patient's initial resistance to my presence, her husband implored me to visit. Reluctant but compassionate, I entered the room and held the patient's hand. To my surprise, she expressed remorse for having previously mistreated a nun and requested prayers for herself and her family. As I prayed, she peacefully passed away, leaving her family in tears but grateful

for the comfort.

In that moment, I felt a profound connection with the Lord and a realization of the power of forgiveness. Much like Mother Foundress and Jesus on the cross, forgiveness doesn't always demand an apology; we can take the initiative to forgive those who have hurt us.

This experience taught me that we all possess the ability to be healers, using our simple knowledge and compassion. The question we must ask ourselves is, do we heal or wound others? Let the examples of Mother Claudine and Jesus inspire us to be the agents of healing and forgiveness in the lives of those whom we encounter.



THE JOURNEY OF SYNODALITY IN PERUVIAN CHURCH: TO SEE, TO JUDGE, TO ACT.

Sr. Shiny Kurian

Delegation of Latin America

The Church in Peru, at various levels, discusses the sole theme of synodality and its implications. This was a new and challenging experience that involves thinking, reflecting, listening, participating, judging, and acting in alignment with Pope Francis's call for an itinerant Church at the periphery level. The significance of this endeavor is underscored by Pope Francis's statement that "the path to synodality is the path to the third millennium," a theme modern writers and theologians have explored to aid reflection.

For me, this journey is more than an intellectual exercise; it is a spiritual odyssey, a transformative experience delving deeper into the realities of life and mission. It encompasses the energy of the healing process within oneself while also caring for the common good and our shared home.

The people of Peru responded positively to the synodal path, viewing it as a spiritual process championed by Pope Francis. It disrupted routines, bringing about discomfort and surprise, a Kairos moment. The Episcopal Conference embraced it as a gift of the Holy Spirit, establishing a new national commission to animate the 46th ecclesiastical jurisdictions in Peru. Each local Church, in turn, formed its diocesan commission to facilitate the listening process in accordance with its unique reality and context. These commissions created spaces for meeting, dialogue, listening, and discernment, all centered on the question, "What is the Spirit asking of us in this current moment?"

I was privileged to represent our Congregation at a meeting organized by the major superiors of Peru, engaging in a search and dialogue to

understand the context and realities of our time. This experience allowed me to delve into the local reality of our Congregation, parish, and institutions, identifying prevalent themes in our pastoral ministry.

Regular meetings were organized at the diocesan, parish, and institutional levels to build capacity, foster a sense of communion, and encourage active participation in our mission. We are engaged in various activities at the national, regional, and parish level, promoting synodality in our mission: a collective response to the newly discovered factors and realities, using the method of seeing, judging, and acting.

As we press forward, guided by the words, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor..." (Luke 4:18-19), may we all continue

our baptismal call, walking together to do common good and fulfilling the mission of Jesus through our collective efforts.

In the cultural context of Peru, the month of October holds special significance as the time of El Señor de Los Milagros (The Lord of the

Miracles). This revered image, painted by a slave of Angolan descent, is said to have withstood multiple earthquakes, symbolizing miraculous protection. October is aptly named as "purple month" due to the purple attire of the Madres Nazarenas Carmelitas Descalzas, the custodians

of the image. As residents in Peru, we fervently pray that the Lord works miracles through our lives as we follow the synodal path in communion, participation and mission.



PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN OUR PASTORAL EXPERIENCES

Sr. Peuma Peiris
Province of Sri Lanka



The series of sessions that I attended on *'Be Claudine for Mission Today'* provided me with ample avenues for reflection, enough insights for actions and an ocean of inspiration for initiatives in the missions that we, as a religious community are involved in, here in *Bingiriya*, in the North Western Province of Sri Lanka.

Bingiriya is situated in the outskirts of the diocese of *Kurunagala* and the majority of Catholics that we serve are Sinhalese coexisting with the Buddhists. We are three in the community and are convinced that the pastoral care of the flock entrusted to us is a non-negotiable priority in our life and mission and we joyfully make ourselves available for the same letting ourselves be constantly challenged and edified by the resounding words of Mother Claudine: "To make the good God known and loved."

