

SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART
PROVINCE OF INDIA
NEWSLETTER



November 2018

NEWS FROM THE PRAGNYALAYA DOWNSTAIRS COMMUNITY

Period of ‘maun’

The province newsletter, from what I gather, is usually about ministerial involvements; but having reached the age of the Retired, which is another kind of ministry, I can only do some personal sharing... When I asked the P.C. whether I could come off as Coordinator of this community, I also asked for one month of MAUN. So as soon as the Feast of the Sacred Heart was celebrated, I went into MAUN. To tell you the truth it was a bit of a ruse. What I wanted was some space, peace and quiet and time to myself. So, with a bit of a recollected air, I went about what I really wanted to do, which was to clear up my goods! So, in the peace and stillness of my room I went to work. Joyfully and with a sense of relief, I parted with half my wardrobe, distributed the books which I had so long cherished (e.g. the Sonnets of Shakespeare and The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins) to the Library and the various book cupboards we have. Then I started on my files, reams of them, containing the retreats, workshops, programmes I had given and attended. This cost me much more as I realized with what painstaking labour I had prepared them. It hurt sometimes to the point of tears – my life’s work for mission, as it were...But I did think of St Teresa’s words “All things pass, save God”.

Besides this, I went through all my spiritual note books, remembering those precious times when God’s grace flowed into my life through the retreats, seminars, meetings I had attended these 54 years of life in this province. My prayer was one of heartfelt gratitude for those graces and for the people who had helped me in one way or another. I know that “I must sing of the mercies of the Lord forever”!

I had always cherished the idea of reading the entire Bible. The chance came during my MAUN. I read God’s Word from cover to cover in sequence. It was truly an inspirational experience to see God’s unshakeable faithfulness to Israel through its history and to see that fidelity flower into the gift of Christ to the New Israel in the New Testament. I know that it is Sacred Scripture that stirs my inmost depths as nothing else can. Deo Gratias in aeternum! I am more aware now of why Julian of Norwich never wanted to budge from her cell and why the hermits, recluses and rishis treasured their silences.

In conclusion I want to thank my community for respecting my need and for supporting my 30-day MAUN!

Ambuja rscj

The Bishops' 'Colloquium' on Small Christian Communities

The National Service Team of Small Christian Communities in India decided that Poona Diocese would host the Colloquium on Small Christian Communities (SCC.) September 16th – 20th, 2018.

It was a blessing for us that the newly built Generalate of the Fatima sisters was available to fulfill all the needs of such an important meeting. It is only right that this account should begin with an expression of our gratitude to these sisters for allowing us to use their premises.

At the 1st meeting of the Poona Diocesan Animation Team (PDAT) of Small Christian Communities held on June 20th, 2018, committees of 20 members were chosen as the Organizing Team for the Bishops' Colloquium. These 20 members were further divided into 9 groups: Welcome, Accommodation, Security, Transport, Catering, Living arrangements, Liturgies, Cultural Programmes and Medical needs... etc. etc. Each group organized its own specific work. I was asked to be in charge of the Liturgy group. This was a challenge that stretched me and called me to give of my best. It must be noted that all this work was carried out most efficiently and effectively.

It was a great and historical moment for all of us in the diocese of Poona. This is because of the auspicious presence of more than 40 Bishops from all over the country, who had come for the Colloquium. The Bishops were welcomed by St. Patrick High School Boys and girls with traditional dance "Lezim" at the Cathedral on 17th September 2018 at 5.00 p.m.

Then followed the Bible Procession with a Prayer Dance. Rev. Fr. Thomas Vijay, the Secretary for the National Service Team for Small Christian Communities placed the Bible on the Lectionary and did the Aarati and garlanded the Bible. His Grace, Rt. Rev. Anil Couto, Archbishop of Delhi, being the Main Celebrant, surrounded by the NST, lit the lamp to the sound of general clapping, this was followed by a "Bharat Natyam" danced by the Novices of St. John the Baptist sisters.

Then followed the official entrance of the Bishops to begin the Holy Eucharist, at which the main Celebrant was Rt. Rev. Anil Couto, Archbishop of Delhi, assisted by Bishop Ignatius Mascarenhas and Fr. S.A. Louis, Director - SCC Poona Diocese. It was a splendid moment with exceptional singing and decorations all around the Church.

Mass ended with fervent Thank you given by Sr. Kirti to all the Bishops, priests, religious, sisters and lay faithful who helped made this whole event a glorious example of Church unity and fervent spirituality in support of our great Archdiocese.

The Colloquium on Small Christian Communities was officially inaugurated by Bishop Ignatius Mascarenhas, Chairperson of the SCCs in India, at 6.00 pm in St Patrick Hall in the Presence of 42 Bishops representing all the dioceses of India. The welcome speech followed, given by our Fr. S. A. Louis Director of the SCC of Poona Diocese.

