



VOLUME 14, ISSUE 1

INDIAN PROVINCE NEWSLETTER

Dear Brothers and friends of Edmund,

Greetings from Goa where the politicians are working overtime to try and win a seat for themselves in the Goa Assembly. The party affiliations are not that important for one can always change one's loyalties if one gets an attractive offer from a rival party.

As the month of February begins, one is aware that the Congregation Chapter will bring a new set of visions, leadership and structures. When the chapter concludes, the much more difficult task of putting words into actions will commence.

All the Brothers in Shanti Nivas had a dose of Covid to varying degrees. Bap in particular got a bad dose and prayers are requested for his quick recovery.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the renowned Vietnamese Buddhist monk, died on the 22nd. of January, at the age of 95. Well known for his Mindfulness meditations, he also co-authored with the Jesuit Dan Berrigan - *The Raft Is Not the Shore: Conversations Toward a Buddhist/Christian Awareness*. He was a very inspiring presence in our world.



It was very disheartening to read about the summary dismissal of the Franco Mullakal case by a sessions Judge in Kerala. Thankfully the CRI has appealed to the CCBI to investigate the matter but knowing the apathy of the church hierarchy to such cases, there is very little hope that Justice will prevail.

A very interesting talk circulating on YouTube is one given by Dr. Kethoser Kevichusa, a Naga intellectual. It is worth listening to.

Yours fraternally

Mark



BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

The spiritual scorecards of the last month are, at best, distressing. Democracy teeters on its edges as it twists back and forth. So what is the Christian answer to all of that? Let's see now: If we're meek, we're doomed to suffer silently, right? Answer: No. If we're poor of spirit, we're supposed to accept life as it? Answer: No. If the circumstances of life are difficult for us, we're meant to welcome its sadness and go on anyway? Answer: No. If a system is unjust, we're required to make the best of it? Answer: No. Or, if people are undermining the pillars of society, we're supposed to be merciful to them and forget it's happening? Answer: No.

"Blessed are the merciful," the fifth beatitude contends, "for they shall receive mercy."

For those for whom that fifth beatitude is seen as a kind of recess, a relief, a break from the rest of Jesus' concerns about hunger, righteousness, meekness, mourning, poverty of spirit — all of them somehow entwined with justice — hold it. Not so fast. The question is, what do we have here, a confused Jesus? A confused you? Or a bad case of holy inconsistency?

Is mercy really meant to be a mitigation of justice?

The moral problem is a serious one and, as a matter of fact, is plaguing this society at this time in its development in frightening new forms. What happens to justice when mercy takes over has never been meant to be anarchy or destitution, or economic collapse, or regional destruction. And so? Then the fifth beatitude, mercy, raises major political, civil and moral issues. Is mercy a function of politics at all? Is mercy a civil obligation that overrules the civil law? Is mercy a pillar of society — and who says so?

The kind of mercy we give, Jesus says, will be the kind of mercy we get when we need it. Which means that mercy is clearly not an event; mercy is a way of being in the world. It is the ability to identify with the sufferings of another and then accompany them while they struggle with them. Mercy is not so much some kind of quickly compassionate act for another as it is the foundation of an ongoing relationship — if not with this one particular person as it is with the many caught in the same darkness. It is not so much a commitment to law as it is coming to understand the struggles of the other

Most of all, mercy is the beginning of a movement of the soul. To become merciful, we must first become aware of injustice and how it happens. It is beginning to see what we have failed to understand before: that the frequency of gun violence in the bowels

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of the city, for instance, comes from the lack of all manner of life's needs there.

The second step of mercy is a call for justice by the just, by those who have failed to see for centuries now that justice is often the most unjust system of them all. On the other hand, the percentage of minorities incarcerated for life while the wealthy had lawyers who got them deals are clear signs of our own failure to see the difference.

The third dimension of mercy lies in its commitment to compensation for the injured who have been left behind by society for generations as well as support for those whose social rank serves them well.

The fourth criteria of genuine mercy is the acceptance of those whose lives do not match our own for status and dignity, for education and ability and bright, shiny couth.

