

SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART

PROVINCE OF INDIA

NEWSLETTER



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NEWSLETTER FROM THE TORPA COMMUNITY

CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT (CWD) locally known as *Mahila Vikas*

To transform and to be transformed....

CWD is recognized for innovative education programs and for social and economic empowerment of the tribal community in Torpa and Rania. Whenever I have personally visited the field, I am always struck by the communitarian spirit of this agrarian community. 'Whatever they do, they will do together'. Any field work, celebration of marriage, religious life or even a calamity or death will mean that the entire village attends the event and will offer to help out in whatever way they can contribute.

Every morning sunrise, the large dew drops of water, the natural landscape of the mountains, the crops in the field, the pretty wild flowers and the starry night sky make Torpa scenic and beautiful at this time of the year. But the depletion of the natural resources of water/forest/land (*jal, jungle, jameen*) – the pride and joy of every Adivasi tribe – calls us "to listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor". CWD together with the networking partners formed a group of progressive farmers called "Climate Change Volunteers" (*Mausam Mitra*). Currently the third phase of the training programme is on. Information is being shared on the importance of weather forecasting for the farming community with a special focus on crop planning especially crops that require less water. The volunteers will then share their best practices in agriculture to empower the small and marginal farmers.

The winter season has been severe with the temperature dropping even further. We are cold, distantly located and often internet connectivity is very poor. At this time what really keeps me positive and focused is the engaging human stories that always warms my heart and gives me the much needed spiritual energy. I will share with you one such story:

Rescue & Rehabilitation of Neelmuni, a Human Trafficking Victim

Phulmuni Topno a young married woman was desperate to find her younger sister aged 10 years who suddenly went missing from the village home. In 2018 she approached me to locate her sister who was trafficked to Delhi around six years ago. She had no photograph, nor any documents/identity proof of her sister. But she was determined to bring her younger sister back home. Prior to this, she took the initiative and together with her husband boarded a long distance train bound for Delhi. Both of them had never travelled anywhere out of the village before. But the agent (*dalal*) sent them back empty handed on the very same day by the next train. The CWD team helped Phulmuni to be reunited with her sister Neelmuni who is now a young adolescent. It was a great joy and a delight to see the contentment and satisfaction on Phulmuni's face after her sister returned and was reunited with the family.

For us at CWD, networking with the organisations such as Justice & Care Delhi, Delhi Police and the local Karra Police greatly helped in securing the procedures required by the District

Child Protection Office and the District Child Welfare Department. The agent is now in police custody. Efforts are on to recover Neelmuni's wages from the employer in Delhi and to rehabilitate Neelmuni in the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalay, a government school that offers free education and a holistic program.

Mariaelena Figueredo rscj

IT IS A GREAT JOY TO BE IN TORPA.....

Every day work begins with the little children of Bal Niketan Nursery school. Their smiling faces and their cheerful greetings are a delight..... to hear their sweet voices "Good Morning Sister". Sometimes I attend their morning assembly. I always admire their journey from Nursery to Upper K.G..... how bold and confident they have become. They come forward to sing or recite a prayer, shout slogans, or monitor the assembly and the different programmes – Children's Day, Christmas gathering, and speeches for 15th August and 26th January. Two to three times a week I move from class to class. My heart overflows seeing them answering, coming forward to write on the board or in their note books. Their tiny little fingers miraculously moving to draw, or paint or read and write. During their little breaks they are very adventurous. They run around like live wires, run to catch the swing, see-saw, climber and merry-go-round. Some jump over the sand which lies piled and sometimes they play with bricks trying to make a train, car, house or shop, etc. The campus is filled with so much noise and full of life. Sometimes they fight, pull, push and pinch each other and also act as a fare judge to solve their little fights. Often they make friends again before they enter their class. This reminds me of my own childhood and the words of Jesus "Unless you become like a little child you will not enter the kingdom of heaven".

