



ISRAEL-PALESTINE

NO CHE... S CELE

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INDIAN PROVINCE NEWSLETTER

Dear Brothers and friends of Edmund,

Amazing Peace

Thunder rumbles in the mountain passes
And lightning rattles the eaves of our houses.

Flood waters await us in our avenues.

Snow falls upon snow, falls upon snow to
avalanche

Over unprotected villages.

The sky slips low and grey and threatening.

We question ourselves.

What have we done to so affront nature?

We worry God.

Are you there? Are you there really?

Does the covenant you made with us still hold?

Into this climate of fear and apprehension, Christmas enters,

Streaming lights of joy, ringing bells of hope

And singing carols of forgiveness high up in the bright air.

The world is encouraged to come away from rancor,

Come the way of friendship.

It is the Glad Season.

Thunder ebbs to silence and lightning sleeps quietly in the corner.

Flood waters recede into memory.

Snow becomes a yielding cushion to aid us

As we make our way to higher ground.

Hope is born again in the faces of children

It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they walk into their sunsets.

Hope spreads around the earth. Brightening all things,

Even hate which crouches breeding in dark corridors.

In our joy, we think we hear a whisper.

At first it is too soft. Then only half heard.

We listen carefully as it gathers strength.

We hear a sweetness.

The word is Peace.



Christmas in Gaza



Christmas in Manipur

It is loud now. It is louder.
 Louder than the explosion of bombs.
 We tremble at the sound. We are thrilled by its presence.
 It is what we have hungered for.
 Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace.
 A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies.
 Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.
 We clap hands and welcome the Peace of Christmas.
 We beckon this good season to wait a while with us.
 We, Baptist and Buddhist, Methodist and Muslim, say come.
 Peace.
 Come and fill us and our world with your majesty.
 We, the Jew and the Jainist, the Catholic and the Confucian,
 Implore you, to stay a while with us.
 So we may learn by your shimmering light
 How to look beyond complexion and see community.
 It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time.
 On this platform of peace, we can create a language
 To translate ourselves to ourselves and to each other.
 At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ
 Into the great religions of the world.
 We jubilate the precious advent of trust.
 We shout with glorious tongues at the coming of hope.
 All the earth's tribes loosen their voices
 To celebrate the promise of Peace.
 We, Angels and Mortal's, Believers and Non-Believers,
 Look heavenward and speak the word aloud.
 Peace. We look at our world and speak the word aloud.
 Peace. We look at each other, then into ourselves
 And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation.
 Peace, My Brother.
 Peace, My Sister.
 Peace, My Soul.— *Maya Angelou (2005)*

Let us recall, too, the continuing tensions between Israelis and Palestinians that drag on without a resolution, with ever more serious social and political consequences. Nor should we forget Bethlehem, the place of Jesus' birth, which is experiencing hardship

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also from the economic repercussions of the war, preventing pilgrims from visiting the Holy Land and adversely affecting the life of the people.

Yet, in the heart of the night, look! The sign of hope! “the Love that moves the sun and the

other stars” , became flesh. He came in human form, he shared in our plight and he broke down the wall of our indifference. In the cold of the night, he stretches out his tiny arms towards us: he is in need of everything, yet he comes to give us everything. Let us ask him for the strength *to be open to dialogue*. Let us implore him to stir up in the hearts of everyone a yearning for reconciliation and fraternity. Turn to him in prayer. (Pope Francis)

Yours fraternally

Mark

BECOMING AGENTS OF CHANGE

Arab-American poet Naomi Shihab Nye recalls a transformative, unexpected occasion of generous acceptance:

Wandering around the Albuquerque Airport Terminal ... I heard an announcement: “If anyone in the vicinity of Gate A-4 understands any Arabic, please come to the gate immediately.” Well—one pauses these days. Gate A-4 was my own gate. I went there.

An older woman in full traditional Palestinian embroidered dress, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing loudly. “Help,” said the flight service person. “Talk to her... We told her the flight was going to be late and she did this.”

I stooped to put my arm around the woman and spoke to her haltingly. “Shu-dow-a, Shu-bid-uck Habibti? Stani schway, Min fadlick, Shu-bit-se-wee?” The minute she heard any words she knew, however poorly used, she stopped crying. She thought the flight had been cancelled entirely. She needed to be in El Paso for major medical treatment.... I said, “No, we’re fine, you’ll get there, just later,





who is picking you up? Let's call him."

