

SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART PROVINCE OF INDIA NEWSLETTER



July 2020

NEWS FROM THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY

SOPHIA NURSERY SCHOOL 2020: THE NEW NORMAL IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION



Admissions



First Staff Meeting



Online classes*



Preparing the educational kit for the month



Sanitizing the kit



Parents accepting the kit

*On line classes are conducted 3 times a week for 40 minutes. All concepts are covered including Art and Gym. Parents are very happy and babies disappointed. One baby howled and cried “No stop, no stop”.

“GRATITUDE IS THE SIGN OF NOBLE SOULS”

When my brother shared with me that he saw policemen dip biscuits in water when on duty, it disturbed me for some time. I shared my dream of reaching out to at least 100 Policemen in Mumbai with the Nursery Staff. I was deeply moved by the response I received. We decided that if each of the 20 staff members reached out to 5 policemen we would achieve our goal. We prepared bags, each containing a pair of gloves, a mask, water bottle, drinks, and snacks with a note expressing our gratitude for their selfless service during the Pandemic. Even the In-laws and family members got caught up in the excitement of reaching out to our Mumbai Police.



We were struck by the graciousness and humility of our police when receiving this very small token of our gratitude. Many of them are working beyond the call of duty with risk to themselves and to their families. The idea of putting the project on Facebook was to inspire our Nursery parents to take up from where we left off. My own family did. A few staff members, like Sr. Rosa Salve, Niran Chandok and one or two others, who were unable to take an active part in this gesture for health reasons, were requested to support the movement with their prayer.



Patiently awaiting normalcy to celebrate our Jubilee of 50 years. All our plans are on hold!

Charlotte Bastion rscj

UNLOCK

Lockdown was a real time for me to go deep into my inmost soul and unlock my lack of trust in God. This corona virus felt like a big struggle of God and the devil within me. I met both God who was trying to show me how merciful and loving he is, and the devil trying to show me how cruel God is. I always knew God lives in us but during this time, I also came across the devil in me.

Every day when I heard or read about people suffering because of the virus, I started doubting God's love. I was scared and angry with God. Many evil thoughts arose and I started questioning how God, who gave us life, could be careless.

But when I heard the news that a 104 year-old man fought this virus and was still alive, I started fighting with my narrow thinking: how much faith he must have had to be alive and continue praising God! I saw only people struggling but I forgot to see God's mercy and love shining through the nurses, doctors, police who are risking their lives to save us. Is this not God's love? Many volunteers helping each other, all human beings becoming one and supporting each other, are these not signs of God's love? My struggle to understand God's love almost came to an end when,

during a workgroup meeting, I received a letter from Sr Ananda with a quotation in it – it seemed like God’s message to me saying, “In all this I am there with you – not far, but close.”

I felt that for so many years God has blessed me with many things and yet, now with this struggle I had forgotten his love. I realized that the challenge is not to understand God’s love but to ask myself how much do I love God. The failure of many of my plans and arrangements for the new year made me disappointed, there were moments when I was scared and felt discouraged. But looking at that one old man who fought this virus at the age of 104 was an inspiration - cannot I at this age fight with evil within me? Who is making me doubt God’s love? And I felt I can. Now I have started looking at every moment as a manifestation of God’s love, and love him in return. I felt now no struggle within me, because I talk to my God daily and I say I love you. I don’t need to know the future for I know you are with me and I pray daily for all. God’s mercy is everlasting. Unlock your heart in this lockdown.

Josephine Pereira rscj

ONLINE – A NEW BEGINNING

The month of March had already begun. We had just finished the last big event of the department for the semester – the Inter-collegiate seminar for Chemistry teachers on the first weekend. Now the mood was set for the Semester End Examination – practical exams were done, the theory exams were going to start soon and then the well-deserved vacation would begin!!!

By the end of the second week of March, the news channels started giving vast coverage to the spread of the virus. Before we could enter the third week, some schools had already been closed. From 17th March 2020 onwards, colleges too were closed, and almost no staff came to work. Surprisingly the hostelites were able to go either to their guardian’s place or home, within 48 hours (usually they would need time to book tickets etc). The campus was empty - and that’s how we entered into the prolonged lockdown, which is still on, due to the spread of Novel Corona Virus.

No exams, no corrections, no results, no farewells, no goodbyes for the year-end and no official ending of the academic year 2019-2020!! It still feels incomplete!!

Well, we still had a new beginning - a Virtual beginning. Before we realized it, we had entered into a new era – online teaching and learning!!!