K.G. Trainees/Balwadi Teacher Training Programme: There are 23 trainees for the academic year 2019-2020. There is team of 6 staff members and I am one of them. Each of us has different tasks in preparing the trainees as a balwadi teacher. The trainees also prepare for the one year diploma course from the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). After the completion of this one year course they get two certificates one from the government and one from CWD. The subjects are Hindi, English, Maths, teaching methodology, various practical activities which are related to teaching, lots of assignments, lesson plans, personality development and leadership training, plus seminars on various topics like child psychology, family life, social problems, human trafficking, children's laws, health, hygiene and nutrition.

I take family life, personality development and English classes with the trainees. Often they do not know English as it is not taught to them in the school. Though most of them have finished their higher secondary education they need guidance. This year's batch is better compared to past years. With them I am also teaching especially the grammar as you all know my own limitation. I have to study understand and then perform so I spend time to prepare these classes especially English. This keeps reminding me of our charism and mission 'to be an RSCJ Educator'. Previously, I found it hard but as the years passed by I now enjoy my class. We both enjoy rhymes and I have even composed a few to my own tune.

Besides the above I continue to be a part of the Hostel Team and the Tailoring department. I contribute to value education, personality development and family life education. I also make personal contact in order to meet possible vocations. In the month of May I visited few 'possible vocations' in the area and also helped Sophie to conduct vocation camps in Torpa. I attend the weekly CWD meetings with the project staff and their follow-up if required. Whenever Mariaelena is away from CWD I am literally on my toes. Often I do not realize how the days pass by. On the whole all this refuels my energy. And at end of the day there is so much to thank

God for all his goodness and kindness. So I feel very blessed in many ways. There is only gratitude in my heart for all that satisfies me here at Torpa.

Charusheela Gaikwad rscj

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE OF WORKING AS HOSTEL-IN-CHARGE....

Since July 2019 I am CWD Hostel-in charge. I have also been given an opportunity to prepare for my Part II MSW studies through long distance learning. Miss Virginia Topno is the Hostel Warden. She and her team look after all the practical arrangements for running the Hostel Mess like shopping, marketing and cooking in the hostel kitchen. My work is the spiritual animation of the residents who are mainly college students. Hostel life begins with the sound of the morning bell at 4.30 am, morning prayer at 5.30 am and mass at 6 am. When the mass ends, it is time for cleaning of the hostel premises.

For their morning prayer I tried to introduce different types of prayer like awareness of one's breath, listening to the sounds within and around and repeating a mantra in the mind. Sometimes I played B.K. Shivani's video "Meeting the Supreme Light as your Father". The hostel residents are used to reciting vocal prayers. So all this was new for them. If for whatever reason there was no mass, then I introduced them to a few *Yoga asanas* and '*surya namaskar*'. The residents loved these new ways of praying. Once a week, mass in English language was introduced. (The daily mass is in the Hindi language). Twice a week I took the practice of simple English hymns and mass prayers with the students. Till date they have learnt many new English hymns. But for many students it is still a struggle to pronounce the words as they are more comfortable with the local languages of Mundari, Sadri and Hindi.

I also introduced the residents to '*sundrikaran*'. Together we planted a few flowers and plants around the hostel building. The first 2 months it worked well but later the students got busy with other programmes. The students also help out whenever required in transplanting and harvesting at the neighbouring rice fields belonging to the College. For me it was my first experience to enter a rice field with ankle deep water in order to transplant rice, and again to harvest the rice crop. At the students request I could not refuse. At the beginning I was hesitant and unhappy but later I enjoyed the chance to be part of this very humble work.

Basically all these experiences in the hostel ministry have been enjoyable. I feel that I do get the opportunity to share my inner journey with the students and I hope to attract young girls to an rscj way of life.

Agnes Guria rscj

CHILDREN OF THE NEW DAWN SCHOOL

My New Responsibility.....

