



1st May 2023

NEWS FROM THE MALWANI COMMUNITY, MALAD, MUMBAI

Looking Back, Looking Forward

He brought me to this Land...He leads me forward...

A journey into the unknown, a journey both mysterious and marvellous, a journey of Faith and Hope in darkness... Malad? Malwani? St. Anthony's parish? A date pre-planned by God for me – **14th June 1992** – My first entry into this 'sacred land' which was soon to become God's fertile field... and my home for 17 memorable years!

Down Memory lane

- Eve of the Feast of St. Anthony when having been invited to give the homily on 'Prayer' at the novena Mass I stood before a sea of unfamiliar faces, but surrounded by an ambience of deep devotion, rapt attention and obvious commitment as it was a rainy day that did not deter their presence. It was then that I sensed from within – a quiet clarion call to me – **'God wants you to work here!'**



- I had shelved this thought when the second milestone event occurred on **5th July 1992 – the inaugural Mass of the Basic Christian Communities [BCCs]** concelebrated by Bishop Bosco Penha [who had already prepared the initial ground for this] and Fr. Vincent Gonsalves, the then Parish Priest of St. Anthony's parish, Malwani. Five of us, FILMC Team members [Bp. Bosco's team for the Formation and Involvement of the Laity in the Mission of the Church] were

there to present to the parishioners the need and importance of starting the BCCs in this parish, following the directive of the Archdiocese of Bombay. However, Bishop Bosco graciously asked those present if they were ready for this. There were doubts, mixed opinions and feelings but ultimately the Holy Spirit prevailed. The parishioners asked for a team member to assist them in this task. It was at that crucial moment I timidly dared my 'Yes'- yet encouraged by my inner Spirit – ***I am ready, send me Bishop!*** This began a great saga of events for me. Hand in hand with Jesus, my lifelong partner, I began my Mission of working in this parish to build God's Family through the BCCs.

I didn't plan; I didn't need to foresee the 'What? How? Where? I knew for sure that it was **His** initiative, His plan. I never doubted the Spirit's Guidance once I had 'set my hand to the plough'. As there were no religious sisters here I stayed overnight with different families each time I came to Malwani [from Sophia College] in order to visit every family by day with the help of a local person, and



call for a meeting at 8 pm to conduct 'Awareness programmes' for the parishioners. In this way, by November 1992 we had 5 communities formed, 2 in Marve and 3 in Malwani village [called communities A, B, C,] each with a set of Animators. This method was followed in the years that followed, with help from my sisters of the Sacred Heart, later joined by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Tarbes who took up their residence at St. Anthony's. The welcome we received from the parishioners was truly heart-warming and encouraging for the journey forward...

FAST FORWARD to the NOW! During the 30-year period that has followed, much has happened at St. Anthony's. Blessings have abounded as the BCCs, now called SCCs, grew in number to 45 in 2022-23. The regular involvement and participation in a variety of activities have empowered our lay faithful, both individually and collectively to develop latent talent, leadership qualities and spiritual gifts through the **3 Pillars of the SCC – Community building and Team work, Faith formation especially through Gospel sharing, Reaching out to the marginalized** in new, creative ways. I have been overwhelmed time and again, to witness God's Work through our parishioners while supporting them at the grassroots. Visits to families, especially to the sick, the aged and the bereaved, have challenged us to reach out to others with the Heart and Mind of Christ.

Simultaneously, the **Cells and Associations** have multiplied to cater to the different needs of our people. I had the special joy and grace to be instrumental in the rebirth of the Bible cell, the formation of the Family cell, the Hope and Life movement as a separate entity affiliated to the all-Bombay level, the start of a Neighbourhood Children's Council [NCC], later a JOY group [Jesus, Others, You] while assisting these as a spiritual guide. As a Resource person for training programmes I have always found these a challenge and joy to prepare and conduct. As member of the PPC and executive team of the parish I have always felt happy to share my God-given gifts, leadership skills, and creativity in team work with the clergy and laity. There have been ups and downs as well but through the struggle has come new life. As counsellor and as a woman religious I have been privileged to enter the inner 'sanctuary' of people's hearts and homes, to be one with them in their joys, successes and pain. Youth animation through interactive sessions with them, have kept me youthful and a life-long learner! The climax has been for me **the completion of 30 years of the SCCs and of our tenure as Religious of the Sacred Heart at St. Anthony's with the celebration of our PEARL JUBILEE on 13th November 2022 around the theme 'Priceless Pearl'.**

As I look back on the 17 years spent fruitfully in this ‘Parish Family’ I feel bowled over by a deep sense of mystery and gratitude firstly to my God who through a close partnership with Jesus as my Good Shepherd led me here into hitherto unknown terrain; to all our parishioners for making this for me a ‘HOME’ away from home by their cooperation, care and concern, their sincere appreciation and respect for us. Limited by the



space of this newsletter, I summarize my million memories, words and feelings in the succinct words of Dag

Hammarskjold: ‘For all that has been, **THANKS**; For all that will be, **YES!**’ He who led me here will lead me onward I know, for ‘**He who has called you /us is FAITHFUL AND HE WILL DO IT**’. [1 Thess. 5:24]

May St. Anthony’s grow from splendour to splendour with God’s Grace!