I am also inclined to believe that what

we are and what we do here is a God-driven response in our docile hearts to the invitation of the Holy Father Pope Francis to Priests, Men and Women Religious and Seminarians: "Dear men and women religious, I encourage you to carry out joyfully your pastoral ministry whose effectiveness is the fruit of faith and grace, but also the fruit of humble life, one detached from worldly concerns."



The pastoral activities that we are involved in, are multi-faceted directing at various existential needs of the time and concerns of the people. We teach catechism for kids, prepare the adults for Sacraments of Initiation, participate and make our presence felt in various fraternities of the parish, visit houses and specially the sick with Holy Communion, accompany the needy and the ones in crisis by means of pastoral counselling, organize and facilitate the liturgical and paraliturgical activities of the parish and the sub-stations, encourage people to recite family Rosary, youth apostolate etc.

It needs to be stressed and underscored that all these ministries and pastoral involvements are not something exceptional. In fact, one might say that these are the very traditional pastoral activities and nothing extraordinary in them. This is exactly the focal point and the crust of



this little article. True enough, that these are the traditional ministries of the Church but what is remarkable to note is that when ventured and embraced in Claudine's respective and perspective, they take a totally different twist demanding a totally different approach and openness to the daily scuffles and struggles of life. One begins to see new horizons to be focussed, new possibilities to be explored, new approaches to be adopted and new temperaments to be cultivated. This is really a challenge for it demands a total and sincere commitment virtually 'abandoning' some of the convictions that we cherished hitherto so dear, of life and mission. In other words, we are invited to qualify our presence and the kind of our involvement in these very traditional ministries in terms of a personal conversion geared to proclaiming God's love and mercy.

Numerous are the practical difficulties that we face and numberless are the stumbling blocks that we encounter as we accompany the people in the vicissitudes of their life. The only language that children of the missions seem to grasp better is the new technology. The cyberspace has given them a different set of values and a different phase and rhythm to life. Social media keep feeding them with uncensored information leaving them all at a loss not knowing the veracity of the information that they receive. In this context, to speak about God and make sense of faith is an uphill task but a must-do job. And our sisters, being conscious of this reality improvise ways and means to address the issue

in the best possible way they could. We are determined to make Christ louder and audible.

The present economic crisis of the country has paralysed the little domestic economies of the poor families. The cost of living gathers momentum day by day forcing people to live hand to mouth, the unemployment keeps adding angst to the already existing anxieties of living. School dropouts are increasing in number. In such a scenario characterized by worrying, anxiety



and uncertainty of living, the presence of our sisters with these poor masses is revitalizing and life-giving. They eagerly long for our visits with peculiar stories to narrate and confide. They are energized and empowered in their own powerlessness. We help them to trace God's abiding presence and providential guidance beautifully written in the gloomy pages of their lives. These encounters challenge us reminding that "life is a gift from God and a mystery that transcends us. For this reason, life should in no way be discarded, either in its beginning or at its end" as affirmed by Pope Francis. (EG, 53). Therefore, our concern is to help these people to realize that life is worth living amidst shocking currents of uncertainty and frustrating tussles of living.

God has His own mysterious ways of shaping and moulding not only the people being served but also the very ones serving: with the onset of pandemic, there emerged the dire



need of lockdowns, distancing and quarantine. Adding fuel to the fire the economic crisis with its skyrocketing prices of essentials and electricity, water, fuel etc... shook the lives of the people and brought unbearable burdens on ordinary people to face their day to day lives. This really affected the religious community to the core. The pre-school being the only means of our income suffered an exponential loss with the dwindling numbers. Even the ones attending the pre-school could not afford the fee. This was when God invited the sisters of the community to count on His providence. It was a decisive turning point and a remarkable juncture of our spiritual journey, a moment of walking the talk. This spiritual dilemma caught up in the basic necessities of life reminded me that we are constantly nourished by the sap of Christ and seduced by His love to bear fruit in abundance with deep joy and compassion becoming joyful witnesses of Christ's mission [G. C. 2019 Page 7]. It is amazing to confess that most of our material needs were taken care of by the very people that we served. The totality of self that we gave to people in love and service began to rebound in superabundance of people's generosity and love. They were so generous that we went empty-handed and came back with full of things. What a providence and what a care!

