



INDIAN PROVINCE NEWSLETTER

Dear Brothers and friends of Edmund,

Greetings from Goa.

This letter must begin with an expression of deep sadness for the people of the state of Manipur. Many have been killed and thousands are living in camps with all their houses destroyed. All one can do is to pray that peace and reconciliation will be restored soon in the state.

The month of August is a significant month for our country and our congregation.

On the 15th of August India celebrated its 77th Independence Day. India now has the largest population in the world (having overtaken China); it is rated as the 5th largest economy and the fastest growing economy in the world. Our country has sent space vehicles to the moon. We have made great strides in the information technology sector and Indian IT companies are among the best in the world. And so are our CEOs.

But there are a few concerns. India is ranked 139th in per capita GDP. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening (at present a global phenomenon). Unemployment has reached alarming levels despite the best efforts of the government. The prices of fuel and cooking gas, so essential for the common man remain very high. And the value of the Indian rupee keeps decreasing compared to the dollar and other major currencies.

On the 29th of August, we commemorate the death anniversary of our Founder-Blessed Edmund. The world is so different now compared to the time of Edmund. What do I see as key elements of a Congregation 'profoundly re-visioned'. To my mind, reflecting on his life, Edmund would have included 3 elements in it: Prayer, a practical commitment to the poor, and being relevant to the signs of the times.

Two ex-students of Steve D'Souza have written a remarkable article on him. It captures wonderfully the various facets of his life as an educationist par excellence. The first part of this article is reproduced in this letter.

Yours fraternally

Mark



LOVE BEYOND NAIVETE AND ROMANCE

Several years ago, a Presbyterian minister I know challenged his congregation to open its doors and its heart more fully to the poor. The congregation initially responded with enthusiasm and a number of programs were introduced that actively invited people from the less-privileged economic areas of the city, including a number of street-people, to come their church.

But the romance soon died as coffee cups and other loose items began to disappear, some handbags were stolen, and the church and meeting space were often left messy and soiled. A number of the congregation began to complain and demand an end to the experiment: "This isn't what we expected! Our church isn't clean and safe anymore! We wanted to reach out to these people and this is what we get! This is too messy to continue!"

But the minister held his ground, pointing out that their expectations were naïve, that what they were experiencing was precisely part of the cost of reaching out to the poor, and that Jesus assures us that loving is unsafe and messy, not just in reaching out to the poor but in reaching out to anyone.

We like to think of ourselves as gracious and loving, but, the truth be told, that is predicated on an overly-naïve and overly-romanticized notion of love. We don't really love as Jesus invites us to when he says: Love each other as I have loved you! The tail-end of that sentence contains the challenge: Jesus doesn't say, love each other according to the spontaneous movements of your heart; nor, love each other as society defines love, but rather: Love each other as I have loved you!

And, for the most part, we haven't done that.

- We haven't loved our enemies, nor turned the other cheek and reached out to embrace those who hate us. We haven't prayed for those who oppose us.
- We haven't forgiven those who hurt us, nor forgiven those who have murdered our loved ones. We haven't, in the midst of being hurt, asked God to forgive the very people who are hurting us because they are not really cognizant of what they are doing.
- We haven't been big-hearted and taken the high-road when we've been slighted or ignored, nor at those times have we let understanding and empathy replace bitterness and our desire to withdraw. We haven't let go of our grudges.