I have taken my new responsibility as Principal of the school from 1st April 2019. Before taking over my new task I went through a lot of turmoil. I was getting fever and stomach ache. All this happened to me because of fear, anxiety and thinking of the unknown future. I had nightmares. On 31st March 2019, I went to Ulhatu, the Shrine of Mother Mary, along with the Torpa Parish Catechism children. I earnestly prayed to Mother Mary and shared what was happening to me. And Mother Mary heard my prayer. I somehow felt myself a bit calmer and my fears began receding. My prayer life was strengthened. Yes... there have been many ups and down in these past 10 months but I can say that I have grown in confidence in myself and to trust God alone. I have felt greatly supported by the Provincial and the Council, each of my community members and many rscjs. I am deeply grateful to each one. In the school the staff members too are very

co-operative and supportive. Because of them we were able to hold many activities in the school. I would like to share briefly about the Annual Sports Day.

The Annual Sports Day was held on 6th December 2019. After many years we celebrated the event in a little bigger way. We invited a Chief Guest and also invited the parents. The Chief Guest was Mr. Gopal Bhengra, an International Hockey player from a nearby village and the Guest of Honour was our Manager, Sr. Vimala. We were all very excited. Just before the Sports Day I was away for a meeting for almost a week. Therefore the entire programme was arranged by the P.T. teacher and the staff. We began at 10 am by welcoming the Chief Guest. Then we had the march past followed by the lighting of the Torch and the opening dance. In his speech the Chief Guest said that Sports is very important in our life, it help us to be disciplined, to compete with each other in a fair manner, to concentrate and to accept failure without any grudge. He mentioned that we can make a career in Sports. He wished the children for a bright opportunity and great future. He gave away the prizes to the winners. We invited some of the parents and guardians and conducted a game for them. They were very happy to participate and also to see their children excelling in different fields other than studies. Grace Topno and Abraham Sanga were the champions of Sports Day 2019. The Red House was the overall Champion for 2019. We ended with a closing dance by class 7. All the success goes to the teachers' team effort. Truly, it was an enjoyable event.

Sushma Topno rscj

MY EXPERIENCE AT CND SCHOOL & SACRED HEART PARISH, TORPA.....

I joined the Children of the New Dawn (CND) School in April 2019. When I was asked to teach in the higher classes, I was a little nervous. Since I did not have any experiences of teaching in the higher classes, I was given the books to prepare for the class. When the time came to begin the class, I used to pray to St. Madeleine Sophie for guidance and help. I was also asked to teach history in class 8 but I hesitated, since it is not my subject, thinking whether I will be able to do it or not. But I thought, it is a good opportunity to learn, so I took a risk to do it. Once I began preparing, I realized that am taking interest in the subject. Now I feel comfortable to teach and enjoy myself too.

Besides, main subject teaching, I have religion class with students of classes 8, 9 and 10. During this class we share our faith with each other; how God is leading each one of us in our daily life. In the beginning students did not share as some of them felt shy. When I realized this I was trying to make the class lighter so that they may feel comfortable to express themselves. Slowly many began to share their life and their faith. Their reflection was so deep and enriching. During winter we had our class outside under the big crucifix which is in the centre of the school. This place was so appropriate when we began because we were talking and discussing about the last seven words of Jesus. I asked them to imagine that they are part of the same journey where Jesus was crucified. Everybody entered into this experience of Calvary. I was so touched to see them reflecting and praying. I too prayed with them. At the end all of us made a prayer of surrender just as Jesus surrendered Himself to His Father. After that, that place became very significant for us and we hold all our classes there. Now we have come to the end of the academic year. We ended our last class praying together and asking for a blessing for all the students who are going to appear for their annul examination. As I look back I feel happy and privileged that I got this opportunity to share my faith with them and that I am also benefitting and I have learnt so much from them.

On Sunday I attend the children's Mass at the Parish. There are small children who take keen interest to come regularly for the catechism class. Looking at them I am encouraged. We are having different activities so that children may have some experience of Jesus as well as they can

enjoy the Sunday class also. Once we had an action song competition which was related to the Bible. As we were leaving to go home, I asked a little girl who is about five years old “why do you love Jesus?” She answered me very confidently: “Jesus gave me my parents”. I was really touched by her answer. It really made me think that why do I love Jesus. From then onwards, on recollection day I take some time to reflect and pray on this.

I feel grateful that God is giving me an opportunity to come closer to Him and strengthen my relationship with Him.

Neelam Hemrom rscj

MY EXPERIENCE IN THE NEW DAWN SCHOOL.....

