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>>> NEWSLETTER <<<

# SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART PROVINCE OF INDIA



## NEWS FROM THE POLYTECHNIC COMMUNITY

### **SICKNESS IS A GIFT OF GOD**

I experienced ill health from December 2023 onwards, i.e. from before the Provincial Chapter. I had no Christmas. I felt so weak that I could not eat food or drink water. I was admitted for treatment for a week in St. Elizabeth's Hospital. Sr. Mary came sometimes to the hospital to visit me. When I returned from hospital, I looked after myself at home. I was certain that my time had come because my body was giving me different warning signals. I told Sr. Anila that I thought that my time had come. I told her not to inform my family members that I was sick; I said to her that I would inform them myself when I felt that my time was near. However, somehow they got to know that I was not well; but I informed all my relatives not to come to visit me and I told them that I would inform them when I was better.

In early February 2024, I was once again admitted in hospital. During my illness I got swelling in both my feet and my feet and arms became pitch black in colour. For three months I could not wear chappals on my feet because of the swelling.

Now a specialist, Dr. Ashwin Patil, is treating me. I am taken to him for a check-up from time to time. Gradually, with the medicines which he prescribed I began to get better. The medicines are costly. Dr. Ashwin also told me to walk and do some exercise. Lately, I have started walking and doing some exercises and I am gradually getting a little better. Sr. Anila is very keen that I should walk, so she has arranged for the polytechnic corridor near our community to be left open so that I can walk there after the students and staff members leave for the day. I also walk there on weekends and holidays. Now the swelling in my feet has almost gone, but my feet and hands are still very black in colour; but I hope that this too will gradually go with medicines and exercise. I am grateful to all those who looked after me and to all the RSCJ of the province for their prayers. I am also grateful to my family and well wishers who have been praying for me. I pray for all of them that the Risen Lord will keep them safe and will bless them abundantly. This is my prayer for all, because well-being is essential in our lives.

*Rosa Salve rscj*

### **THE JOY OF GIVING - Encountering Challenges**

The Joy of Giving Week is observed every year in India from October 2nd (the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi) to October 8th. During this week, people are invited to join and they come from all walks of life to give their time, material or money to any cause of their choice. In Sophia Polytechnic, 'Joy of Giving' is celebrated each year from October 2nd till Christmas. This is a significant period during which our students are encouraged, every year, to reach out to various groups in the city of Mumbai and its suburbs. This reaching out can be in varied forms of contributions or by constructive learning activities. What is common to all of the ways is the willingness to make a difference.

This year the students, who were divided into several groups, were actively engaged in this noble venture of the joy of giving cum sharing with those around. In spite of their hectic academic life, they tried to spend a day with the group they had chosen, knowing that it would make a difference to the lives of those they interacted with. Their responses have been generous, effective and their involvement has been greatly appreciated by those with whom they interacted.



We started with a blood donation drive in the institution and it was wonderful to see the joy of the students in giving their blood for someone else. We believe that blood can save millions of lives, and young people are the hope and future for safer blood donations.

#### **The groups the students chose this year for the outreach programmes**

- Schools for the less privileged children
- Children's hospitals for those needing special care
- Old Age Homes
- Animal Shelters

**Schools for less privileged children** are of different categories, depending on the economic status, the physical or mental abilities or social backgrounds of the students. Our students planned in advance for the day. They chose the types of activities according to the age and needs of the children. Once the school children knew that they were going to have a different day from their daily routines, they eagerly waited for the visitors with happy smiling faces. The children were engaged in different learning activities through which they expressed themselves without hesitation or fear. The tiny little ones loved scribbling with crayons and markers on sheets of paper provided to each one of them; they seemed so serious and engrossed in drawing what was uppermost in their minds and



hearts. For our students too these were moments of pure joy, and of fostering connections. At the end of their activities small gifts, including bags of goodies, were shared with the children. As for the older children, they introduced themselves and spoke about their hopes, dreams and even their personal interests for the future. Despite their less privileged conditions, our students saw that no disadvantage affected the deep desire of these children for a better future!