Following were the topics discussed

- SCCs Development in India – An overview (In growth and in understanding)

- SCCs, not an Association, but church on the move, new way of being church, church in the neighbourhood, not an option but that which should happen Today – An Ecclesiological, Pastoral, Evangelical Interpretation
- Kerala Model of BCC Ministries.
- SCCs as “New Method, New Expression, with New Ardour for Evangelization”.
- New Leadership Issues.
- Bishops Panel on Bishops’ role.

On the 18th September 2018 was a day of meetings for the Bishops and NST members. Then 4.30 p.m. the Bishops were transported in fours and eights to various Parishes of the Poona Diocese. They said mass in all these parishes. Immediately after mass they were escorted to the different parishes in the area where the SCC functions. They visited a few families, then the Bishops were escorted to meet groups of families. It became clear during these interactions that many simple people questioned the existing division between rich and poor, learned and simple. They requested that simple poor people should be allowed more direct interaction with priests and Bishops. They said that there should be true union between all classes of Christians. This would ensure that acceptance, understanding and trust pass more easily between every Christian and every other Christian without barriers of status. The bishops said that they had learnt much from direct contact with the SCCs for example hearing their opinion on the way the Church functions.

What was my experience of the Colloquium on Small Christian Communities? After having had turmoil in me for being chosen to be on the Organizing Committee, I experienced deep joy of being part of this group to work with laity. I enjoyed and was comfortable with people whom I came in contact. I experienced in very tangible ways my faith increasing in Jesus Christ – The Heart of Jesus that reaches out to the whole humanity without any reservation. I am deeply grateful to my Community for giving me this opportunity so that I could experience the great universal Church in our diocese.

Kirti rscj

Millicent shares

I was asked to write a “paragraph” for the Newsletter. A PARAGRAPH? A PARAGRAPH? How much is a paragraph? Sitting in the burning sun of the Pragnyalaya verandah, I just look at the deep green ferns lining the verandah on the garden side. From long, thick, heavy swords, to delicate slivers of light green crowded together, making a living shield, for the other small plants to breathe coolness into the hard October heat.

We have worked out our goal and life style and like everyone else each one must be now working out how to keep them and follow them up. How many years have you lived in our Society? It still feels as if this naming of goals and life styles symbolizes the first sports of light and love that “bind us together in love”

We wish you a binding with love care and joy

Millicent rscj

Teaching Yeshu

In June 2017, our helper in Pragnyalaya asked me to help her son “Yeshu” in his studies. Yeshu was in STD III in “City World School” (English Medium) and was promoted to STD IV. I readily agreed and asked to see his books which he brought.

I talked to Yeshu – a bright little boy who could talk enthusiastically in Marathi. “Yeshu can you read the first lesson in English? “No Sister”. “Can you write the alphabet?” “No Sister.” “Can you count numbers?” “Yes Sister, Numbers 1-10”. I was shocked. How could I prepare Yeshu for STD IV? I wanted to refuse to take his tuition.

I had several sleepless nights after this interview but I prayed and asked the Spirit to help me and I was inspired and urged to do what I could. So I started with the alphabet, Nursery Rhymes, and Numbers 1-100

Yeshu was earnest and struggled to do his best. It gave me great joy to be able to help him. Today, 5th November 2018, he can read Book I and do addition, subtraction, multiplication up to lakhs and division up to hundreds!

Celine rscj

Lord that I may see

Being in the elder care community I am constantly face to face with diminishment, However on May 18th 2018 when I woke up from my siesta and found that I was immersed in darkness, it was a big shock for me. I suddenly became aware that I was not able to see. I felt afraid and lost, not understanding what was happening. After a series of tests, painful injections etc, the doctors confirmed that I had developed a bleeding retina. A new world opened out before me. I found myself with a deep sense of loss and helplessness, unable to do simple ordinary tasks like reading, seeing the numbers on the mobile phone. I was able to move around but always with much caution. God became my only refuge and I spent many extra hours in prayer. Others in the community reached out to me. Sr. Millicent spends hours reading to me. Now after several months of treatment, though the cure will be slow, I am able to reach out to others. I am called to exercise Faith and to continue to have hope and trust.

Being a professional nurse, I am often called by community members to consult about their health issues and specially in the night I am called, to help out with emergency situations, which I am happy to do. I serve Sr. Gladys her meals, make the early morning coffee for Sr. Karuna Mary which she appreciates being made by me, help Sr. Ramina to wash her clothes, I help in the scullery and in the small daily tasks that are part of community living. I also wait to open the door for Sindhu in the night and to say Good bye to those who leave the house early morning. Besides I am happy to go out when invited to Maria Assunta to talk to the AIDS patients, especially mothers with HIV. Their pain and losses help me to put my losses in perspective.