I thank God for giving me this opportunity to teach at CND, Torpa. I am very happy to teach the little ones. My experience with weak students was very good. I love teaching specially the weak ones. After school I take extra class with them. They are very happy to come for class. When I first began teaching in the school, I realized that some students have the desire to study, but because of some reason or the other, they are not able to manage their studies. For example one boy in my class is very weak in studies. When I came to know this I told the child to call his mother to come and meet me. So she came to meet me. She told me that I am not educated but whatever you tell me I will do. So he started to come for extra class. And in the first term exam he got the 2nd rank. I was so excited and happy. I experienced within me great joy. On the result day the child’s mother was so happy that she said because of you he got the 2nd rank. I told her that he has the capacity to study but nobody is there to guide him.

School Picnic....

14th November is Children’s Day. And on that day the school arranged a picnic to Satdhara river. The Satdhara river is at a distance of four kilometers from our school. The School arranged two buses to go to the picnic spot. We started our journey at 8.30 am. We went happily. We were talking loudly with joy. Some of the students were singing merrily. After reaching the picnic spot, all the teachers and the students enjoyed the natural sights on the way, the river, the sand, etc. Soon after reaching we had breakfast which was provided by the school. Some students were playing, talking, laughing, singing, bathing and enjoying the sight of the flowing water. One group of staff and students were enjoying themselves cooking the lunch – the highlight of the picnic. I enjoyed with the little ones going into the water and playing with them. After two hours everybody returned to join the main group. At about 1.30 pm we enjoyed our delicious hot meal with great joy.

Soon it was time to return. At 3.30 pm we made our way back home. I had a wonderful day. I enjoyed the picnic with my students.

Shalini Sajan rscj

MY JOURNEY WITH THE SEEKERS TO PRERANA, PUNE



Here we (Victoria, Kumud and Vimala) are, in Prerana, Pune, having journeyed all the way from Torpa. How did we get here?

The journey began in mid-July 2019, when Victoria, who is from a village in the Bandgaon parish, near our novice, Anita Hamsoy’s village, arrived with a companion, who however, left after a few weeks. A week later they were joined by Kumud, Sr. Prisca’s

niece. After a number of days of fairly relaxed time as they adjusted to a new life, the days settled into a pattern: Mass in the hostel, guided meditation, an hour or so of English class with Sr. Vimala, followed by English homework, oral and written, for an hour or so, a walk to the Children of the New Dawn school, where they “helped with” and attended one class of spoken English in the Primary school, and then back for lunch. Afternoon was a time for rest, personal work, reading the newspaper, reading the life of a saint, reading a simple story book etc. After tea, there was gardening, followed by rosary with the hostelites. In the evening, before they joined the community for prayer, there was another class with Sr. Vimala on a variety of topics: practicing saying some of the common prayers, as well as the mass prayers, in English (the mass is in English every Thursday), understanding the Eucharist, a little introduction to the political and social situation at the time of the beginning of the Society, some information about the current happenings about which they are reading in the newspaper, so as to understand what they are reading, family sharing etc. Videos and pictures, downloaded from “Google” on the mobile were a great help in giving them a visual understanding of things they would otherwise not have been able to imagine, like the temple in Jerusalem, boats and a storm at sea, noblemen and the king Louis XVI and the Queen, castles, palaces, gardens and the lifestyle of the nobility etc.

What they enjoyed very much was the participation in several of the functions in the hostel and school, when, besides a good meal or snack, there was dancing! Sunday nights, when after supper they played Chinese Checkers with the younger members of the community, was a weekly event to which they really looked forward to and enjoyed, with much laughter and merriment.

The actual journey to Pune started on 31st January 2020 night. On the 30th January there had been a farewell lunch and a special prayer for them in Torpa community. On the evening of the 31st a number of pieces of luggage, big and small were loaded into the jeep and with the community saying fond farewells, the travelers set off. In Pune, after a little wait (as the train arrived at 3 a.m.) we were met by Venezia and Anita, who brought us to Prerana; and here we are!

Vimala Verghese rscj