We called her son and I spoke with him in English. I told him I would stay with his mother ... and would ride next to her... She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it. Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and found out of course they had ten shared friends. Then I thought ... why not call some Palestinian poets I know and let them chat with her? This all took up about two hours.

She was laughing a lot by then. Telling about her life, patting my knee, answering questions. She had pulled a sack of homemade *mamool* cookies—little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts—out of her bag—and was offering them to all the women at the gate. To my amazement, not a single woman declined one. It was like a sacrament. The traveler from Argentina, the mom from California, the lovely woman from Laredo—we were all covered with the same powdered sugar. And smiling. There is no better cookie.

And then the airline broke out free beverages ... and two little girls from our flight ran around serving us all apple juice and they were covered with powdered sugar, too. And I noticed my new best friend—by now we were holding hands—had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing, with green furry leaves. Such an old country traveling tradition. Always carry a plant. Always stay rooted to somewhere.

And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and thought, this is the world I want to live in. The shared world. Not a single person in that gate—once the crying of confusion stopped—seemed apprehensive about any other person. They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women, too. This can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost.

(Taken from the Richard Rohr December reflections)

50 GLORIOUS YEARS OF RESILIENCE, GROWTH AND JOY!

On 11th December we celebrated Br Conrad D'Souza's golden jubilee. It was an opportune time to thank God for the gift of Br. Conrad for his five decades of unwavering dedication, commitment and service.

The Eucharist was solemnized by the Archbishop of Bhopal, Rev. Dr. A. A. S. Durairaj, who highlighted Br. Con's resilience in facing health challenges the previous year. The



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thanksgiving eucharist became even more meaningful with the mass readings of the day being perfectly intertwined with Br. Con's 50-year journey. It was a lovely gesture from the bishop to invite Br. Con to share his life's narrative briefly, before the homily. The ones who know Con well can envisage the joy of listening to him sharing pieces of his life.



The novices played a pivotal role in the day's celebration, crafting a special jubilee cake, and orchestrating the evening's festivities. Their soulful and melodious singing uplifted the spirits of the faithful gathered for mass.



We had two special visitors amidst the 100-odd priests, religious and local families. One was Br. Con's sister, Jean D'Souza, who has been extremely close to him. As Br. Con put it, "We are the closest of friends and the nearest of enemies." Her gentle and steady presence has enabled Con cruise through the past 50 years. Our second visitor was Br. Steve Fernandes, our Provincial, who added significance to the occasion. Br. Steve

eloquently portrayed Br. Con's extraordinary contributions as a selfless teacher, a formator, a leader, and a wisdom figure.

Br. Con, taking the stage, infused the winter evening with humour, weaving words around life's challenges, and ensuring each person present received a





special mention or a humorous anecdote. Three days hence, the memories of this enchanting evening linger, resonating with the warmth of Br. Con's presence.

The evening concluded wonderfully with a delicious spread of cuisine, an unexpected sing-song and several 'pun-ny' jokes! Thank you, Br. Conrad for your graceful presence to the Bhopal community. We pray that your golden turn to diamond, and your diamond to platinum; because the life's best is yet to come!

Br. Elton Fernandes

CELTIC RELIGIOUS LIFE AS I SEE IT.

This is a very personal account, based on my own experience as a Christian Brother for 77years. Maybe I haven't expressed myself as well as I'd like to. And I may even sound somewhat judgmental as I respond/react to situations I've encountered. There is no offence meant to anybody. As I said, this is very personal.

Did I know what I was doing when I entered St. Joseph's Juniorate in July 1946? Not really. My home was 10 minutes' walk from the Brothers' school and monastery where my Dad and his six brothers were pupils. So were my Mum's two brothers - one of whom joined the Brothers at 20 and was missioned to Australia where he was 30 years before coming home to Ireland on holiday. I and my 4 brothers attended the same school so the Brothers figured largely in our lives. They weren't very high profile in the town as they didn't socialise. Class ended at 3.30 p.m. after which they had dinner, community prayers before the Great Silence began at 9 p.m. They didn't possess a bicycle or a car. They actually had a rowing boat which was used mainly by Brothers who came on summer holidays when the school was closed.