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- We haven't let ourselves be vulnerable to the point of risking humiliation and rejection in our offers of love. We haven't given up our fear being misunderstood, of not looking good, of not appearing strong and in control. We haven't set out barefooted, to love without security in our pockets.
- We haven't opened our hearts enough to imitate Jesus' universal, non-discriminating embrace, nor have we been able to stretch our hearts to see everyone as brother or sister, regardless of race, color, or religion. We haven't stopped nursing the silent secret that our own lives and the lives of our loved ones are more precious than those of the rest of the world.
- We haven't made a preferential option for the poor, haven't brought the poor to our tables, and haven't yet abandoned our propensity to be with the attractive and the influential.
- We haven't sacrificed ourselves fully to the point of losing everything for the sake of others. We haven't ever really laid down our lives for our friends – nor, especially, for our enemies. We haven't been willing to die for the very people who oppose us and are trying to crucify us.
- We haven't loved with pure intention in our hearts, without somehow seeking ourselves within our relationships. We haven't let our hearts be broken rather than, however subtly, violate someone else.
- We haven't walked in patience, giving others the full space they need to relate to us according to their own inner dictates. We haven't been willing to patiently sweat blood in order to be faithful. We haven't waited in patience, in God's good-time, for God's judgment on right and wrong.
- We haven't resisted our natural urge to judge others, to not impute motives. We haven't left judgment to God.
- Finally, not least, we haven't loved and forgiven our own selves, knowing that no mistake we make stands between us and God. We haven't trusted God's love enough to always begin anew inside of God's infinite mercy.
- We haven't loved as Jesus loved.

After his wife, Raissa, died, Jacques Maritain edited a book of her journals. In the Preface of that book he describes her struggle with the illness that eventually killed her. Severely debilitated and unable to speak, she struggled mightily in her last days. Her suffering both tested and matured Maritain's own faith. Mightily sobered by seeing his wife's sufferings, he wrote: Only two kinds of people think that love is easy: saints, who through long years of self-sacrifice have made a habit of virtue, and naïve persons who don't know what they're talking about.

Ronald Rollheiser





A SOLITARY PATH

To be ahead of time is to invite scepticism, despite an innovative approach. Yet Br. Eric D'Souza persevered and shaped a generation of students, writes **Adity Choudhury** and **Aparmita Das**

To leave a lasting impression is no easy feat, yet the 73-year-old Brother (Br.) Eric D'Souza accomplished just that. Presently, conversations on the quality of education in Meghalaya have transformed into hushed whispers, dinner table debates or a mild concern. The recent development on the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP), too, does not present a positive picture.

In this light, Br. D'Souza's legacy reflects his innovative spirit. Br. Solomon Morris, the principal of St. Edmund's School, Shillong, speaks of him in terms of a genius, an uncompromising social worker and a mentor with a unique approach.

As an educator, he taught in different schools run by the congregation, most famously teaching Shah Rukh Khan at St. Columba's School, New Delhi.

"His dynamic life involved constant growth. His early education was at St. Mary's School, Mount Abu in Rajasthan. Following his postulancy, he shaped young minds in different schools across the country – West Bengal, New Delhi, Mangalore, Assam and then here in Meghalaya," Br. Morris said.

Known for his sharp wit, he was a bit of a prankster during his B.Ed. days in St. Mary's College, Shillong. "Mother Anne was at her wit's end to make sense of his behaviour."

That said, the trailblazer was an intensely private person. It wasn't easy to get to know him. Case in point, his spiritual bent of mind. One would not necessarily know how and where he was praying; it reflected in his dedication towards his mission.

His teaching method was ahead of his time, unconventional both in its philosophy and practical application. He taught every sum in the mathematics textbook, for instance, without referring to the textbook – he knew them inside out. Visual imageries, mind-mapping, a sense of humour, among others, became part of his approach.



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He founded Providence, the school for underprivileged children, with the help of Samantha Syiem, the counsellor of the school. What began as an idea over a period of two years went on to become a force to be reckoned with.

This initiative, in Br. D'Souza's words, began as "an answer to a call given by the 1994 Christian Brothers Chapter to empower the laity, to move to the margins and to encourage internationality."

Following a meeting of the Managing Committee in 2003, the name 'Providence' came to be. While the mission of the school is, "To give the children the chance they never had", the vision reads, "To place the children above where their parents were."

With a piercing gaze and a compassionate heart, he adhered to the motto of Providence – "Every child in need is a call from God."

Br. Morris recalled his spirit of giving back to the community.