By mid-April some colleges in the country started sending out invitations to join webinars/ faculty development programmes (FDPs)/workshops to be held online. Soon these webinars were going to keep us fully occupied for the next two months!! Every college was organizing webinars or training programmes.

As a college, we also organized several webinars through the IQAC, the NSS and different departments. The Department of Chemistry too organized a few webinars and quizzes. It was a learning experience to work online – work from home (WFH).

The online FDPs helped me learn a lot of new things which I would have never learnt otherwise. Several colleges organized training on how to use the tools that are available online for preparing our classes to go online. By the time the month of May arrived, I think the majority of the teaching faculty in our country were equipped with the skills to use software and apps for teaching online.

Technology can be fascinating. I myself have learnt many new things – using Zoom for online meetings and seminars, how to record my own class as a video, to create animated videos, the effective use of Google meet, Google classroom, Google forms, Google docs, Google slides, Canvas

... and the list goes on!!! Technology and the Internet have a lot to offer which can be used to make online teaching interactive, effective and captivating.

Now that the online classes are about to begin, I am looking forward to using these newly-acquired skills to make my teaching effective and interactive for my students. Yet I will miss being in a real classroom, having all of them in front of me in reality, not virtually.

The Virtual world of teaching and learning is most probably here to stay, it is the NEW NORMAL.
Rajani Khandagale rscj

THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY OF BIRTHING!

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, I was in America. On day one itself, my seventh sense whispered to me, “This is going to bring about something new”. Naturally, I was excited, happy and curious about the newness that was to emerge and delighted that the whole globe was in it together. However, on deeper reflection and thought, came the wake-up call and awareness of the agony of giving birth.

Newness in uncertainty! Our pregnancy with the newness of a mysterious uncertainty has come not as a choice but a given! My grey cells kept ticking away, urging me to identify the problem using Otto C. Scharmer’s Generative Speaking and Generative Listening of his *Theory U*. Aware that love is the key to every heart, I began to reach out to people in love, to intervene and intercede with all around to join the Ripple Effect Movement and do all in my power to birth this *New Normal*.

A new high! As a religious, I became doubly aware that as God’s chosen ones, we have the added responsibility of playing a significant role in this birthing process. In the present disruptive, dismal scenario, with things out of gear and with fear, sickness, death and uncertainty looming large, we feel that we are in an anomalous state, a precarious stage of being in liminal space where everything seems to be in limbo. But, isn’t this precisely a wonderful spiritual high of living in the NOW, the **PRESENT MOMENT!** My faith, belief and trust in a divine power, assures me that God is in control, and that He has a purpose and knows what is best for us. Stubbornly turning a deaf ear to the umpteen warnings of Mother Earth, we humans continued to exploit her shamelessly until she decided to heal herself and breathe again. Are we thus not responsible for COVID-19? Salubriously, however, God who has with a purpose allowed it to happen, is walking with us in this difficult pregnancy, listening to the birth pangs and cries of all the suffering, pain and crucifixion many are undergoing (not least engineered by fellow humans), aware of the rising death toll each day.

A significant, new venture: Given the geographical disparity in evidence and places of worship all closed, we humans are slowly but surely, being pushed to the limits of religion and to venture beyond rituals and ritualism so as to enter the realm of spirituality, action and love. We are definitely becoming aware that we all belong to the same web of life; and, gratifyingly, our humanity is slowly inviting itself back into our heart, our family, our community, our world. Isn’t this the newness we all want to see again? The true human side of our human nature has become dormant and we need shock treatment like a pandemic to shake us out of our complacency.

After effects of COVID-19: Rather than exacerbate the situation, we need to allow COVID-19 to continue educating us every passing day, to help us realize that we can indeed live content with the basics. There is no gainsaying the fact that our dialogue, debate and discussion on the Corona virus

has thrown up alternatives that can easily become the *New Normal*. We don't need to zoom around in fossil-fuel gulping vehicles, nor globetrot, polluting the atmosphere. Eating organic, healthy home-cooked food, and spending quality time with family and friends, strengthening close-knit bonds, is bound to bring down the spiralling rate of suicide, medical bills and psychiatric illnesses. With the *Ethics of Enough*, the *Less-is-More* culture and our focus on quality rather than on quantity, we can change our lifestyle and mindset. Let us advocate conscientiously, believe judiciously and behave responsibly, championing and defending values to the hilt. If each of us becomes the flame that ignites a fire, together we can ensure that the fire leaves behind the wonderful legacy of an Eco-friendly Covid-19 as would be evident in the prevalence of a *green* heart, the clamour for *green* food, the natural warmth of *green* attire, the delightfulness of *green* architecture, the charm of a *green* job, and a *green* lifestyle concluding in a *green* burial so to say!