A few years ago I was with a very charismatic couple and it suddenly came into my head to ask what the Bible said about the Brotherhood. They were astonished to say the least. However, holding the Bible reverently, they prayed fervently and opened the book at random. The lady looked puzzled and said she didn't understand the passage before her eyes. It was Matthew 19, 12. "...there are those who chose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven."

That answered my question: People who are called to a monastic (religious) life are called to live as we will live in heaven! Impossible! One might say. But with God all things are possible. It also answered another unspoken question: religious profession is not a SACRAMENT - a sign - because it is meant to be a REALITY! Men and women in



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the early days of Christianity not only followed the Ten Commandments but they embraced the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience to respond to Christ's injunction "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". Literally thousands of men and women flocked to the deserts of Egypt and Syria to live as hermits. In some instances people gathered in community to live the cenobitic way of life. The emphasis was always on union with God by their way of life. Work was not emphasised.



Interestingly monasticism took different forms over the centuries. Celtic monasticism, apparently introduced by St. Patrick and spearheaded by St. Brid of Kildare, became the model for many European countries, thanks to the missionary zeal of people such as St. Columba, St. Gall, St. Columbanus, St. Aldan etc. Emphasis was always on prayer, poverty and silence. St. Comgall was a great man for austerity and his monasteries were well known for severe penances and only one meal a day. As a youth my penny-catechism mentality wondered how all those hermits satisfied the obligation of Sunday attendance at Mass! In actual fact they sometimes had a Bishop offer Mass for them. The Bishop was subject to the Abbot/Abbess, even if he stayed in the monastery, and his duties were merely confined to baptizing and offering Mass. I have noticed in the traditional monasteries that the religious sat in stalls facing each other across the chapel – not facing the altar or Blessed Sacrament. They saw Christ in each other.

Since the Irish monasteries never came under the influence of the Roman Empire they were autonomous. Having to learn Latin they were not averse to reading books of a secular nature. They also assimilated some of the druidic customs and festivals. The Celtic Cross stands witness to this as it incorporated the druidic sworl. The time of celebrating Easter differed from that followed by Roman practice. This almost led to schism until it was pointed out that "The power of the keys was given to Peter and not to Columcille!" The Irish submitted, "Roma locuta est!" Ironically the calendar had to be revised in Britain in September 1782 and eleven days were skipped to conform to the Gregorian calendar. The Irish monasteries were renowned as centres of learning and educated many European





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nobles.

This is our heritage. Succeeding centuries brought sea changes due to wrangles, invasion, persecution and wars. The Holy Roman Church was fragmented with different “churches” emerging. The life-style, power and wealth of the Roman church gave rise to many scandals. Many of the monasteries became wealthy also because of farm produce, the making of sacred vessels and the making of wine. In some instances serfs were employed to do the manual work while the religious brothers and sisters were busy with study and prayer. When some of these serfs desired to enter the monastic state they became lay-brothers and lay-sisters. The Abbots and Abbesses wielded immense power and sometimes they became embroiled in political matters.

To off-set this the Spirit from time to time raised up people like Benedict of Norcia, Francis of Assisi and Teresa of Avila to proclaim by their lives how consecrated people should live. There was a big gap between the monastic way of life and the clerical. Some orders had members ordained priests which functioned very well. Unfortunately it introduced something akin to a caste system in some clerical orders. I stayed with such a group for a month many years ago. The priests and brothers dined at different tables. In Ireland, a poor and exploited country at the time, young men who felt called to the priesthood joined clerical orders. The cost of formation for the diocesan priesthood was prohibitive unless one came from a wealthy family or unless the candidate was “adopted” by a foreign bishop who defrayed all expenses. Shortly after Vatican II, the now defunct Herder and Herder Correspondence published figures of thousands of priests leaving religious life. It failed to mention that they neither left the church nor the priesthood. They had discerned that their vocation was to the priesthood, not to religious life. It happens here in India that as soon as a candidate enters a seminary he is given the title “Brother”. This makes it more difficult for the ordinary person to understand what the consecrated religious Brother is. I made a remark at The Church in India Today Seminar (1969) that I would rather be known as a male nun rather than a half-baked priest! Because of that and some other remarks on children’s First Communion and First Confession (all from personal experiences), I was invited two years later by John Cardinal Wright to attend the 1971 synod in Rome as a **peritus!** Of course I didn’t go. I am only a Brother!

