

# SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART PROVINCE OF INDIA NEWSLETTER



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## NEWS FROM THE BHOKAR COMMUNITY

### My Experience of a New Mission and Collaborative Work with RSCJ

I was recalling when I received a call from my Provincial Superior, Sr. Philda CCR. On the phone she told me about my transfer for collaborative work with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of



Jesus (RSCJ) at Ashankur. I said to her “I am ready to go wherever you want to send me”. But I was little bit reluctant to come to Ashankur because I had no experience of social work, neither had I lived with sisters of other congregations. Later, I was full of curiosity to know about the social field and the mission at Ashankur, Bhokar. On 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2022 our sisters came to reach me to Ashankur. As soon as I got down from vehicle the Ashankur community welcomed me with warmth. At that moment I felt that they accepted me like their own sister. It was sheer hospitality, the humbleness and the innocence which fills one’s heart with happiness. I accepted that God has called me to do collaborative work in Ashankur.

The very next morning I woke up and went around the Ashankur campus. I saw six cows, which provide us with plenty of milk, the poultry farm, heaps of onions, a plantation of sugar cane, the cultivation of maize, soya beans, a kitchen garden, plenty of gooseberry trees, different kind of birds that come to get food and shelter. It was a joy to breathe fresh air; there was no noise because it is away from the city. The Ashankur campus looked so beautiful with its surrounding of greenery. All this filled me with happiness. I felt that this was a place where I would feel close to nature and closer to God.

I am spending a prayerful, fruitful, meaningful and wonderful time in the Ashankur community. The community consists of 4 members: two RSCJs, one lay volunteer and I (CCR). At the beginning of the community year, together we drew up our community’s Goal: “Trusting in God’s love, we create family atmosphere in the community to proclaim the Good News to the poor and downtrodden through love and service. And the means to achieve are by respecting one another, concern, sensitivity and forgiveness, openness, listening and understanding.” Drawing up the community goal was a new experience for me. We are practicing what we have written in our goal. Even though we come from different states, families, cultures, languages and different



congregations, we always pray together, work together, respect one another, and share each other's feelings. Sincerely I can say I never felt a single dull or gloomy day. There is always joy and happiness.

Now let me share about my experience of collaborative work. According to me, collaboration does not come always easily; sometimes it is difficult and hard. There is proverb that says, "If you want to go fast go alone, but if you want to go far you go together." Collaboration needs good communication, a lot of planning, good relationship, teamwork and effective leadership. It is something challenging that we must all do in one way or another as followers of Jesus Christ.

Since the past six months I have been working with RSCJs and a lay person in the community. The journey through these six months has been fascinating and with lots of experiences. Ashankur is



a place where development is done through the giving of basic education; but it is also a place where the moral and physical well-being is taken care of. I am working in the Remedial Class Project. Mr. Atul, one of the staff members, and I take care of the project. In this project we mostly focus on shaping the minds of weak children. Once a month, we go for supervision of the classes. We have visited the residences of all our teachers and the children's families. The majority of students of the villages in the region have a weak socio-economic status. Due to the Covid pandemic and the lockdown that the world has experienced these past years, the educational situation has been very badly affected. The children were mass promoted by the government. They have become distracted; however, through

remedial classes we are trying our best to provide quality education to our children with all the necessary support. In the beginning of the year, the animators of the Remedial Class programme were given two days' training.

Adapting and learning a new language is something different. In this world everyone likes to learn and speak in English. At Ashankur there are some hostelites who are very willing to learn English. I am the privileged one to teach our hostelites. I am happy to teach them as most of them come from vernacular medium backgrounds. They are very poor in English. I use different methods to teach them. I teach them with friendliness, love and kindness. I appreciate and encourage them for their efforts. I can see a lot of improvement in them and I am happy to continue to engage in this teaching.



I am getting an opportunity to take part in the activities of Ashankur. It is helping me to get in touch with the poor and marginalized. And I am becoming aware of social conditions. It has been my experience that when you learn you can work in a better way and when you work you get powerful experience. I am also learning the local culture as I go to supervise the remedial classes and to observe the SHGs (Self Help Groups) in the villages. I also visited our neighbours in the surrounding area in order to create a good relationship with the people. With all this experience, I want to go ahead to get more experience of this mission. Thank you.

*Sr. Sabita CCR (Congregation of Carmel Religious)*

## The Joy of New Experiences and Learnings

Rejoice in the blessings of our life and give glory to God in all things. “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope.” (Romans 15:13)

I am blessed with new people and ministry here in Ashankur. I am taking care of the hostel. I am getting so many opportunities and through them I have new experiences and learning. I am learning Marathi in order to interact with young girls in the hostel and with the staff. As I am doing my final year of the B.A. course through Mumbai University, from time to time I travel alone to Mumbai for my college work and to Pune for my spiritual direction. I have gained confidence in travelling alone.



I also attended different workshops and training programs which helped me to become aware of social conditions, to form positive attitude and gain maturity in order to work with people in the social work field. I attended a training program on Capacity Building in Bosco Gramin Vikas Kendra (BGVK), Kedgaon, Ahmednagar. It was for freshers in development work.