From where I stand, the polarization of the dignified and urbane from the average and the suffering is greater than ever. In the 1960s, we could hear the heartbeat of equality beating under our feet as it rose up to claim its place one generation after another. Now over 50 years later, what we hear is the slamming of solid doors against those others we never expected to see on our side of town.

It is the Beatitudes that call us beyond ourselves to the best of ourselves. But until the leadership of the country does the same thing, it will be unconscionably too long until "mercy" becomes the icon of the land again.

Joan Chittister

IS ANY ONE LISTENING?

Principals, Teachers, Parents, Caregivers and other stakeholders do read this article about children & their lives during the on-going pandemic.

Two fine young boys, Carl and Robert, (names have been changed to protect the identity and respect the privacy of the children concerned) came to see me the other day in school. While chatting, I noticed that one of them was chewing gum. Normally, children are aware of their decorum and manners and if they do forget, their peers would remind them about it. In this case, none of them were aware. Something has changed.

One fine day, I received calls from parents who asked me to speak to their 8 and 10-year-old sons. They wanted me to use my authority to rein them in. The boys were on their mobile phones for hours on end; they were ill mannered and aggressive if asked to give up the mobiles; they missed their meals; they refused to help out at home with the household chores; they got up late and were generally irresponsible and callous.





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In order to assess the effect of this pandemic on the learning gaps, I asked three or four smart boys presently in Class 8, to solve the Class 6 Mathematics paper. The results astounded me! They scored less than 40%!

The effects of the pandemic, much like the virus, are creeping stealthily into the lives of our vulnerable children. Like the line in Paul Simon's song, "silence like a cancer grows", disturbing changes in behaviour is spreading among our children like the dangerous cancer.

I watched the young students coming in for their ICSE exams which were held in November. There was something missing in these boys: the smiles, the sparkle in the eyes, the ebullience, the spring in their steps, their joy of being with their companions. They looked listless and mechanical in their gaits.

I am worried. I feel for our children. I want to do something to help them. I did some serious reading on the adverse effects of the pandemic on the lives of the children across the world.

So, what are some of the effects of the pandemic that we should be concerned about?

1. 'Closing Schools Closes Lives' (Prof Russell Viner, President of the Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health): The closure of schools is, of course, damaging to children's education. Because schools are not just a place for learning. They are places where kids socialise, develop emotionally and, for some, a refuge from troubled family life. Prof Viner goes on to say the pandemic has caused a range of harms to children across the board from being isolated and lonely, to suffering from sleep problems and reduced physical activity . . .

2. Mental Health problems on the rise: Due to the lack of outdoor activities and a structured lifestyle, children are getting restless and bored. They lack focus in their lives and are busy with their mobile phones and other screen time activities. This often leads to family tensions, feelings of isolation from friends and loneliness. There is often a lack of purpose and they seek refuge in online gaming and cut themselves off from other people. They live in their own world completely oblivious of their surrounding concerns.

3. Children with Special Needs Suffer Silently: While most students have had routines disrupted, the children perhaps most affected by this disruption are special needs students. One of the strategies that works best for them is a structured routine. And that is not there. It is now the job of the parents to establish a structured routine





for them. The parents of special needs children have struggled through trial-and-error process to find out what works and what doesn't, to encourage their children to engage with virtual education.

4. Children living in rural areas and belonging to low income group are affected the most: It is the disadvantaged children who pay the greatest price, as they will fall the furthest behind, and have the fewest resources available to 'catch up' once the pandemic threat has passed. Our children of Providence School are facing huge problems and some have dropped out of school as they need to work to support their families. We have a school called Edmund Rice School Mangkara in the remote area in the West Khasi Hills about 15 kms from Kynshi. This school educates the poorest of the poor from the surrounding villages. The lockdown has hit them hard and children have forgotten what they learned earlier.

5. Academic Fall out- Online classes are no substitute to the regular classes: What we have seen is that children are forgetting what they already know – a regression that will be much harder to remedy. Since there is no face-to-face interaction like in the normal classroom situation where dialogues, debates, and normal discourses between children and teachers happen, children are losing their conversational skills. They are not able to express themselves. Online exams are generally based on MCQs and as a result children are not writing enough. The writing skills have deteriorated and children don't want to write anymore. They find writing to be tedious and time consuming. Reading habits are on the decline.