We became identified with our apostolate of teaching and the essence of our vocation was largely ignored. How many times have I been asked, “Brother, why didn’t you go the whole hog and become a priest?”! I often said, “That’s like asking a man why he doesn’t leave his wife and marry another? I doubt if I was convincing.

Br. M.B. Finn





PEER GROUP MEETINGS

The Province Renewal Team (PRT) comprising Brs. Cedric Andrade, Conrad D'Souza and Parag D'Costa organised a series of peer Group meetings in the first half of December. The 80 Professed Brothers in the Province were divided into 6 groups according to their ages.

During the first series of meetings the various groups were welcomed by Cedly who outlined the objective of the series of zoom meetings. Con then, through a power point presentation, gave a reflective input on Moses and his Exodus experience.

The life of Moses was divided into 3 sections of 40 years. During the first 40 years Moses attempted to make himself a somebody during his life in Egypt. During the next 40 years as he roamed in the wilderness alone, he realised that he was a nobody. During the last 40 years of his life when he led the people into the promised land he became the friend of God and all his people.

The first step toward spiritual renewal is the recognition and the acceptance of the need for change

Jeremy Lopez

The final question posed: Where do we CBs as a body, stand today, vis-à-vis the Moses-stages? This is a question we need to ask ourselves at the personal, province and congregation level. Can I act on becoming a friend of God and of others given the stage I find myself?

Parag concluded the session asking for suggestions from the Brothers to make the PRT more effective.

Some Suggestions from various group of Brothers:

- ◆ How do I become a Friend of the God of Jesus? Spend time with the God of Jesus. Take note of my Spiritual practices.
- ◆ Organise retreats, being Bro to others, interacting with the poor.
- ◆ Be aware of the Burning Bush encounters or daily nudges in my life.
- ◆ Trust in our co-workers; Look at the experiences of Edmund; Make space for God (invest time with Jesus)
- ◆ Be more human! How can the PRT be a conduit with the various Peer groups. Can the PRT organize 2-3 retreats twice a year, for about a dozen guys?
- ◆ A Province zoom





The PRT intends to organise similar zooms every 3 months to help the Brothers prepare for the proposed Province Assembly to be held in December 2024.

ACTIVITIES AT ST AUGUSTINE'S

St Augustine's is always a hub of activity, but it has been more so since we returned from the Diwali holidays on the 22nd November.



The staff and students were immediately into preparation for sports. Since we had a very elaborate sports last year as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations, this year's sports were mainly, but not wholly, around athletic events. The "Marathon" and the longer races – the 800m, 1500m and even the 3000m (!!!!) were held outside school hours. With just about 8 days to prepare for the Sports meets, all were mightily pleased

that the occasions were ones which were very satisfying to all. At the Secondary Sports Mrs Sibyl Gosalves, who recently retired after 33 years of service, was the Chief Guest. At the Pre-Primary Sports Ms Jenny D'Souza, who also recently retired from the school office after 15 years of service was the Chief Guest and Bro Larry, who celebrates his Golden Jubilee in the Christian Brothers in 2024, was the Chief Guest at the Primary Sports. It was our Principal, Bro Vinay's first Sports as Head of the School, and all acknowledged his facility in leading the staff and students into giving of their best and reaching these heights of excellence.



Have you seen so many parents take part in a Parents Race?

On the 21st December we had a Fun-Fair. The staff encouraged Bro Vinay to have this event, which has been taken up again after a gap of 6 years. One and all had an enjoyable time.



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The year ended with a Eucharist of Thanksgiving for the year; with Christmas class-parties and with a lunch for the Staff.

Larry Miranda

Our Jubilarian being escorted by the Head Master



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“UNEXPECTED MOMENT ENGRAVED AS MY BEST MEMORY”

Unexpected it was!! Br. Cedric phoned to inform me that I was chosen to attend a training on Social Justice, Human Rights and Advocacy in Geneva, Switzerland. I was taken aback! Reason, I was only introduced to Social Justice and Advocacy this year at the Residential Training programme for animators at St. Columba's, New Delhi. Though overwhelmed I was hesitant. It was the encouragement and support of Br. Cedric, the Principal, Ms. Varina, and the teachers that convinced me to embrace this once in a lifetime opportunity.