"We are discussing NEP now. He developed ideas and ensured their execution much before anyone thought of vocational training. This must be about 20 to 25 years ago. Today, many of the students are working. They have their own bakeries or beauty parlours, for example. His students from different schools would also contribute through teaching, rather than monetary payment."



*Br. E. S. D' Souza
Founder Providence*

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR LATEST NOVICES

God bless you
Romanus, Selvin & Billiam





ST. PATRICK'S SCHOOL ASANSOL INTER SCHOOL TOURNAMENTS

It's not the will to win,
But the will to prepare to win
That makes the difference.

The Founders' Cup, initiated by St. Patrick's Higher Secondary School, Asansol is a platform where the Christian Brother Schools meet to foster the values of sportsmanship and a sense of unity, belonging and oneness as Edmund Rice Institutions.

The Founders' Cup 2023 held a special significance as it had been resumed after a hiatus of three years following the outbreak of Covid 19.

The tournament started on 15th July, 2023 with a grand opening ceremony, where we welcomed our Chief Guest, Brother William D'souza, who is now the Vocation Promoter for the Christian Brothers in India and the Community Leader of the community at St. Columba's School, New Delhi.

The Chief Guest, Brother William D'souza hoisted the CCBI Flag and declared the meet open. It was followed by a short cultural programme, a song and a spectacular dance performance with a strong message to eliminate single use plastics from our lives.

There were a total of eight participating teams in the tournament.

The participating teams were St. Columba's School, New Delhi, St. Edmund's School, Shillong, St. George's School, Kolkata, Goethal's Memorial School, Kurseong, St. Joseph's College, Kolkata, St. Mary's High School and Orphanage, Kolkata, St. Vincent's High and Technical School, Asansol and St. Patrick's Higher Secondary School, Asansol.

The Football Tournament kicked off with Goethal's Memorial School, Kurseong taking on St. Edmund's School, Shillong.



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Matches were keenly contested over the weekend, as the players showcased their exceptional skills and team work on the field, leaving spectators in awe. The matches were marked by heart-stopping goals, breathtaking saves and countless nail biting moments.



After playing some very tough matches, St. Mary's High School and Orphanage, Kolkata and St. Patrick's, Asansol reached the finals. The atmosphere was electrifying and the excitement palpable as SPS beat SMO in a close match, where the scoreline read 2-0 in favour of SPS, Asansol.

In tandem with the Football Tournament, our Table Tennis Tournament lit up the arena and added an extra touch of excitement. Players showcased their agility and precision as they battled it out at the tables.



After several thrilling matches, that kept the spectators at the edge of their seats, St. Patrick's, Asansol emerged victorious in both Under-13 and Under-19 categories.

This exhilarating tournament came to an end on 17th July, 2023. A Closing Ceremony and the lowering of the CCBI flag marked the completion of this gala event.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the participating schools, their dedicated coaches and the Organising Committee who contributed their time and efforts to organize and facilitate the tournaments. The display of talent and the camaraderie of the young players were truly commendable. The players enjoyed themselves both on and off the field and will long cherish the memories and friendships forged during their stay in the school campus.

Mrs. Anusree Datta Mukherjee

SEM TRIUMPHS OVER SHERWOOD IN CISCE BAREILLY ZONAL FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT

The CISCE Bareilly Zonal Football Tournament concluded with an exhilarating finals match between Sem and Sherwood. Both teams displayed exceptional skills and sportsmanship, providing spectators with a thrilling and exciting game. The match was characterized by intense competition, with Sem ultimately emerging victorious. Additionally, it is worth noting the spirit of friendship that prevailed





throughout the tournament.

The finals between Sem and Sherwood proved to be an unforgettable showdown. Both teams showcased their prowess on the football field, creating a riveting atmosphere for all present. The players demonstrated excellent teamwork, technical abilities, and strategic gameplay.