Fr. Mermier said that 'I want mission' and Mother Claudine said "To make the Good God known and loved". Today we through our pastoral life amidst the people realize that, **I am a mission on this earth!**

THE PASCHAL HOPE

Sr. Sahayarani Selvaraj

USA

Province of Pune



Working as a Pastoral Associate in the parish is a main job, which has a well-articulated and framed job description. The primary focus of the Pastoral Associate is sharing in the pastoral ministry of the parish and of the community. With the pastor, the Pastoral Associate is co-responsible for personal ministry to parishioners and community members; and for the development of a family-centered parish. S/he assists the priest and gives faith formation to the kids. Working in this post in my parish at Cadyville, USA, I find it's not a job, it's beyond and something different and life giving. My days are packed with daily, weekly, monthly and yearly activities. Preparing kids (initial faith formation) for the first Holy Communion is a yearly programme. Four days in a week I visit the sick who are affected by Multiple Sclerosis, Muscular Dystrophy, Diabetics, aged and lonely, home bound, Autism, Mentally and Physically Challenged, Alzheimer, Dementia, Cancer and Drug providers and consumers, etc.

Each day is a new experience in visiting my beloved faithful. Being with them and listening to the same thing over and over again is tiresome and sometimes it's funny too. I enjoy being with them. I consider it as a privilege given to me to carry the Eucharistic Lord and share with these persons who impatiently long to receive Him. Of course, they are more privileged than me to receive Jesus in their homes, nursing homes and senior housings. I am so grateful to the Almighty for making use of me as His instrument. While visiting them daily, I discover the stark realities that they go through, for example, living

alone, waiting for someone's visit, waiting for someone to bring food etc. a life totally depended on others. Some are capable of doing things by themselves and some are unable to move by themselves. These people's lives energize me to do my ministry and inspire and strengthen my vocation. At times, frail and weak I am, I feel downhearted and dispirited. Constant prayer and daily participation in the Holy Eucharist gives me synergetic boost to my everyday life, to look at the reality, to rejuvenate my energy. Working with the kids for their faith formation also nourishes me in my personal faith journey.

Admiration of the nature and its scenic beauty- the running water, and the vast and boundless blue sky with the moving clouds and smiling sunshines, the autumn colours and the subsequent leaf fall in regions, the bright white snow, the bitter cold and gentle breeze all these bring novelty in life. Personally, my spiritual reading and knitting help me to relax and learn new skills to soothe and calm my active mind. And even more, my pastoral ministry enlightens me with the Paschal Hope not only in me but also in my people entrusted to my care.

I would like to share about one of my home-bound persons Evangeline whom I visit every week. She touched me with her life-journey of living the Paschal Hope. It was on 10th November 1963, she was just 27 when her husband aged 35 was killed in a road accident. Evangeline and her seven children were left behind. The eldest was 7 year old and the youngest was hardly 2 months old. Evangeline, through her strong faith and

conviction, somehow pulled through this ordeal. She instilled in her children a strong faith in the Eucharist and the importance of Rosary. She never missed Sunday mass, took some of her kids with her and left the other kids with one of her family members to babysit. Now at the age of 87 she is with the same mind-blowing faith and conviction, and continues her prayer life and says prayers and rosaries and offers special prayers for the souls in Purgatory throughout the day.

