

SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART

PROVINCE OF INDIA

NEWSLETTER



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NEWS FROM THE TORPA COMMUNITY

A Human Being Proposes, but God Disposes

“Man proposes, but God disposes.” This saying was brought home to me very starkly by my recent experience.

After leaving Harigaon 30 years ago, I had made only two very brief visits there for work and had not met any of my old contacts of many years. So it was with great enthusiasm and joy that I went to Harigaon for a visit on 10th March 2020. 12 hectic days followed: presiding at the Ashankur Women’s Day Programme, Chief Guest at St. Theresa’s Women’s Day Programme and also at the Annual Day Programme of the English medium primary school; whirlwind visits to ex-teachers, ex-students, meals with them, much love and gifts received, and I was ready to leave on 22nd March by train, for which I had a ticket to Mumbai from where I was due to leave for Torpa.

God disposed: BANG came down the gates of the lockdown! I was “locked up” in Harigaon for an exact 5 months, till 10th August, when the gates suddenly, unexpectedly opened to let me “out” to go back to Mumbai! However, it wasn’t a “lock up” at all. The Lord was as it were saying, “I am going to block her way with thorns...I am going to lure her and lead her out into the wilderness and speak to her heart” (Hos. 2: 16-17). I had come for 12 days with the minimum number of things – clothes, medicines, toiletries...., but He provided me with everything I needed through the loving kindness and attention of each one in the Harigaon community.

He began “formation” immediately. First, a very few peaceful weeks when I naturally slowed



Spoken English class with Social Distance

down, a preparation for my next ministry in Rishikesh! I had prayer in the Harigaon chapel which is one of my favourite Province chapels and with many memories of the growth in my life with the Lord from 1968-1990. I had time to read a few light books, for which I hadn’t had time during the past few years. Then slowly He increased the pace. I was asked to take “Spoken English” with the eight

English medium primary school teachers. I had no materials. No matter! I could draw on my experience.

Then the 4 PYs asked if I could do the Constitutions of 1815 (Abridged Plan, Constitutions, Summary) with them – a more spiritual set of classes! I had neither materials for it, nor the Constitutions. I borrowed the Constitutions, Margaret William's life of St. M. Sophie & History of the Society, Phil Kilroy's life of St. M. Sophie and



Class on the Constitutions

Dominique Sadoux's Commentary on the Constitutions and began classes every alternate day. Typed notes were also given, so that the PYs in turn could give classes, if required, in the future. Then the Bhokar community visited us one day. Deodita said she had got the bright idea suddenly, that since she had missed her retreat of

this year, she could ask me to give her a retreat! I was flabbergasted! The last retreat I had given was to my novices, perhaps in the year 2000. After that I had been in a very active ministry in Torpa till now. Nor did I have any materials with me. They were all in Torpa! I hesitated and said I would get back to her. However, it was a spiritual need of one of my younger sisters. I prayed and pondered for another 2 weeks over what message the Lord wanted to give and how to go about it. A reading during community prayer gave me the direction and I told Deodita that I would give the retreat. The Lord was slowly giving me practice.

He didn't leave it at the ministry level either! Having got me into a place where I didn't have my usual preoccupations, my habitual routine changed and I also had more inner calm for reflection. He did indeed spread a "banquet" for me, but every now and then I would find a little grain of sand in the delicious fare – a small weakness or habit of mine which needed correction. I would thank Him for showing it to me and try to eradicate it, but some were firmly lodged in my teeth! The Divine dentist would have to get it out with some cooperation on my part! As I said spontaneously to Prisca, when sharing some of this with her, "How clever the Lord is!" This was my spontaneous remark at each new move of His. The psalmist had expressed it more poetically, "O Lord, how great thou art!"