At the end of the day the children looked so happy and grateful even though goodbyes brought sadness to both sides. Our students learnt that these little ones can make a lot of difference to their own lives, through just being with them, playing and sharing with them. They returned from their interaction with these children with a deep realization of how good it feels to make a difference in someone's life, even if it is just for a day. Beyond the externals, these activities forged a deeper connection between all, based on empathy, and a new

understanding of the joy of giving. The programme aimed at instilling hope and assuring these young hearts that they were loved and cherished.

**Visit to a children's hospital for those needing special care** was another part of our outreach programme. With the help of the hospital authorities the visit was well planned to bring joy to these precious little ones. Children stay in these hospitals with their parents or relatives. The lives of these children, caught up in mostly incurable diseases, certainly do not bring joy when you are with them. Our students however prepared themselves to interact with these children and tried their best to bring joy to both the parents and their children who are struggling through their life-threatening diseases or disabilities with such astounding perseverance.



These "little fighters" teach you how to remain resilient in times of turbulence and to seek comfort in those that are there for support. The hospital gave a brief explanation about the importance of therapy and how necessary it is to provide palliative care – pain alleviating care – to the parents as well. For our students the whole experience put reality into perspective!

**Visiting institutions for differently-abled children** was another aspect of sharing joy. The students conducted some small learning activities with the children, coupled with games, music and dance thereby bringing joy and excitement to all. The day's visit concluded with little attractive gifts to each one where they all witnessed bright smiles that made the hearts of the visitors truly warm, in experiencing the meaning of joy in an extraordinary situation.



### Visiting Old Age Homes



Some students chose to visit old age homes in the city. Here too they acquired necessary information as to how to spend a day with the inmates of these homes. The time they spent with the elderly was fruitful, interactive and rewarding. The elderly people were happy to see some young, cheerful, happy faces and to spend some relaxing time with them.

Our students returned with deep realization of how satisfying it was to make someone's day a little brighter and happier for a little while by interacting with them or just chatting with them, listening to their stories of the past they left behind some years ago, recalling them with joy and sadness at times. They looked delightful in the company of our young students. Nevertheless, the smiles on their faces said it all, but the pain in their eyes for not being with their loved ones was certainly visible.

The residents of the old age homes did not forget to enquire about the life of girls, their families, friends and studies – a time for joy in giving and receiving. For student these rare opportunities opened their minds and hearts to be more attentive towards their own elderly at home and to feel grateful for their existence in their lives. No doubt it was an insightful experience for them as they returned home with not only memories but also some valuable lessons of life which they will hold on to throughout their own lives.

### **Visit to Animal Shelters**

Mumbai city runs a few shelters for domesticated animals. On their visit the students were shown how to give baths to those animals, keep their shelters clean and hygienic and to be sensitive to the animals' food habits. It is very important to build a rapport with the animals you care for and to feel comfortable with them. Slowly the students bonded with some animals in the animal shelter by the language of friendliness, care and compassion.



In brief, these outreach programmes symbolize the enduring power of collective good will and the transformative ripple effect of kindness and generosity. Besides this, after such programmes our students carry home a renewed sense of the need of clear motivation in their own personal lives.

### **Our Hope:**

It is our hope, that through visits to all these different sections of the wider society, while still pursuing their courses in our institution, our students begin to understand that these are life-time experiences offered to them, which will stand them in good stead and be a source of meaning and bring joy in their own lives. These outreach programmes open the minds and hearts of our students to the harsh realities faced by many young children and persons and help them to deepen their understanding of the sick, the elderly and all God's creation, caught in the web of misfortune. We hope these exposures become for them part of a transforming journey and alert them to future opportunities in which to live their social responsibilities with compassion, resilience, gratitude and joy.

*Mary Varghese rscj*

### **NEWS FROM SOPHIA JUNIOR COLLEGE: Participation of Sophia Junior College in the United Nations International Day of the Girl Child and International Day of Education**

The Sophia Junior College students have been regularly participating in these programmes under the guidance of the teachers from the English Department. Below you will find in chronological order their participation and involvement during the last three years.