I am at peace now and know that this too is God’s expression of love for me, to make me more sensitive to the diminishment of others which are part and parcel of our aging process. I myself have been gifted with several graces like patience and surrender to God’s will. My daily prayer is “Lord that I may See within me, around me and above all SEE YOU in everything”.

Anjali shares

What do I say about my Ministry and my presence here in Pragnyalaya Community? I feel absolutely content and overjoyed with what the Lord has provided for me to serve my sisters here as community treasurer.

There are moments when I am touched by God's graces through my readings. One thing has touched me – "I can change my life if I want to change it and I have to nourish it, to help me do the RIGHT THING and in the RIGHT WAY". So I am learning to be straight with my LIFE> and SILENCE is all I need. I feel the graciousness of the Lord towards me.

There are some elderly couples and lonely people in the neighborhood whom I visit sometimes. I am touched by their stories of loneliness, incapacities etc. But there is a smile on their faces!

I am truly happy that the Province has this "HOME" for our elderly. I find opportunities to go out to our own dear sisters who find difficulty in helping themselves. As I walk with them in the same direction, my desire is to live gracefully, enriched by God's unconditional love which holds me in His loving hands.

This HOME and our Garden are for us a bit of heaven!!!

Anjali rscj

Living in the hospital

During the last few months I had the occasion of living in the Holy Family Hospital, Mumbai, for more than a couple of weeks at a time. It struck me very powerfully what a different world that is. There are so many different activities going on simultaneously. There are doctors of different categories going in and out of patient's rooms with different levels of involvement, care and commitment to patients. There are number of nurses of various categories laboriously filling in detailed records of each patient as they mill around distributing medicines and injections etc. There are young girls in training learning to give a sponge or take temperatures. There are helpers of different categories cleaning, swabbing, emptying garbage, and distributing food. The hospital is run by different departments administrative, medical, pathology, finance, pharmacy, security, catering, pastoral and social service, laundry etc.

In the midst of all this hub of activities the presence and role of the Ursuline sisters of Mary Immaculate who run this hospital is very inspiring. There is the possibility of following the Eucharist on their broadcasting system for those who wish and are not able to attend in person. The sisters take communion to all the Catholic patients every day after Mass. The anointing of the sick, confessions etc are made available on request. Every patient is visited by a sister everyday so there is a personal contact with the family too. The fathers and sisters are cared for in a special way. If any priest or sister is attending a patient there is an open invitation for him / her to eat all their meals in the convent with no charge. This open house hospitality is done so simply you are taken to their refectory and invited to make their home our home. I was very touched by this; very shy in the beginning but seeing how casual they are about it makes one feel

at home. I soon became part of their community. I realized I have a lot to learn from them. They are also very kind and caring for one another and for their patients especially the poor. Their world is not only their duties in hospital but they reach out to others. During the feast of Mount Mary they went to distribute communion both early morning before their hospital duty and evening after their hospital duty at the Basilica of Mount Mary. They also went to count money and returned late at night but were always up early for community prayer. During the Kerala floods in all their convents they cancelled all their celebrations for the year, and sent the money to the flood victims. They fast every Saturday, have a night adoration from 9.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m. I experienced them as people who live by faith and the power of prayer sustains them through all their ups and downs in running such a complicated set up. Somehow, I felt God is present here.

Dropping in to visit other patients and talking to their relatives was another grace filled experience. Each one's situation of helplessness and vulnerability seemed to create immediate bonds and you realized the faith and inner strength of very simple people who face the challenges of life with such trust, hope, surrender and equanimity, always giving their all without any conditions or calculations. Listening to others and entering their pain gave me much courage and strength to live my own pain with love. Seeing my sister Celine, who always cared for others, suddenly reduced to total helplessness and dependence on others, struggling with so much pain was a very painful situation. The support of love and prayer, that we felt from so many people, and from all of you in the province gave us courage to live each day in hope. So, when I look back on this time I have much to thank God for, thank you too each one of my sisters. We continue to count on your love and prayer

Shanti rscj

Karuna Mary: She would have had a lot to share with you, of all her involvements and interests. But, unfortunately, after her post 95th birthday break, she has become very weak and is not able to do that now. But she will recover; so be ready to hear from her at another opportune time.

Gladys keeps repeating again and again that when she went to probation Mother de Valon welcomed each one with a long, warm hug during which time Gladys believes she prayed for them and that is what keeps her firm in her vocation to the Society. The power of a genuine Hug! She also had the privilege of sitting on the same stone that Philippine sat on in North America and she says that this is another memory that continues to confirm her in her vocation.

Ramina goes about with a radiant smile, greeting each one as 'darling', ever grateful for the slightest gesture of service. She assures us of her prayer for each one, which we believe, as she spends much time in Prayer.

Elizabeth continues with her quiet hidden service in the refectory, cutting vegetables and welcoming people at the door.

So, we all continue to walk as one Body united in His Heart towards the final EMBRACE. "THE JOURNEY MAKES US ONE"