Then, just as I was settling down to a prolonged stay in Harigaon, "CLANG!" the gates opened! Prisca was leaving unexpectedly for Pune in 3-4 days' time in the Ashankur jeep and Pratibha was coming from Mumbai the same day to Pune in a private vehicle and returning. A hectic 3-4 days followed: Winding up the two sets of classes, getting a fitness certificate and e-pass for travel, and packing! Now, here I am, in the KP community. When do I leave for Torpa and then for Rishikesh? Now I have stopped asking! He has His plans! The Lord is very clever!

Vimala Verghese rscj

The global pandemic of COVID-19 and the extended lockdown that followed in India began initially with the healthcare crisis and soon developed into an economic crisis and a humanitarian crisis. Currently the Covid positive cases have been increasing in the Khunti district, Jharkhand state, in which Torpa is located. In the present atmosphere of fear, we want to renew **HOPE in order to COPE** with the uncertain times ahead.

In March 2020 when travel restrictions were imposed Sr. Sophie, who was visiting Torpa, could not return to her community as per her scheduled plan and Sr. Vimala, who was in Harigaon, could not return to Torpa. From April to June 2020, awareness drives and Covid relief work were conducted in the villages of the Torpa and Rania blocks. The government rules and regulations such as wearing masks, maintaining social/physical distancing, etc. were always maintained by us. To equip ourselves to accept the extended lockdown and the uncertainties that we encounter in the Torpa ministry, meant that we needed to learn some 'digital skills' that would prepare us to cope during the lockdown period and even after the lockdown is lifted.

July 2020 onwards was a time for the capacity building of the staff. Salony Priya, a child psychologist, from UMEED organization, prepared a series of online training through the Zoom platform for the education project staff comprising of village community teachers, learning facilitators and the programme coordinators on the following topics tailor-made for them in Hindi: mental well-being for educators, digital literacy – challenges and benefits and how to adopt a positive approach and stay stress free. 48 staff members gathered in the big hall of our Centre wearing masks and maintaining social distancing. In the very first Zoom experience, the host allowed us to enter the Zoom meeting room, we connected but the external audio speakers began echoing. Salony Priya was not audible to the entire group. Finally we had to make do with a video recording of the sessions in smaller groups.

In order to cope with digital challenges, the education project staff and the Bal Niketan teachers were introduced to digital platforms such as Google Meet, social media, etc. with practical hands-on training – 'do it yourself' sessions conducted by the 2 ITE trainers, namely Shashikant Singh and Anmol Guria.

Through WhatsApp groups and group audio and video calls, the ministry team tries to stay connected with the village community teachers and parents and guardians who have smart phones. The staff is learning to make short videos of 3 to 5 minutes on storytelling, language class, etc. The main objective is to encourage the staff to share digital content in spite of the many hurdles faced on a daily basis. It is a big challenge given the reality of network issues and no connectivity in interior villages. But the offline and online learning continues....

The livelihood programme staff is acquiring skills to make short videos of 5 minutes on interactive conversations with small and marginal farmers, engaging them to talk about crop planning, status of the rice crop, red millet crop, weather forecasts, etc. A major focus of our organization has been to restore the livelihood of the village community through linking more households to their rights and entitlement to get help from the government schemes.

We know that we are not alone in these uncertain times; the element of fear and risk is always there. For me, this has been a personal experience of renewed trust and faith in God's love and God's protection to keep our community and our people safe.

Mariaelena Figueredo rscj

On the night of 22nd March 2020 when the Prime Minister announced the lockdown, we Indians were not prepared for this. Our minds and hearts were not ready for this sudden change. Certain new rules were imposed. Social distancing is not a part of the tribal culture. The right hand of a tribal person always instinctively comes forward to greet you. We never thought that the lockdown will prolong for months and would turn our daily life upside down especially for so many people who live from hand to mouth.

I visited seven villages along with the staff members of our organization who conducted awareness programmes and distributed dry rations, sanitation kits and masks. Even now, as I am writing, tears are rolling down my cheeks. People were so grateful and happy with the little help that we could give, especially to the elderly, the widows and the handicapped – those whom help had not yet reached. It was a very heart-touching moment for me when an elderly woman, a former self help group member from Rangrudi village, was so happy when she heard that we had come especially to meet her in order to give her a dry ration kit. She cried out loudly, “Mahila Vikas still remembers me”.