Throughout the match, Sem maintained consistent pressure on Sherwood's defense, creating multiple scoring opportunities. Despite this, Sherwood displayed remarkable



resilience and skillful defense, preventing Sem from securing an early lead. The intensity and competitiveness of the game kept spectators on the edge of their seats.

As the match progressed, Sem's persistent efforts were rewarded when they managed to break through Sherwood's defense, scoring a crucial goal. Sherwood retaliated with fervor, attempting to equalize, but Sem's defense stood strong, denying them any significant chances.

In the closing minutes of the game, Sem displayed exceptional composure, managing to secure another goal, further extending their lead. Sherwood, undeterred, continued to fight relentlessly, but time was not on their side. The final whistle blew, signaling Sem's well-deserved victory with a scoreline that reflected their commendable performance.

Friendship and Sportsmanship: The tournament was not only about fierce competition but also highlighted the essence of friendship and sportsmanship. Both Sem and Sherwood showcased exemplary conduct throughout the tournament, fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect and camaraderie. The sincere appreciation expressed by Sem for Sherwood's participation exemplified the bond shared among the schools.

The success of the CISCE Bareilly Zonal Football Tournament owes gratitude to the efforts of all participating teams, coaches, and school administrations. A special thanks

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to Sherwood's principal for granting permission for their school's participation, ensuring a competitive and enjoyable tournament for all.

The CISCE Bareilly Zonal Football Tournament concluded on a high note, with Sem emerging victorious in a gripping finals match against Sherwood. The tournament celebrated the spirit of sportsmanship, emphasizing the importance of camaraderie and respect among competing teams. Congratulations to Sem for their outstanding performance, and commendations to Sherwood for their spirited gameplay. The event served as a memorable occasion for all involved, highlighting the positive impact of sports in fostering friendships and promoting healthy competition.

FINAL SCORE:2-0

Amit Massey

Annual CCBI Schools Tournaments at St. Vincent's High and Technical School. Asansol.

Sport demonstrates what teamwork and synergy can do. A tournament strengthens the competitive drive, builds team spirit and motivates teams to reach for the stars.

On 15, 16 and 17 July 2023, St.Vincent's High and Technical School, Asansol hosted the CCBI Tournaments, an endeavour to develop harmony and healthy sporting milieu among the Christian Brother schools from across the country. This tournament included Br. Revo Mark Miranda Memorial Football Tournament, Br. J. G. Pakenham Memorial Badminton Tournament and Br. Aloysius Ballantine Memorial Basketball Tournament.

This tournament is held year after year to reinforce the significance of robustness, agility, fair play and drive to win. The occasion was graced by Reverend Brother Miles Allams, the Community Leader of Goethals Memorial School, Kurseong, as the Chief Guest. The tournaments commenced with the flag being hoisted by our honoured Chief Guest followed by the teams marching in with the school brass band. There were 8 schools who participated in the tournament, namely - St Edmund's School Shillong, Goethal's Memorial School Kurseong, St. Columba's New Delhi, St. John's School Chandigarh, St. Mary's Mount Abu, St. Joseph's College, Bowbazaar Kolkata, St. Patrick's Higher and Secondary School Asansol and St. Vincent's High and Technical School Asansol.

The event kick started with a hymn sung by the choir invoking the blessings of the providence. The audience was captivated by the elegant grace of the semi-classical dance performance. A didactic street play was performed by the students of class 12 highlighting the Sustainable Development Goal 4 -Quality Education. It emphasised the problems and the need for inclusive education. The street play





was not only informative but also demanded a change in the education system. The audience was enthralled by the zestful and synchronized moves of the western dance which elevated the spirit of the teams.

The Chief Guest addressed the players and inspired them to show their talent in the true spirit of sportsmanship. The match commenced as soon as the referee and the players entered the field. The honorable Chief Guest, Reverend Brother Miles Allams, kicked the first ball to mark the beginning of the tournament

The spectators from all sides cheered for the players. The zeal and the adrenaline rush was evident among the participants. Within a few seconds, excitement heightened as attacks and counter attacks heaped up with every passing moment. Different matches were played simultaneously, each team displaying the determination to win. The semi-finals were held on 16 th July and the final match took place on 17th. July.