She is a breast cancer survivor and has been battling against lung cancer for the last 14 years. She also lives with chronic lymphocytic leukemia which is not active at present. She has passed through numerous surgeries and chemotherapy treatments to put the cancer in remission, but unfortunately, it keeps reviving. Nothing will stop this faithful woman from trying a new drug or procedure in the hope that the cancer will die. She continues to live with a hope to be cured and keeps herself joyful in all circumstances. She continues to set an example by being faithful to her daily prayers, novenas, and receiving the Holy Communion often. Her children are very good in their words and deeds. They have their families and grand children.

Immaculate the youngest of her children follows her footsteps, is a very active participant in the Church. Prayer is a very important and vital part of her life, and she tries always to put God first in daily chores of life. Like her mother, she, too, is a breast cancer survivor for the past 15 years. On December 14th in 2022, while working in a gym, Immaculate suffered a burst aneurysm, and as a

result had a stroke. Fortunately, she was attended quickly, and survived with some deficits. The worst deficit is identified as being short-term memory issue, which is nothing short of a miracle. Within two months, she had three brain surgeries; by the very fact of surviving these she feels her purpose of life has not been accomplished yet. Through the many family and community prayers she received good medical care and quick intervention.

Immaculate is alive today and she is the proof of God's love. She has the same spirit of her mother to do things for the Church and for others. She is not certain why she was spared from death on this earth, but she asks God every day to reveal the purpose of her life in this world and seeks ways and means to serve Him. She comes to see her mother every day. They thank God together for their faith and paschal hope. This is her life journey. There are so many people, that we have met

in our lives too, sometime even people with more problems than these but what makes them different is they see God in all things and in all circumstances. They inspire me by their way of living. I visit them to listen to them and give Jesus to them. Have you ever had the chance of meeting Jesus in your life and in others? He is with us in the every day in our lives. Are we ready to recognize Him? Yes, He is our Passover Life-Giving Bread.



A LIFE GIVING MINISTRY

Sr. Shanti Pulickal
Province of Kolkata

“Be a love Bomb, let it explode; not to kill but to save”. Strange! But this caption, found on a sign board near a jail was the main inspiration of the founders to begin the Prison Ministry India movement.



Prisons are places where the inmates are serving a sentence for a mistake they have done. Punishments can be taken as a challenge to better oneself or it can lead to total frustration. Since prisoners live under heavy bondages such as fear, insecurity, helplessness, hopelessness, anger, and revenge; in a word a host of negative emotions, the time of punishment often leads to total frustration. Pope Francis said ‘For punishment to be fruitful, there must be a horizon of hope; otherwise it is simply an instrument of torture.’

In prison ministry we try to bring new hope and new life to prisoners; to

make them feel that they are our brethren, though behind the bars, and to create the awareness among people that the prisoners are part of the society and we have the duty to care for them. “I have committed a crime, but I am a human like you” was the desperate cry of a prisoner when we met him. Jesus said “I was in prison and you visited me” (Mt. 25:36).

Prison Ministry India (PMI) was launched in 1985. Born in a cowshed with two members, now it has spread its wings to 650 dioceses in India with nearly 9000 volunteers. I feel privileged to be a member of PMI and serve as its coordinator in Berhampur Diocese, Odisha and also as the state secretary.

The vision and mission of PMI can be summarized as follows: Release, Renew and Rehabilitate. We try to realize this vision in different ways. We visit the prisoners, listen to them, understand their needs, counsel them and do whatever help permitted by the jail authorities. Yes! We visit the prisons to meet Jesus there, aided by the two basic principles of PMI: “Prayer is our powerhouse and inconvenience is our convenience.”

Medical Assistance: We give priority to the good health of the prisoners and



conduct Eye camps, medical camps and Gynaecology camps at different times, giving free spectacles and medicines. We meet all our expenses following the norms given by PMI, “God’s Providence is our bank balance and begging is our lifestyle”. Begging was humiliating indeed! But our Bishop motivated us, ‘Be ready to be humiliated for the sake of the humiliated ones in the jail’.

Recreational activities: We also conduct many recreational activities such as Fun games with prizes on different occasions such as Christmas celebration, PMI day, women’s day etc. Volley ball match or other such games are conducted once a year.