I visited Digri Badkatoli village along with Sr. Agnes and the staff to help conduct an awareness programme to address the stigma attached to Covid. The village community excluded the entire family of Vimal Horo (a migrant worker who had returned from the state of Karnataka) from filling water from the common hand pump in the village. The staff intervened and held an interactive discussion with the village community explaining the myths and facts of Covid-19. A total of 42 people attended the meeting and agreed to resolve the issue.

Our organization also provided a cooked meal daily to 6 hamlets in Rania. Due to the extended lockdown and no local market, where the people could earn their daily living by selling forest produce, these vulnerable people who live in the hills were happy to have a warm cooked meal prepared by volunteers from the village and the staff.

This has also been a very challenging time for me: trying to adapt and to live with a change in lifestyle: e.g. frequently washing my hands, using a sanitizer, wearing a mask, maintaining social distancing, unable to visit people in their homes (as is a social custom here), do a few hours of work or work from home on one's own and struggle to learn digital functions.

Charusheela Gaikwad rscj

As this time, when the whole world is facing the pandemic, we read and we experienced the human tragedy faced by the north Indian semi-skilled and unskilled labourers. The picture of thousands of migrant workers walking towards their villages miles and miles away without any food or transport stayed with me. It was heartbreaking and painful. From Khunti district many people go to the big cities to earn their livelihood. So, it affected me even more to see the situation of my people.

I felt helpless, yet I had a strong desire to do something. Then I got an opportunity to contribute my small bit in this cause. Along with three staff members I started stitching masks for the villagers. When our organization provided dry ration to the needy families, I was happy to be a part of the team along with other staff packing dry ration kits. I also got an

opportunity to go to five villages for Covid-19 awareness programmes. Though the people in the villages knew about Covid-19 they did not understand the lockdown rules. Some migrant workers, who were home quarantined, did not understand quarantine conditions. Our organization's staff went to the villages of Torpa and Rania blocks to make them aware of the seriousness and the consequences of this pandemic and to ask them to follow the instructions given by the government. Sanitizers, soaps, hand-wash and masks were also distributed to the needy people in the Torpa and Rania blocks.

Agnes Guria rscj

New Beginnings.....

In March there was great enthusiasm to begin the new academic year at New Dawn School, the teachers with the new students and the students desiring to go to their new classes. There were many 'small angels' with dreams of joining Class 1. One could feel the excitement in the air, students buying new books, new uniforms, etc. I too was not untouched with this fever of new beginnings of school life. On the other hand the I.C.S.C.E. Board Examination was still going on. Our students were satisfied with the way they answered their papers. Things were moving smoothly when suddenly all our dreams were shattered. For the lockdown began.....

After the first lockdown.....waiting for school to reopen, came another shock with the second and many more lockdowns....Finally we are still waiting for the lockdown to be lifted. 'Waiting' has been a key word in this period for me. I am learning to wait now in many ways, wait for someone, wait for the things to move slowly and wait in order to reflect and to take time before acting.

Finally the waiting is pushing me to change – a change in my life, a change in learning. With great difficulties we are adopting to new ways of learning in the school. Both teachers and students are struggling to connect with each other through WhatsApp. I must say that the teachers are becoming creative in online teaching even though it is a new discovery for many. Very especially the Class 1 students, who have not yet entered their classroom and seen their teachers, are becoming familiar with this way of learning. Sometimes I wonder what enormous dreams must have been in their tiny little minds about coming to school and now it is all melting away.... but they are accepting the present reality. I can say that a new digital era has slowly begun in the New Dawn School.

Sushma Topno rscj

My Close Encounter with God

We finished the exams in the month of February 2020. Then we were busy correcting the exam papers. In March 2020 we had the results' day. After a few days we began taking admission for the next academic year. Then began the lockdown and everything was closed. In the month of April 2020 we began the online classes for the students. I was not confident to teach the online classes. But by the grace of God I was able to teach and learn many new things by searching the internet. It was a learning experience to teach online classes. Giving online classes has helped me to learn a lot of new things which I did not know. I used to send the videos to the students through the WhatsApp groups. However, I am missing the teaching in the class.