St. Edmund's School, Shillong became the Br. Revo Mark Miranda Memorial Football Tournament (under 13) champions. Goethals Memorial School , Kurseong won the Br. Aloysius Ballantine Memorial Basketball Tournament (under 19) and St. Columba's School, New Delhi won the Br. J. G. Pakenham Memorial Badminton Tournament (under 19).



The prize distribution ceremony for the tournaments was held on 17th July , 2023 in the school field. The teams were awarded trophies and medals. Every player received a participation certificate

The three day event thereby concluded with the Principal's vote of thanks. And marked the overload of fun and excitement coming to a satisfying end. .

Ms. Priyanka John

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JTI CLUSTER BULLETIN SEPTEMBER 2023

We returned last night after four harrowing days of bearing witness in Manipur. Nothing had prepared me for what we saw. Manipur is fully a war zone, with sophisticated rifles, mortars, bombs, and massive mobilisation of ordinary civilians, in which the state does nothing to restore peace, ensure justice, protect civilians, or assist people in camps in which children already are displaying signs of malnourishment; but instead is often perceived to be taking sides in what threatens to grow into a civil war.

On both sides entire villages have been razed to ashes.

We spent many hours in seven relief camps on both sides of the "border", met scores of community leaders from both communities (and even were caught once within a few hundred metres of raging cross-fire). The grief, the rage and above all the hate are boundless.

I searched desperately for signs of hope, of peace and healing in the immediate future. I could find this only in stories we heard in the camps of people of the "other" community who helped save lives.

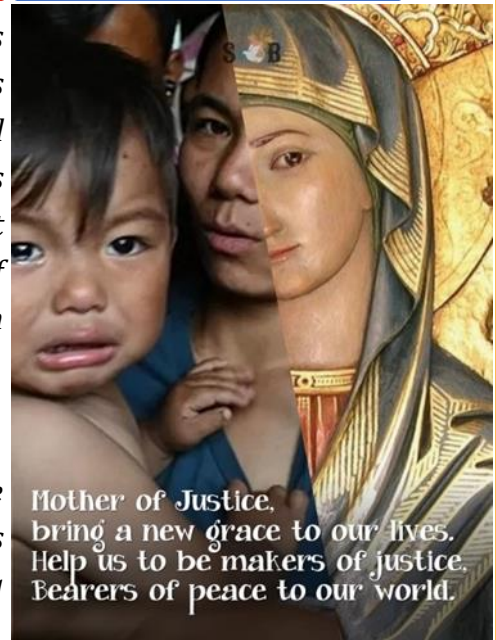
I grieve for our people. I grieve for our beleaguered, broken land. I rage for the malign governments that we have installed.

Harsh Mander, social activist

PATHARLYNDAN

The rains seem to be following a different pattern this year delaying the planting of rice by over a month. The steady rains which used to be a regular pattern has changed drastically with sudden cloud bursts that lead to flooding the fields and then we see prolonged dry spells. The people in the village are grappling with this shift and working hard to adapt to it.

The Brothers and the office bearers of the Multi-Purpose Cooperative made a visit to the Agricultural Department and had a meeting with Bah Nangsan Shylla, ADO Mairang. He was very supportive and suggested ideas as to how to take the Cooperative forward. The Cooperative had applied for a Government subsidy to start a polyhouse for organic vegetable and herbal garden and there is optimism that this proposal may receive approval.