Activities outside the jail: With Coronavirus the prison gates were

closed for us but it paved the way for activities outside the jail such as visiting the prisoner's families, praying with all family members and settling family problems. If there is no earning member in the family, we help at least one member to get a job. We have helped in the release of poor prisoners and in getting them jobs or financial aid to start any small business.

Construction of houses for the homeless: PMI does not permit foreign funds or projects. By creating awareness of the needs of prisoners locally, and by their contributions we were able to construct houses for two prisoners at the cost of three lakhs each. I thank the benefactors especially my provincials who have supported me financially and encouraged me.

Released Prisoners: After their release, the prisoners try to get what they had been longing for. Some longed for their loved ones, some for drugs, and some for gambling. Some had been spending their time in prison

eating and sleeping. Some released prisoners commit the same crime again and return to jail. We try to counsel them and also organize programmes to motivate them to learn the real values in life.

Most of the prisoners from our dioceses are arrested for ganja trafficking as it is cultivated secretly in the jungles here. The punishments vary from 10 to 14 years. Almost all released ones have gone back to their families except one whose wife divorced him after his release, for reasons of her own and we are not able to trace him back.

Spiritual Aids: Masses and confessions are arranged almost four



times a year and our bishop never misses these occasions to visit his flock in the jail. We also distribute Bibles, prayer books, hymn books and other spiritual books. Prayer is the backbone of PMI. A prayer cell is created in the Cathedral parish, Berhampur to pray for the prisoners and the prison ministry. The members pray as a group on every Sunday after Holy Mass and personally every day. Sr. Shanti takes her turn for the 24x7 hour online prayer for prisoners every day from 9 to 10 am.

Prison ministry had not always been a cake walk. There had been frustrations even from those we helped, lack of understanding and too many restrictions from the jail superintends, hours of waiting at the prison gate for permission to enter and so on. Well, these are only part of the ministry. Yet we go on, for prayer is our powerhouse and the prisoners are our own brothers and sisters behind the bars.

SISTERS OF THE CROSS IN MANIPUR

Sr. Juliana Topno
Province of Guwahati



Manipur, historically known as Kangleipak, is a state in the northeastern part of India, with the city of Imphal as its capital. It is bordered by the Indian States of Nagaland to the north, Assam to the west, Mizoram to the southwest, and Myanmar to the south and to the east. It is a land rich with valleys and beautiful lakes and surrounded by hills and mountains. The name Manipur means 'land of gems.' Its economy centers on agriculture and forestry.

About two-thirds of the people are Meitei, who occupy the Manipur valley and are mainly Hindus.

Indigenous hill tribes, such as the Nagas in the north and the Kukis in the south, comprise the rest of the population. They speak the languages of the Tibeto-Burman family. They are, by and large, practicing animism. They also have a good mixture of Hindu, Muslim, and Christian populations. Christian missionaries in Manipur have contributed significantly to the educational and health fields. The people of Manipur are simple and extremely friendly. It is famous for its rich culture and traditions, vibrant dance forms, and music.

Sisters of the Cross set foot in northeast India in 1979. Sisters in the province greatly desired to enter Manipur as it is a fertile soil for Vocation to Religious Life. Sr. Annie Varghese, the Provincial, and Sr. Betsy Devasia, her Councillor, had the opportunity to meet Archbishop Dominic Lumon on July 13, 2022. They expressed the desire of the Sisters of the Cross to serve the church in the diocese of Manipur and the Archbishop responded positively. Our sisters speeded up the procedures with the general team and without any delay, answered the call of the Church.

Our charism was implanted on April 11, 2023, in New Alipur, in the district of Jiribam in the diocese of Imphal under Phaithol Parish. We are collaborating with the diocesan priests mainly for the pastoral and education ministries. Our joy was boundless as we entered the soil with a big dream: To Make the Good God Known and Loved.