Getting children to sit still and study even for an hour is becoming a challenging task for parents and teachers. Procrastination is on the rise and quite a number of our senior boys have not submitted their projects on time. The habit of daily study is missing and children have lost the healthy competitive edge that we normally find in the engaging classroom situation. The best learning takes place in the classroom situations, where children learn from each other and from their mistakes. Very often what the teachers find difficult to explain is easily decoded by the children who help each other in a spirit of give and take.

Online classes are not the best platforms for asking questions especially by the shy ones. A lot of questions remain unanswered and doubts never clarified. As a result, the learning gaps increase. The lack of opportunity for intellectually nourishing activities like music lessons, co-curricular activities, overnight Campfire Trails summer camps, picnics and Creation Week activities seriously hamper the learning experiences that are not found in the text books.

6. Arrested development: For children or adolescents of any age, the uncertainty and the loss of their own freedom will be hard to process and could lead to long-term behavioural problems. It's also unclear how the isolation and physical distancing may influence the development of socio-emotional skills, like regulating your feelings, exercising self-control and managing conflicts with your peers. The reflections of older students show that friends played a central role in handling problems and





maintaining a positive outlook on life. Value Education and Life Skills classes could be of great help where teachers take on the responsibility to address and care-front these issues.

Only with a concerted effort from parents, teachers, social workers, psychiatrists and administrators can we be sure that children of all classes can emerge from the crisis ready to cope and thrive in the post-Covid-19 world.

7. Living in close proximity in families: Lockdown did help families to bond closely as more opportunities were created to share leisure activities or do housework and small household repairs together. Children described growing closer to their families but also suffering from having to live in such close proximity all the time, especially with younger siblings. Some children also wrote about tensions and feelings of isolation in the home, not being able to share personal matters in a trusting atmosphere, being pressed to do too many home chores on top of managing schoolwork, and missing out on parental attention. They regretted not being able to see close relatives, including grandparents, parents who were living apart from them or who had to travel to work, and were concerned about their welfare.

8. Online Classes – Strenuous for most students: Children of Junior & Senior classes find it difficult, and physically straining, to sit at the computer all day. They face problems with self-motivation, school assignments and homework. Students complain that they can't get out of the house and meet up with their friends. The routine gets them down as there is no physical activity. Sleep problems are on the rise. For some senior students, not knowing whether they would be able to graduate with good results and continue their education in high school is the greatest source of distress, far exceeding fear of the virus.



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Conclusion

From their academic success to their social skills and mental health, the pandemic is a crisis for today's children – and the fallout may follow them for the rest of their lives. When today's children and adolescents grow up, will they see themselves as a “lost generation”, whose lives will forever fall in the shadow of a global pandemic?

As educators involved in our children's lives, we need to do something to alleviate these problems. We need to come up with creative solutions to tackle these problems. Parents, Teachers, Counsellors, Special Educators, Caregivers and School Management need to work together and support each other. I believe we can make a difference if we have the will and the passion to do something practical and beneficial for our children and young students.

Solly Morris

Reaching out to our Sisters

The head of India's Catholic religious organization has urged Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Mumbai to reach out to the accuser nun and her supporters in the recently concluded rape case and expressed the solidarity of women religious in India with the nun.

"We would like the Church authorities to at least now, try and reach out to the survivor and her companions and offer support to them in whatever way possible, including financial, spiritual and psychological," said a letter that Apostolic Carmel Sr. Mary Nirmalini wrote to the cardinal, who is the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India.

Nirmalini, the president of the Conference of Religious India, sent the (Jan. 20) letter nearly a week after a court in Kerala, southern India, acquitted Bishop Franco Mulakkal of Jalandhar in the historic nun rape case.

Nirmalini also said women religious in India express their solidarity with "the victim survivor and her companions who have walked with the victim with lot of courage, dignity and determination in their fight for justice."