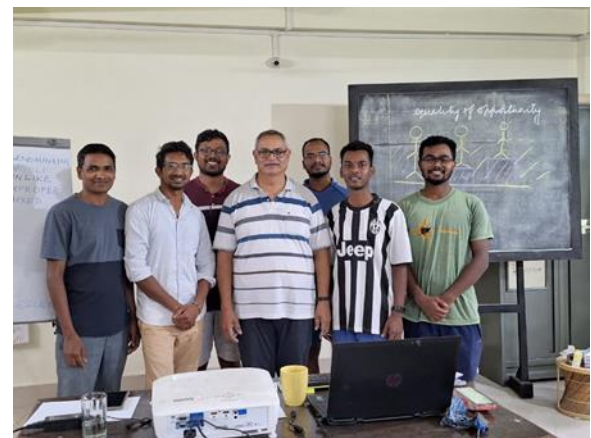
The Lum Laudato Si' initiative started by the village youth under the banner of Iatyllilang Edmund Rice Youth Action, have succeeded in planting almost 400 saplings. Due to irregular rain pattern some have dried up. The group is determined to make another concerted effort to plant even more trees.

Bah Shangpliang, the managing director of NaRi visited Patharlyndan to monitor the progress made by the beneficiaries of Dairy Co-operative. Five families have received funding to construct cowsheds and to acquire two cows each for a start. The construction of the cowsheds is nearing completion, and preparations are underway to purchase the cows, marking the successful completion of the initial phase of the project.

The Edmund Rice Tournament was conducted to mark the 179th death anniversary of Bl. Edmund Rice. The Brothers, Field workers, and the youth leaders conducted the tournament efficiently. The Women's section featured four teams, while the Men's section comprised 16 teams, each representing a different village. The different teams coming together to play on this occasion brings unity, connection and serves as a forum to spread Edmund's values to the surrounding villages. The village Headman spoke on the occasion highlighted the contribution made by the Brothers and urged young men to join the congregation to make a positive contribution to society.



Patharlyndan girls' team victorious in the Annual Edmund Rice soccer tournament



Larry conducted a five day teacher training program in the Hub

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UMTYRKHANG

The three villages reopened school in third week of July after the mid-term break. Rashal joined the Umyrkhang community on the 10th of July and is involved in Pamlatar School teaching English in classes 4, 5 & 6.

On the occasion of our founder's death anniversary, a number of competitions were





held in the month of August for the children of the 3 schools and the Founders Cup Football Tournament for the youth of the 4 villages in the sub-district of Mawlaho. All these activities were brought to its conclusion through a short program organized in Umtyrkhang on the 26th of August.

In between we had the casualty of the female pig dying suddenly due to the indigestion incurring some loss to the project as we were in the process of selling it.



Rashal receives a glorious welcome in Pamlatar primary school



Village people gathered in Edmund Rice Hall to see Founder's day program

ERPAKON

On July 2nd, the Brothers of the Cluster gathered for a two day Cluster gathering at the Hub. During this gathering, we engaged in a Check-In session to share our life experiences and participated in honest Open sessions about crucial elements of our life and work. We also dedicated time to do planning for the rest of the year. Our bonding experience extended beyond our discussions, as we enjoyed a delightful outing to Lake Marngar and a movie together.

Starting on July 5th, Larry Miranda led a comprehensive five-day teacher training program in Jyntru for the younger members of the Cluster and Wahrinong communities. Larry's expertise and training were highly valued and appreciated by the six young Brothers who participated in the program.

The Hub played host to a workshop organized by the FORUM of Religious for Justice and Peace (North East Unit) on July 28th. Dorothy Fernandes PBVM, the National Convener of FORUM, served as the workshop's key resource person. The workshop centered around the theme of "Incorporating Justice and Peace into Our Ministry and Spirituality." Additionally, we engaged in discussions and strategic planning to address the ongoing unrest in Manipur. We had religious coming from Ribhoi, Shillong, Guwahati, Bongaigoan, Silchar and Dimapur. Sunil is the Secretary of FORUM (North East Unit). Subsequently, in August, Sunil joined the National CRI team for a week-long visit to Manipur.

Dorothy Fernandes PBVM, in her capacity as a consultant, made visits to Patharlyndan and





Umtyrkhang. During these visits, she engaged in meaningful discussions with the Brothers and field workers, investigating ongoing ministry projects and potential initiatives for the future.