New Alipur is located in the Jiribam district. It is a beautiful place surrounded by tribes like Rongmei, Meitei, Kuki, and Khasi. We are among the Rongmei tribe, mostly Baptists. People are peace-loving. The youth and children give importance to prayer and take full part in their religious practices. At the same time, it is very challenging to be among other denominations, as they look at us with suspicion of being proselytized. We believe in the power of the Almighty and feel privileged that we are called to be in the midst of unknown people. It is an opportunity for us to witness Christ through our very presence.

Just after twenty-one days of our mission in Manipur, on May 3rd, 2023, a violence broke out between the two communities-the tribal group Kuki clashed with a non-tribal group, the ethnic majority Meitei, over economic, social, and political benefits and quotas given to the tribes. One of the reasons is that the Meitei community demanded to be listed as a Schedule Tribe, but the Kuki Tribe opposed this demand. Unprecedented violence and unrest have taken the state of Manipur like a storm. The state has now turned into a battle zone. The violence between the two communities continues to be

unabated, especially in the peripheries of the valleys. Precious lives have been lost; houses and villages have been burnt and destroyed; belongings have been vandalized and looted; and places of worship have been desecrated and set ablaze. Over thousands of people have been displaced and rendered homeless and are languishing in different relief camps. Many have left the capital and the state for safer places; many have landed in neighboring states. There is a complete collapse in the constitutional machinery of the state. Summarily, there is fear, uncertainty, and a general sense of desperation. Two communities are warring, but it has affected all the people of Manipur, irrespective of which community one belongs, with the complexity of issues that have given rise to this situation.

Though we are not directly affected yet, constant violence within two communities bring a lot of disturbance and creates an unpleasant atmosphere. The future of the children is especially affected. The people of the locality are on good terms with us so far, yet we are unable to know their minds due to the unfavorable atmosphere of the violence. The school was closed for a few days, and we could take a short break but we chose to stay with our people as they promised and comforted us, telling us, "Sisters, don't worry, we are with you. Please call us if you face any problem." Days and months moved with lots of anxieties and turbulence in the minds and hearts of the people. We also shared their sorrows. The internet was cut, and we could not get any news from anywhere. We had to come out of our campus and walk a long distance even to make a call. Our faith in the Lord was deepened, though there was no regular Holy Mass and no chapel for us. We experience the Lord walking with us, behind us, and before us. Our only

security was the Risen Christ. We felt a kind of courage from deep down and were ready to die with our people if an attack came. We clung to God more closely and believed that the mighty hand of God could protect us even from the worst nuclear weapons.

We surrender everything to God daily and have the trust that God has a plan and a purpose for our lives. We are sent on a mission to live our charism joyfully and to pave the path for our successors.

We kept visiting the people constantly, praying with them, counselling them, and healing them with the Word of God.

We are very grateful to our Superior General, Sr. Elizabeth Miranda, for encouraging the Provinces to feel with our people and rise to the occasion with materials to help and support. The first distribution came from Pune Province, then from Madurai, followed by Amravati Province. Trichy Province came up with a payment for the teachers of a parish school. Marathi School in Pune supported the education of five girls. Angamaly Province supported the education of children who had to flee from their home land. Holy Cross School Itanagar raised a fund of Rs. 1 lakh forty thousand and sent it to the archbishop's fund. Our provincials, Sr. Annie Varghese, Sr. Betsy Devasia, and Sr. Jaisy Arokiam, along with Sr. Fatima





Peter, Sr. Nirmala Marandi, and Sr. Juliana Topno, accompanied by Fr. George Baite, the parish priest of Phaithol, visited the camps and supplied the commodities as they were in the most needful moment. Where is our judiciary? Where are our ruling government and the

Supreme Commander of the Indian Armed Forces? Where is the media? Yes, the Church responded immediately, and the blessings poured in. We know the situation of only two camps. But there were many others.