The letter, endorsed by all officials of the Conference of Religious India women section, commends the "prophetic role" of the accuser's supporters, who raised their voice against "an unjust and appalling system, within the Church."

The letter regrets that nobody had paid attention to the accuser when she approached several church authorities before being forced to go public and to the court to seek justice.





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"Her companion sisters had the grit to fight the power and might of Bishop Franco. The sisters, with no financial backing or support from the Church, went through their dignity being stripped as women through many ways in which power was being wielded against them," said the letter, which many view as the first response of the Conference of Religious India since the case went to the court.

Additional District and Sessions Court Judge G Gopauumar said the prosecution had failed to prove the charges against the Bishop.

The sister in the case, a former superior general of the Missionaries of Jesus, a Jalandhar diocesan congregation, had in June 2018 accused Mulakkal of raping her 13 times between 2014 and 2016.

The court, which heard 39 prosecution and five defence witnesses, dismissed her allegation as unreliable, citing several discrepancies in her statement.

"When it is not feasible to separate truth from falsehood, when grain and chaff are inextricably mixed up, the only available course is to discard the evidence in toto," said Gopakumar in his verdict.

"In the said circumstances, this court is unable to place reliance on the solitary testimony of a rape victim and to hold the accused guilty of the offences charged against him. I accordingly acquit the accused of the offences," the judge added.

Nirmalini, who also heads the Conference of Religious India women section, said she wrote the letter "with a heavy heart as I have been inundated with so many phone calls from both religious men and women as well as lay women from around India" after the verdict.

"The issue here is not that most religious women are completely taken aback with a totally unexpected verdict against the sisters, but a section of the clergy and people have been celebrating the verdict as a victory for the Church," Nirmalini said.

She pointed out that from the beginning of the case, the accuser and her companions were subjected to all kinds of innuendos and insults. Hardly any church authorities supported them, she said.

How come a bishop who is accused of raping is part of the Church and the victim along with her supporters are not? In our opinion this is shameful. In addition, most of the sisters, including me, express a complete disbelief and shock at the verdict in the said case where sisters have been apparently denied justice."





Similar questions were raised earlier by Sisters in Solidarity, a national forum of Catholic women, both religious and lay.

Nirmalini expressed happiness that the accuser and the prosecution plan to appeal against the verdict in the higher court as they feel that justice has been denied to them.

"Whatever the outcome of their appeal in the higher court, our serious concern now is, if the Church has a forum where religious women who suffer sexual abuse from their bosses, be they priests or bishops, can present their cases and where they would be heard sympathetically."

Nirmalini brought the attention of the cardinal, who is among the top advisers of Pope Francis, to the fact that women religious have no power or jurisdiction in the church, even though they render "incredible service in society and are the face of the Church."

"Where do we go? Should all religious women knock the doors of the court for justice? We really wonder if this will make other women ever step forward or would leave them with no choice but to suffer in silence," the letter says.

A separate, open letter by the Indian Christian Women Movement, an ecumenical group, addressed to the leaders of various churches in the country, was issued on Jan. 23, decrying the verdict and supporting the nun.

"We call on the leadership of the Church to account for their attitude ever since the survivor Sister courageously spoke out about her ordeal," said the letter, issued by Aruna Gnanadason, convener for the national team of the Indian Christian Women's Movement. "The Church did not react as it should have — letters of appeal she sent to the leadership of the Church were ignored; the church remained silent in the face of her humiliation in the court."

The letter seeks further action on behalf of the sister. "We call on the church to set up an independent and impartial enquiry into the circumstances that have led to this outcome in the lower court," said the letter. "We demand justice."

Jose Kavi

ST. VINCENT'S HIGH & TECHNICAL SCHOOL , ASANSOL **Blessing of the Edmund Rice Auditorium.**

11thDecember , 2021. – A day that every Vincentian will remember with pride, as it was on this very glorious day that the inauguration of the Edmund Rice Auditorium was done in all its splendor.





A prayer service was put up by the staff and students of St. Vincent's School, wherein the blessings of the Almighty was invoked upon each and everyone connected to the school.