Sunil marked his birthday on July 31st, and to celebrate, the community was joined by Gambhir and Vinod at the dinner gathering. On 29th August the Brothers had a dinner celebration with priests from neighbouring Nongpoh and Umsning. Around 17 priests joined us for the celebration.

Bipin is heavily involved in teaching and school activities in St. John's School and Joachim is doing a great job overseeing the outdoor and indoor projects in the campus.



Sunil in a relief camp in Lamka (Churachandpur) during the Manipur visit

The Northeast Forum for Justice and Peace gathering in Erpakon

POETRY SECTION

WE WIN

Only kinship satisfies. All else starves.
The green green grass of home,
The local mispronunciation,
The very weather, wet or dry,
Kins, links and satisfies.

Hundreds and thousands cheer
The hardwon victory
Though the participant winners or losers
Know few beyond the dressing-room.
Cheers are for us, we are all the team,
All the rest are losers, they don't exist.

What globes the place we call home

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Is identified local love,
 Making accepted us out of mes.
 Weather weathers mes into us,
 And failures link mes into us:
 Love is the universal DNA.

It makes each mouth ours,
 Our collective mouths the voice
 To share cheers and sighs
 Linking us to the very accents
 That identify us as belonging to
 The local spirit we relate to,
 Called home.

Brendan July 2023

I CAN FLY!

I watched a young sea-gull begin what I was just ending.

Splat-footed, the baby seagull explored

the borders of my limited garden.

She waddled like my arthritic self,

obscurely sensing that earth was not her home,

a feature that my grey hairs were just admitting,

she with not-too-frightened bewilderment,

I with resigned anticipation of final arrival.

I chatted with her gently, and she, well,

made beaked noises that her elders,

squawking noisily in the morning breezes,

used to encourage her to try again, to fly.

She followed me about, I too practising locomotion,

she to some sort of achievement, I to mere mobility.

From the roof her parents called hoarsely, and

left her to discover herself on her own, but unafraid,

and then, suddenly, she sprang, wings flapping –





for three awkward stumbles – she had flown!
 While I in my turn added a little vigour to my shuffling,
 she spent a moment appreciating what she'd done,
 looked at me admiring and encouraging her,
 and then again ran a step or two – and leapt.
 And landed. In that moment I called my goodbye,
 and praised her. She could fly! And she knew it.
 Her undecided feathers would glow in white and grey,
 her strengthening wings defeat breakers and storms –
 and I would gradually reverse that process
 by learning again to walk, however slowly,
 each aware that a new world was revealing itself.
 I turned indoors, as she, welcomed in noisy happiness
 by her cheering family, jumped delightedly for the roof.

Brendan August 2023

SYNOD ON SYNODALITY

A groundbreaking moment in the Church's history awaits us



PIC: Asian Synodal Continental Assembly which took place in February 2023 in Bangkok.

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Scheduled for October 2023, the Synod on Synodality is perhaps the most closely watched event in the life of the Church, comparable in significance to the Second Vatican Council. The idea of 'synodality' has been in circulation for over two years now. Yet many religious are still asking what it really means and more essentially what does it mean for them.

With the global convocation of this synod on synodality, Pope Francis set in motion an unparalleled consultative process on change, unlike anything the world has witnessed before. The most recent instance the Church said it was going to make changes was back in 1965 at the Second Vatican Council. The puzzling question is why no meaningful changes occurred then despite the pressing need for them.

Sr. Joan Chittister OSB believes that the two thousand plus bishops around the world who attended the Second Vatican Council "voted yes for all of its documents, but once back on home soil, many simply ignored them." This is where the present synod on synodality sets itself apart. This time, through the insight of Pope Francis, there was a clear intent to involve the entire Church and laity themselves in the process of shaping the agenda even before the synod is convened.