*Abide with me...*In conclusion, may the lives of those who have passed on to the other shore become our inspiration, their vision giving us due direction. And may the light of the memories we treasure concerning them continue to shine upon us whereby our collective lifestyles deliver a healthy, bonnie *green* COVID-19 baby. What that baby will be is up to each one of us!

Menona Mudita Sodder rscj

ONE DAY AT A TIME...

Pandemic. Lockdown. Quarantine. Memories of all that I had read of the plague epidemics through the ages, particularly the grisly tales of the Middle Ages (the carts going past, with the terrifyingly matter-of fact "Bring out your dead!") swirling through my mind and taking on new meaning with statistics spiraling out of sight, and visuals on the television honing in on the horrific. Implications for the college, the staff, the students caught completely off guard on the eve of their examinations. Government and University issuing new GRs and circulars from one week to the next. Not knowing what the next day would bring, not knowing what we should be doing tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that, not knowing, oh God, not knowing anything...! Such a strange, unsettling, unprecedented way to be!

And yet, in the simple struggle for survival was the reiteration of the song "One day at a time, sweet Jesus", and a renewed sense of wonder and gratitude at the goodness of people. There were visits to the bank to ensure that salaries are paid on time, income tax challans are submitted, accounts are closed on the 31st of March, Fixed Deposits are made, and dissolved, juggling with the various accounts to ensure that salary and other cheques don't bounce – and the kindness of the bank officials who did all they could to help; visits to a kindly BEST official who would take our cheques and bills to the office, pay them in for us and then bring back the stamped receipts; friendly officials at the BMC and at Gamdevi Police Station who guided and supported us whenever we called for advice. The normal suppliers to the kitchen could not make their routine deliveries, so there were regular trips to the vegetable vendors at August Kranti Maidan and Bhaji Galli to ensure that the kitchen was stocked with vegetables at a reasonable price, and of course, so many of the vendors became our friends, sharing snippets of their personal lives with us, brightening up whenever they saw us, their smiles reflected in our eyes as we acknowledged that we were now connected. There were trips to Crawford Market for groceries from Lobo Stores and fruit from the wholesale market – and again there were familiar faces – Mrs Goveas at Lobo Stores scolding people for not maintaining the stipulated distance between each other, making time for a personal word or two with us; the

patiwala beaming at us when he saw us the next time, whispering that we could get a better price for the fruit if we bargained a little more (and proving to be right!). There were trips to the various cold storage places in the area, to stock up on chicken and sausages and suchlike, and the friendly Parsi gentleman at *François Maison* at Kemp's Corner who advised us in avuncular fashion on which were the best pieces to buy. There was Jagan, the flower vendor at the corner of our lane, who also has a little fast-food stall, who regularly shared food and tea with anyone who seemed hungry and poor. There was the daily camaraderie of people living on the campus – RSCJ, and also staff and their families. Evenings would see them walking around the central lawn or sitting near the Convention Centre, chatting while maintaining social distancing norms!

And through it all, there were webinars, zoom meetings, various programmes and courses for the staff and students organized by the NSS, the IQAC, various departments – chemistry, Life Sciences, Psychology. We have had to embark upon planning for the new academic year – if not Plan A, then Plan B, and if neither, then Plan C, and so on – and upon maintaining contact with staff and students, addressing fears and anxieties, trying to think of alternate and creative ways of being as an institution. That, I think, will be the biggest challenge for us, to find a new way of functioning and being, which will bring us healing and wholeness in this time of disease and brokenness. The need to break free of the constraints on the imagination and think in other dimensions is paramount. At the same time, as a grant-in-aid institution, there are certain imperatives that we cannot ignore – work-load of staff, numbers of students, permissible fees, a ban on fresh appointments.... What would Sophie do if she were alive today? And Philippine? And Janet Stuart? The daily adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, with various rscj on the campus taking the prie-dieu through the day, has helped us to reflect more deeply on these questions, even as we unite ourselves with the travails of our world and our people. It has helped me, I know, to trust more fully, to open my heart more to the needs of others, the poor, the vulnerable, those dependent upon us. And if there are times when the responsibilities seem to weigh more heavily than ever before, there is also the knowledge and the comfort that none of us carries the burdens alone!

Ananda Amritmahal rscj