His Grace Bishop Emeritus Cyprian Monis of Asansol Diocese blessed the Auditorium and its vicinity. Br. David Ryan Silva, member of the PLT was invited to cut the inaugural ribbon. This event was also graced by Br. Ralph Sequeira from the Ministries Office, Br. William and Br. Jerome, Principals of the neighbouring schools, the Alumni, ex-teachers, staff, parents and students of the school.

The second part of the programme began inside the hall with the 'lighting of the lamp'. The immense enthusiasm and zeal in the students and teachers of St. Vincent's School ignited the stage in a spectrum of songs and dance related to the theme 'The Light'. A musical drama



was presented by St. Patrick's school which spoke about saving a girl child from all social evils. Br. Walter Vas, our community leader, enlightened everyone present in the auditorium with the objective and purpose of this new building. A token of appreciation was presented to all those who were actively involved in the construction of this edifice. It included Br. Sunil Lobo as the Project Manager for the Auditorium and Mr. Sajjal Bandyopadhyay the Project Engineer among many others. He also presented

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a video which brought to light the various stages of the construction of the hall.



Our Principal, Mr. Ravi Victor in his vote of thanks reminded us about how important it is for all the students to get this new platform to showcase their multifarious talents. His words of wisdom galvanized the spirits of students and teachers of St. Vincent's School with a sense of pride and responsibility to use the new infrastructure to its fullest potential.

The event ended with a sense of achievement fused with the spirit of sharing and growing.

A DAY WITH PRATYeK

On the 8th of January PRATYeK organized a "Day with PRATYeK" for the board members, governing body members, Christian brothers and well-wishers. The day started with Steve greeting all the members in the meeting and talking about the epiphany followed by a short prayer. Steve asked the house to give an image of something that represents the brokenness of our world in their community or in their surroundings. Many of the members shared their images of brokenness (people sleeping on the pavements/Afghan women and children/a child walking on the street without shoes/child labour/migrant children/slum children etc) This was followed by a series of presentations from the PRATYeK team. The priorities along with all the cross-cutting issues at PRATYeK was discussed and reflected upon so that the members could understand in simple and clear terms the work being done by PRATYeK. After the various presentations it was followed by going into break-out rooms. In the break out rooms there was sharing of stories by the young people from PRATYeK. The other members were asked to share the wow factor about PRATYeK, i.e what is the one thing that strikes them when they think of PRATYeK, and lastly what can be their contribution to PRATYeK and the way forward.. This led to a lot of constructive ideas, opinions, interesting discussions and sharing. Everybody shared





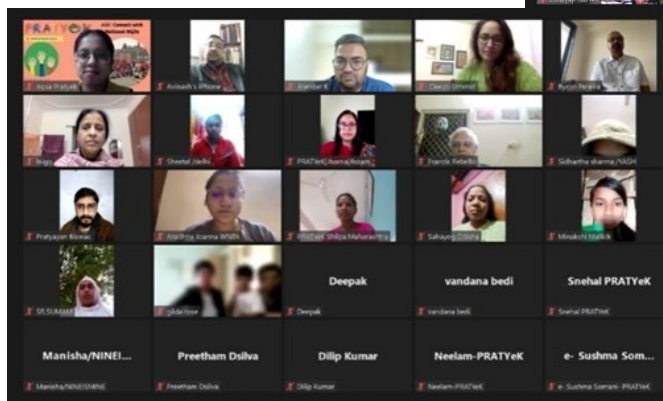
their thoughts and how they would like to be associated with PRATYek. After that we came back to the main group where the facilitator of each break out room shares some of the thoughts shared in their room, There were some who had other engagements and had to leave early but they were willing to stay here for a while as they couldn't stop themselves from staying and listening as they were very much and encouraged and motivated by the work PRATYek is doing. All in all it was a wonderful session where everybody contributed and the various presentations made by the staff were enlightening and how they need to support PRATYek by making monitory contribution mandatory so that the good work done by PRATYek keeps going leading to making a difference to society at large.

A participant shared that, "she picked up the feelings of the people and the stories they were listening to and their experience".