Neha Ma'am, Br. Shaun and I flew from Delhi to Geneva on 4th November. We were welcomed by Br. Tino at the airport and went to the brothers' residence in Gaillard. I began to get acquainted to the other participants from Kenya, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Nigeria, Ireland, Argentina and Australia. Witnessing and hearing of their passion and their work was truly motivational.

Our daily schedule comprised of four sessions – two each in the morning and the afternoon. In each





session we explored deeply aspects related to the Human rights, advocacy, the climate crisis and the role of the UN mechanisms, other international organisations like ILO, UNHRC, Franciscan International and how schools can inculcate skills of advocacy in students. Every session was unique, insightful and informative.

One of the most remarkable and memorable part of the training for me was the opportunity to visit the United Nations building. The artwork, the different meeting rooms, the thought-provoking Human Rights posters created the perfect setting for a valuable learning experience I had never dreamt of. We were also privileged to attend the Universal Periodic Review sessions of Canada and Tuvalu and were able to get a glimpse of international diplomacy in the spirit of constructive review at such a grand setting.



The hospitality offered by Brothers Brian, Tino and Terry helped us all feel at home even as we packed in so much into our days. Our daily walks to the brothers' residence or the tram station in chilly and occasionally breezy, rainy weather were enjoyable because of the lively conversations with other participants. We were also lucky to have meals cooked by the different participants that allowed us to sample cuisines

from different countries even as we cooked and cleaned together!

Over the weekend, we explored the charming town of Annecy. The train ride provided a beautiful view of the countryside as we reached the quaint town. We chanced upon a unexpected pork festival taking place which allowed us to savour various foods, wines and cheeses. We also visited the Le Paquier, Chateau d'Annecy, Lake Annecy and wandered through the picturesque streets while admiring the landscape. Other memories I value are the charming, mesmerizing walking tour of the Old Town of Geneva and other sites of the city like the Reformation Wall, the International Museum of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the Museum of Natural History, St. Pierre Cathedral, Maison Tavel, the Geneva Water fountain, the Flower Clock and the Lake.

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The wealth of learning from the sessions along with the pleasant memories of a circle of new friends formed is a blessing to be grateful for and treasured. I would like to end with a word of gratitude to our group – each one a beautiful soul, who inspired me with their work and dedication. I have returned inspired and equipped with new knowledge, awareness, new friends and an action plan to work for social justice and advocacy in my school in Shillong.

Ms. Marda, Providence

EDMUND RICE VOCATION CAMP IN ST. MARY'S ORPHANAGE AND DAY SCHOOL

During the "Sowing Period" (July-September), Jayanti visited all the Christian Brothers Institutions in West Bengal and conducted sessions on Vocation to the students of Classes nine to twelve. A good number of students responded and kept the correspondence with him. As a follow up program, in the "Nurturing Period" (October to December), we sent invitations to all the interested students who kept the correspondence to attend the Edmund Rice Vocation Camp in St. Mary's Orphanage and Day School from 25-27 November. Fifteen boys from St. Patrick's H. Sec. School, Asansol and eighteen boys from St. Mary's Orphanage and Day School attended the camp. Mr. Stephen Lazarus (SPS) and Br. Dilip Kerketta (SVHTS) accompanied the boys from Asansol.

During the two days, there were three sessions of inputs on each day. The boys were made into five groups and most of the activities were conducted in the groups. They practiced stories and parables from the Bible in groups and enacted on the second day in the evening during the cultural program. A football tournament was organised for them in groups which the boys enjoyed the most. On Sunday, the boys joined the local faithful for the Eucharist and on the last day, Monday morning, Fr. Umakant offered the Thanks giving Eucharist. The meals were looked after by Mr. Pradeep from the Canteen. They were well fed!



The Brothers from SMO community shared their vocation stories which were well appreciated by the boys. All the brothers from the community went out of their ways to make this Camp a great success. A big thank you to Brs. Charles, James, Lawrence and Ruvan for their support, kindness and generosity.