In June 2020 we started selling text books in the school so that the children could start studying. That too was a learning experience for me. It was a good experience for me to interact with some parents in order to know more about their children. A few parents responded that their children are very happy to see their teacher in the video. They are able to understand and to listen to each word attentively. I was so happy to hear that. Some parents said that along with the children they too were learning few words and sentences in English. I thank God for giving me this lovely experience.

In May 2020, as community we began the daily Adoration to pray for the world during this pandemic with each one of us taking a turn for one hour. It has helped me to go deeper within and to trust totally in God. I have experienced that Jesus is alive and He can work a powerful miracle in my life. And I would like to share my experience with you. In July 2020, I was admitted in hospital and the doctor told me that I had multiple stones in my gall bladder. I was shocked. I cried and cried and prayed to God. I was given medication and diet restrictions and the doctor told me to return after 15 days for an ultra sound and then an operation for the removal of the stones. I was so frightened. I just kept trusting in the Lord. On 18th July 2020 at night, at around 11.30 pm, I heard Jesus saying to me ‘Shalini, I am healing you’ and I saw Jesus in white and His shining face. I thought that I was dreaming and I was crying. In the morning I went to Sr. Mariaelena and told her what had happened. Then on 27th July 2020, I visited the doctor. The ultra sound report clearly showed that there was not a single stone in the gall bladder. The doctor was shocked to see the report. He told me that this was not possible. I told the doctor that Jesus had healed me. He just smiled. I am very grateful to God for this personal experience of Jesus and this powerful miracle in my life.

Shalini Sajan rscj

Almost five months of living in uncertainty and waiting has given me the opportunity to discover my own self and deepen my relationship with God. At the beginning of the lockdown I felt that it was a holiday, but after one week passed, it made me realize that I had to do something. I began to do some Society reading; it helped me to strengthen my relationship with God during this time of uncertainty and helplessness. When we began the daily one hour Adoration in the community to pray for whole world and the crisis situation, it gave me consolation that God has a purpose and He will act according to His will.

Living in this situation, we wanted to begin our classes through the WhatsApp groups we created. When I began contacting the students telling them that we will begin class, they were taken aback. Some of them asked how could they have class through the mobile phone? This was genuine question that arose in their minds, namely how to have class without the classroom. They were also aware that many do not have network especially in the villages. They wanted to be with their friends. They were missing companionship. It was difficult for the students to accept to study without their friends and their classrooms. We began our classes but only some of them were able to join in the beginning. Many were left behind because they did not have a smart phone or they had no network. As the pandemic situation is becoming worse, the parents are slowly accepting that it is better for their children to study from home. Some parents expressed that they have little knowledge of the use of the mobile phone. But other parents took the initiative to learn from their children. I was happy to hear from some of the parents that they feel confident about this technology. In this way of online teaching, I am learning step by step and trying my best.

When I reflect over this way of teaching, it has challenged me a lot. I realize that I have to learn so many things. The situation has pushed me to discover and learn different functions of technology. I often felt that I am far behind. As the days are passing, I experience that I am discovering and learning more about myself. God is allowing me to discover Him more and myself too. This time of uncertainty and waiting has helped me to come closer to God and to surrender everything at the feet of the Lord.

Neelam Hemrom rscj

Photo Gallery 1



Distribution of masks at Digri & Kendtoli village



Awareness drive to demonstrate social distancing at Digri Barkatoli village



Awareness drive to address stigma at Digri village Barkatoli, Rania



Young farmers engaged in a weather forecasting exercise at Jiblong village

Photo Gallery 2



Distribution of a cooked meal at Koinara village



Distribution of ration at Turigarah village



The Education team watching a recorded video



Discussion with the New Dawn school teachers on online teaching