Ms. Vandana Bedi, a board member shared that she is most amazed by the inclusiveness and participation of all in PRATYek, the innovative way in which child leaders are coming up and the awareness among children, She also added that it is very heart warming to note that when these children grow up and they go into different fields to work and become leaders, she is sure that they will look at all rights for all children in their work-life as well, the future citizens that are being built.

The day ended with a poem, vote of thanks by Steve and a befitting end with a song-(when you believe).

Ms. Anisha



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Novitiate News

“Desire is the root cause of sorrows,” as quoted by Gautama Buddha, and rightly so, since humankind is always preoccupied with unrealistic expectations in life. The month of January seemed to correspond with what is being quoted above.

We all longed to have a better New Year of 2022, but so far, with the Omicron strain upon us, this year is still quite similar to the previous year. Uncertainty, perplexity, and disruption in schools, continue in our country.

However, we the novices of Bhopal had some distinct experiences. The month of January was eventful for us with some exceptional happenings. On the 4th of January, we were invited to the auspicious Golden Jubilee celebration of Sr. Elizabeth, PBVM. It was a remarkable celebration. The main celebrant of the Eucharistic was his Grace Rev. Dr. Bishop Leo Cornelio, the Archbishop of Bhopal. The mass was enlivened by the joint choir of novices from both congregations, led by Br. Elton. Lunch followed the Eucharist, and after that all joined in with some spontaneous songs and dances.



We were extremely happy to welcome Br. Cedly on the 15th of January, who stayed with us, to conduct a workshop on dream analysis and personality development. We are fortunate and grateful to him for his contribution. On dream analysis, we had the sessions in the premises of the Presentations Sisters, along with the novices of the sisters. The sessions turned out to be extremely beneficial, and we gained a lot of insights, and understand now, that, “our dreams are our friends”.

On the 31st of January, we had an excursion to a pre-historic site called Bhimbetka Caves, where there are numerous huge rocks around with some mesmerizing paintings on them by the Paleolithic age community. They were captivating and left us wondering about the ways they were painted.



All in all, a wonderful month, for which we are ever-grateful.

Sanjoy Lugun





POETRY SECTION

LOVE, ABBREVIATED

Love never gets tired of loving –
It just multiplies, magnifies, grows, expands.
It exhilarates, delights, exalts, fulfils,
And all, and more, banishing nothing!

Love is what is, what is is love:
Beyond defining, beyond comparing,
Itself all being, itself all doing –
Itself all that exists is of.

Since love is love, then love must give.
Not this and that and then the rest –
But perfect everything, throbbing and new:
Love must be thus that all may live.

Love knows what love is and must be.
A cosmos zooms and knows and breathes.
All that exists is boundless love:
We name it God. God names it me.

Brendan January 2022

The Traveller

Traveller hold on to your staff, lighten up your sack,
Keep your sandals on, tunic on your back.
Tread you the many paths, choosing threads that lead,
Follow you your star, hold on to your dream.
Lost you the travelled way? Roads that twist each day,
Deserts have no paths, footprints blown away.
Scattered leaves on trails, in forests dark and deep,
Winding sometimes straight, gradients sometimes steep.



Walk you by river tracks, fields and marshy bogs,
Falls and lush green fields, rolling mist and fog.
Snow-capped mountain peaks, icy winds that chill,
Clambering to the top, views to draw one still.
Bridges that you cross, shaky- strung up, frail,
Rivers gushing through, ravines and lost trails.

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The fatigued body frail, were the years so lost?
 The heart that slumbered still, caged in all its fears.
 Weary are thy feet, the salt of many tears,
 The staff is slightly bent – the weight of all the years.
 Night has drawn a close, radiant light anew,
 Visions of the day – darkness fades away,
 Through tunnels dark and deep, hold on to your dream,
 To see the light beyond, a hope amongst all fears.
 Journey to thy depth – traveller search thy soul,
 Walk you through the night, a heart that holds the light.



Ceddy Andrade

Congratulations to the New Congregation Leadership Team



Hugo Caceres, John Casey, Peter Clinch, Senan D'Souza, David Ryan Silva