#### **International Day of the Girl Child (2021-2022)**

To commemorate the International Day of the Girl Child (11<sup>th</sup> October), students of the Sacred Heart institutions were given an opportunity to create content to be featured on the UN website. Student participants created posters and wrote essays and poems. A group of our students also made a short film called '*TAINTED*' on menstrual taboos.

**International Day of the Girl Child (2022-2023)**



To commemorate the International Day of the Girl Child (11<sup>th</sup> October), students of the Sacred Heart institutions were given an opportunity to create content to be featured on the UN website. The theme of the year 2022 was 'Our Time is Now! Our Rights, Our Future'. Student participants from Second Year Junior College created posters, a video and a comic strip based on the theme.

**International Day of the Girl Child (2023-2024)**

**1. Girls Speak Out**

Our students participated in the 2023 IDG event *Girls Speak Out!* As our entries, we submitted 3 videos on the role of education in their lives and wellbeing. They spoke on how education is transforming their lives, how it has improved their wellbeing, and how it has helped them in developing their skills.



**2. UN Girls Conversation Circles**

Following the success of the IDG event, our students were invited to participate in the follow up. The event was held on the college campus on 22nd November 2023. Eight students, of whom one was a facilitator and one a rapporteur, participated in the Conversation Circle, covering topics on School, Healthcare and Transportation. A staff member moderated the event. Students were subsequently asked to fill up the requisite questionnaire, logging their responses and discussion.



**UN International Day of Education (Staff Participant)**

The Society of the Sacred Heart at the UN-NGO office held a webinar in commemoration of the International Day of Education which was held on January 22nd, 2024. A staff member, Ms. Aditi Paul, participated as a panel member, discussing the critical changes and empowerment needed in the education sector to enable learners to successfully navigate their world and make meaningful participation in the social contract on education.



Annie Peter rscj

**MY EXPERIENCES IN SOPHIA COLLEGE ...**

Easter greetings to all my dear sisters! I would like to share something on my current ministry. I hope you will enjoy my reflective write up.

I feel privileged to come back to life and service on Sophia Campus once again and to be with many sisters. It filled me with positive energy and encouragement to live my religious life more fervently. Last June, I started working as an administrative assistant in Sophia College. Basically, I helped out in the day-to-day functions, programmes, examination related work etc. Also, I assisted in some Junior College clerical work. Initially, while writing the Leaving Certificates for the students, I was very nervous because if I made one small, silly mistake and I would spoil the whole certificate because since I was used to the computerized world, where everything can be erased and rewritten so easily, writing manually felt so stressful. Slowly, I gained self confidence and concentration to ease my nervousness and I started enjoying writing and had a deep sense of satisfaction. Also while doing this work I realized that the majority of the students in Sophia Junior College were Muslims. My thought was 'being a Christian College at least 30% of Christian students could have come to us' but later I analyzed the situation and felt glad that we are providing higher education to the Muslim Community girls who are in much need of the holistic approach to life and education.

Becoming part of the Sophia College work team gave me inside knowledge about most of the functions and activities which happens, otherwise I never could know the difference between our college and other colleges. Besides the regular studies, for extra curriculum activities there are 13 different student clubs which really enhances the talents and abilities of the students in Sophia College. I was really amazed at the capabilities of the young minds that can debate on bold issues, entertain, and express themselves in many different forms. I got the chance to attend the NSS (National Service Scheme) camp in Haloli village in Palghar district. It was Republic Day and I could not get a single auto for an hour; finally along with strangers I took an open truck to reach to the village. It was really a risky yet adventurous experience. Each experience teaches me something new to add in my flower bouquet of experiences.



Basically, I consider myself fortunate to get this opportunity to be part of the Sophia College ministry at least for a year. I have been involved in a variety of ministries like teachings in Pre-Schools and Primary Schools, accounts work, warden's work, social work, accompanying the new vocations, volunteer in Sadhana School (as a novice) etc. All this has given me a complete understanding and deep knowledge of our present ministries and mission in the Indian Province. Really, all these experiences enhance my abilities and knowledge about myself and enable me to be transformed into a messenger of Christ to reach out to others in my mission.

*Agnes Guria rscj*