While Synods of bishops have been around for over fifty years, it is Pope Francis who has made them into focal points of his more co-creative approach of leadership, thus transforming them from being ceremonial 'rubber stamp' gatherings. Under his leadership, notable synods have been convened on various significant themes, including family matters (in 2014 and 2015), youth engagement (in 2018), and the encompassing challenges of the pan-Amazon region (in 2019).

In his inaugural synod of 2014, Francis shattered the pointless convention of flattering papacy. He urged participants to "speak boldly," unburdened by concerns about external reactions. The significance of this change cannot be overstated. Francis may have received more than he bargained for as bishops not only engaged in disagreements amongst themselves but also directed criticism towards the pope. Such boldness was inconceivable under preceding papal reigns.

In Sept 2021, the Vatican kickstarted the synodality process by releasing the *Preparatory Document* which described the "purpose of this synod is not to produce more documents. Rather, it is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make people's hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission."

Prominent theologian and synodality expert Rafael Luciani, explains that, "A synodal vision challenges us to transform clericalist practices in which an individual or a group in the Church makes decisions without listening and consulting, as if existing beyond the people of God. Synodality demands that we listen and engage in dialogue to establish binding relationships that build Church."

The Synodality synthesis for India openly acknowledges right at the beginning that even though "the comfort of being led by clergy/religious is still prevalent, the role of the laity as co-responsible collaborators in the Roman Catholic Church in India has begun, but is yet to take root in many





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dioceses.”

For a synodal Church
 communion | participation | mission



The co-creative intent in the upcoming Synod is clearly displayed in two radically innovative arrangements – the distinct seating configuration to be adopted at the Synod and the format of the working document prepared for the event.

In contrast to the traditional synod hall arrangement, where cardinals occupy the front rows, followed by bishops, priests, and lay theological experts at the rear, this upcoming October assembly will be held within the larger Pope Paul VI audience hall. This larger space, typically hosting more than 6,000 pilgrims during cooler weather for papal audiences, will undergo a transformation into a setting for intimate, small-group roundtable deliberations. Behold, a synod that embraces the power of round tables!

The collaborative process which began in Sept 2021 is now condensed in *Instrumentum Laboris*, a working document for the Synod participants. In an unprecedented move, the *Instrumentum Laboris* departs from its traditional format of offering a draft final document open for amendments by the synodal assembly. Instead, it comprises a collection of thought-provoking questions, echoing those that emerged from the global consultations. Strikingly, the ingenious minds in the planning committee offered us sharp focus questions and abstained from formulating a predefined set of conceivable answers.

A key voice on synodality, Sr. Nathalie Becquart asserts, “You can't listen to all of the people of God if you don't listen to women and sisters.” The *Instrumentum Laboris* states, “All Continental Assemblies call for the issue of women’s participation in governance, decision-making, mission and ministries at all levels of the Church, to be addressed, and for this participation to be given the support of appropriate structures





so that this does not remain just a general aspiration. Most of the Continental Assemblies and the syntheses of several Episcopal Conferences call for the question of women's inclusion in the diaconate to be considered."

Interestingly, the forthcoming synod is set to step up the involvement of women by granting them the privilege to vote for the first-time following decades of demands for this right. Out of the 364 voting participants, a majority of whom are bishops, over 50 will be women.

Pope Francis' synod on synodality is the greatest gamble of his papacy. It holds the potential to foster energy and cohesion within the Church, yet it also carries the risk of greater conflict and division. We will know soon.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. *What deters me from relating respectfully with lay people I encounter routinely? How might we amplify lay empowerment within our ministries and institutions?*
2. *What questions do I fear asking myself? What questions do I fear asking in my community?*
3. *Can we adopt a circular seating for our prayers and meetings? How am I called to embrace a circular or co-creative style of leadership?*
4. *In what ways would things be different, if I were to nurture the feminine voice within me? if we were to nurture the feminine voice in our world and Church?*

(More on living synodality and the essence of its spirituality in the next issue...)



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