Sr. Manisha Gonsalves rscj

Sr. Poonam Shares

In June 2022, I was appointed as an assistant teacher in St. Anthony’s Primary School, where I have worked previously. The school is run by the Diocesan Society, Mumbai, and managed by the St. Anthony’s Parish. I am a class teacher of sixty children in Std. two. I teach all the subjects – English, Mathematics, Marathi, Art, Craft, and Physical Education. This year, the school was reopened in person after the two years of the global pandemic. Hence, dealing with small children has been very challenging. This is because children were within their homes for two years without any outdoor activities or academic activities which would enhance their discipline. Further, many of them were kept busy on their mobile phones and

TV programs. It took a lot of time for the children to settle down and to be disciplined. I also had the opportunity to interact with the parents of these children on a daily basis. I tried my best to inculcate good values in them, so that along with academic knowledge they have values that will mould them into good citizens of India, for today's children will be the future leaders of this nation.

I enjoyed being with the children. It makes me feel so proud and satisfied to see children whom I had taught 14/15 years ago. When I meet them again and talk to them, it gives me a deep sense of joy to see them doing so well and remembering the values that they have received.

I also actively participate in preparing children for the Inter-School Competition and other activities that are held in the school. I always remember St. Madeleine Sophie's words, "I will go to the ends of the world, for the sake of one child". That gives me encouragement in reaching out to the children and bringing out the best in them.

Thus, I ensured the intellectual, moral and spiritual development in these children. Nothing perhaps has a greater transformative potential than **Education** in today's crisis-ridden world. I am grateful to the Lord for all the blessings I have received throughout this challenging year.

Sr. Poonam Gaikwad rscj

"I have come that you may have life, and have it in abundance"

This year has been filled with various events. For the first time, I am working in the pastoral field which is connected with the St. Anthony Church, Malwani. It fits in well with my personality and temperament. My Social Work background has an added advantage. I naturally look for the poor, the needy, the homebound, the faithful who lost their faith in the Church, and the widows who lost their homes. It is in this context that my attention is drawn to the bible quotation: **"I have come that you may have life and have it in abundance."** This is exactly what I am trying to do while dealing with people through the SCC, Legion of Mary, Communion Distribution and Women's Cell. Through this ministry, I find myself both life-giving and receiving.

One of the SCC groups of Sr. Sophie



Blessed Carlo



Blessed Carlo's statue was brought – it was a day of the youth. They acted his life. While carrying his Statue, they had special dress code.

Within no time some identified me as someone interested in their life and their well-being. It is true – more than ever, I feel deeply involved and concerned about our Church and the sheep that are looking for guidance. They need our personal interest. It has been inspiring for me to see many lay people who are very committed to pastoral work.

During the Advent and Lent 2023, I took up the challenge of visiting the homebound persons in our neighborhood areas – Rathodi, Kharodi, Jan Kalyan, and the Marve Queen area – with Legion of Mary members. The issues connected with widows and abandoned elderly parents are truly disturbing. Getting priests for them for the Sacrament of the Sick and confession are not easy due to the shortage of priests. If one has the good will to be with the lonely and abandoned, he/she can do a lot. Being a Sacred Heart Sister, it is a new type of vineyard for me. Every Vine-dresser requires a lot of workers – morning, afternoon and evening. Because as the Lord said, “The harvest is plenty, but the labourers are few.”

On Easter Sunday, our neighbouring parish – of Sacred Heart Church – arranged 1500 food packets (Chicken Biryani) for the poor on the streets. I too went and joined the group to support their initiative. After the midnight Mass, they went home, cooked the Easter meal for their families, slept for one hour and came to Sacred Heart Church by 6 am to prepare food for the poor. There was no special collection of money. But each one contributed towards this initiative. I joined the food packing group. Later I was taken in a car with 105 packets to different streets of our St. Anthony Church parish. One of the volunteers said to me that for the past 18 years he never had Easter lunch at home. It has always been on the street with the poor. That is Easter for him. Truly, I had never experienced such dedicated lay people who are spending so much of their time for the Church. As I handed over the packet to each one, I heard them saying, “Sister, May God bless you”. I was very moved and overwhelmed because I felt the Risen Christ’s presence wherever we were going and it was He who was blessing me.

Counting the food packets for the poor



Distribution of food packets



It was such a life-giving experience to be part of that group and receiving the blessing from each recipient. What echoed in my heart were the Lord’s own words: “you did not choose me, but I chose you ...to go and bear fruit that will last.”(Jn. 15:16)



To conclude, this whole year, I have been trying to enter the door of the vulnerable, the needy, the lost and above all the “homebound” in the name of our living God who whispers to all ***“I have come that you may have life and have it in abundance.”***

Sophie N.I. rscj