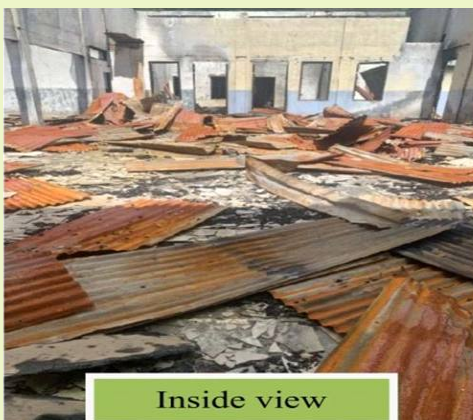
We are moving with the Church to help the frontline ministries in times of need, extending generously our support to the people affected in Manipur.

Everyone has a fear that something worse is going to happen. Amid these

threats, we are challenged to be here and continue the mission to be agents of peace, compassion, and reconciliation. We are sure that you will take the people of Manipur to the Lord. Continue to uphold us in your prayers so that peaceful coexistence may become a reality once again.



Churches are being destroyed



Inside view



BANDIPUR - A NEW VENTURE

Sr. Jones Rayer
Province of Kolkata



Bandipur is one of the most famous hilltop settlements, in Gandhaki District, under Tanahun Province in Nepal. The natural beauty of the place attracts the entire world.

People from various parts of the world visit this place to relish the richness of its beauty and enjoy its preserved, old time cultural atmosphere. Its landscape indeed

makes the beholder to praise the creator for the marvellous gift of nature to human kind.

It is to this lap of nature that the Sisters of the Cross were invited, by



the Apostolic Vicariate of Nepal. Trusting in the Divine Providence and in the patron saint Our Lady of Compassion, the sisters willingly accepted the invitation. Thus one more community was added in the history of the SCC, as the convent was blessed and inaugurated on 3rd June 2023. In fact this mission was initiated by the Sisters of Notre Dame. They established an English Medium School for the people of Bandipur in the year 1985. Soon the school turned out to be a boon to the society and brought in lots of growth and development for the place and the people. The sisters won the hearts of the people through their simplicity, hard work and motherly love and care. Thirty seven years of their service and life in Nepal made them feel at home. Unfortunately the sisters had to leave the country in 2022 due to some personal reasons. The sisters entrusted the mission to the vicariate and departed the country with heavy hearts and tearful eyes.

The three pioneers namely Sr. Selvi Rayer, the animator of the community, Sr. Indrawati Joseph,

the school office-in-charge and Sr. Juli Tudu, the vice-principal began to give their service in the school under the guidance and direction of Fr. Denis D'Souza, the newly appointed principal of Notre Dame School. Initially the sisters found it so difficult as the school buildings are on 4 different hills. They had to climb up the hills and down many times a day and it was a herculean task for them. They looked at each other and got energized to go ahead. They surrendered themselves at the feet of the Lord and soon they began to feel at ease. The teachers are very cooperative and helpful. They introduced the sisters to the people in the neighbourhood. The sisters started to visit the families of the students. Many students come from far away villages and hills. They



mostly belong to economically poor families and they walk miles to the school. Those who are a little better off financially can avail the school or public transport. People mostly depend on agriculture and terrace farming, forest products and tourism related activities for their livelihood. Availability of electricity supply, internet and mobile network, transportation facilities and other civic amenities help the people to be in touch with the world beyond Bandipur.

People are so simple, loving, welcoming and very caring. Sisters are accepted well and made to feel at home by their hospitality. They find confidence to share with the sisters about their personal and family problems and difficulties. Sisters spend quality time with the people listening and motivating them to face the challenges of their daily lives. Sisters spend sufficient time with the youth and students, encourage and inspire them to look at life positively. Sisters in their daily prayers place the needs of the people and intercede for their welfare. There are five Catholic families in the parish. They take active part in the church activities and cooperate well and special care is given to them. Nestled in the mountains, besides the brook of streaming Trishuli River, and the wonderful cultural heritage along with the sparkling mountains and lush greenery, Bandipur is truly a queen of the hills and the sisters feel blessed to be missionaries on the mountains who proclaim the word of God and Make the good God known and loved. "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Is 52:7)