The aim of the program was to empower the participants with vital skills like issue analysis and management + participatory methodology in community work, including community need assessment. It was also to equip us with skills for planning community projects. It was a new experience and new learning for me. When I was asked to attend this program, I was afraid to attend it, because I do not know and understand Marathi properly and I would be with unknown people. It was a big challenge for me. But I was ready to face this challenge and I got ready to go for it. Mr. Atul and I attended this program. The program was for 7 days. There were 12 participants from different states of India for this program. Three out of the 12 did not know Marathi (two from Gujarat and me), so the program was conducted in three languages: Hindi, Marathi and English. It was an interesting program and there was much to learn. I attended such a program for the first time and I have learnt a lot about social work. I learnt the history of social work, why and for whom social work started. I also learnt to work in a team. We learnt to do PRA of a village and to show in different diagrams. I also learnt to make a ‘problem tree’ and how to write project. It was a time to learn new things and to work together, to interact with others, men and women, to become strong and to grow in more confidence in my ministry now and in future. I experienced that the Holy Spirit of God was with me to help me. I felt happy in learning new things and new ways to work with people by attending different programs. I thank God and the Society for giving me the opportunity to learn and to grow mentally and emotionally.

*Sr. Anita Hamsroy RSCJ*

## Capacity building and Team work

For any organization to function smoothly a synergy between the management and its staff is of utmost importance. The lack of cohesive synergy results in clashes and affects both the parties adversely. With this in view, modern corporate policy often advocates periodic meetings and forums for open and free sharing of views by the staff of all ranks in addition to conducting personality and psychological tests and improvement programs for the staff. With this view, I organized the orientation program for the staff. It began with psychological analysis and personality development to gauge the mental frame of the staff. It was connected to team building. The model was on 'inner growth transcending to outward change'. It also focused on the social conditions and the role of the NGOs (Non-Government Organizations). It was good for the staff to understand and take part in the exercises like Box Test, to do a SWOT analysis, affirmations and Johari Window. A well motivated and happy staff would be an asset for the organization and this can only be achieved if they are emotionally sound and know how to cope up with the trying demands of our daily activities. For this it was essential to make them aware of their strengths and weaknesses as well as how to overcome these by the means of affirmations.



The other workshop conducted for the staff of Ashankur was an Action Research Training and Orientation Workshop. Its goal was 'to Care for Our Common Home' and 'to walk with the underprivileged'. It was a preparation and development of a strategic plan to meet the commitments under the Provincial Apostolic Plan of Pune Jesuits 2022-2027 (which Ashankur is engaging in as it is a collaborative venture with the Pune Jesuits). It was to develop understanding about SDGs (Sustainable



Development Goals) 1-6, 12 & 13 in particular and their application to Mandve village in Shirampur, chosen by us as the model village. We also looked at Ashankur's work related to three verticals, namely 'Women's empowerment through SHGs', 'Remedial classes for children from classes 1-4', and 'Skill Development' in tailoring, nursing and computers. The staff members were divided into three groups covering each vertical and they presented their understanding to the two other groups who had been given the task of identifying the SDGs contained in the presentation of the group. From the response of the other two groups listening to the presentations it was clear that that our focus was on Women's empowerment and Education. After the workshop, the staff members were to go to



Mandve village to do the base line survey and for this it required team work. I was happy to see the staff getting knowledge and widening their capacity to work together in a team.

This year, Dignity Academia team conducted an Impact Assessment Study to understand the difference Ashankur's projects have made in the lives of women in the past couple of decades. The team was in Ashankur for six days. Their study comprised the qualitative and the quantitative aspects of the programs implemented by Ashankur. The quantitative aspect of the study attempted to capture the numerical impact, while the qualitative covered the change it has had on the lives of the people. I accompanied the team to some of the villages. It was an overwhelming experience to hear the positive remarks of the people about our organization. I was happy to see the Self Help Group women who have grown in self confidence. They were able to share what they have learnt; they spoke freely and interacted with the team. Without any hesitation, the women were able to say that since they are in the Self Help Group, they have got respect in the family and status in the society. They have learnt to go to the bank and do the transactions. The women were grateful to Ashankur for what they are today.

*Sr. Prisca Tirkey RSCJ*

### **The Best Place to Find God Is In a Garden**



Working in our kitchen garden has taught me many lessons. I have learnt that gardening is hard work but it is spiritually fulfilling. Gardening not only involves the entire body in the physical act of planting but also the mind and spirit. Gardening teaches me the following: "Don't worry about perfection; nature doesn't grow in straight lines". This sentence made me happy as I started my responsibility to look after the kitchen garden. Before I started looking after the kitchen garden in Ashankur I did not have much experience of farming or gardening. This year, I got the opportunity to do gardening and I took it as a challenge. While I am growing different kinds of vegetables I realized that being in touch with mud gives me calmness. It gives me joy when I work in the garden. I feel happy when I pluck vegetables. I forget all my worries and tensions while working in the garden. God has given me the sense of belonging to God's creation, because I realise that the same God who created me has created the plants. When I am close to nature I feel closer to God. I experience connectedness between plants, God and myself, and when I think of this it makes me happy. My garden looks evergreen; looking at the garden I feel sound in mind and soul. As I work in the garden I thank God for giving me this opportunity to do so. I realize that however the vegetables may grow I feel happy when I look at them, whether they are big or small, healthy or weak. I just enjoy gardening and I love the plants. In a word, gardening is a source of health, pleasure and wealth. The hard work of gardening rewards me with spiritual calm. As I engage my body muscles, my mind is still and quiet. Almost always, the chorus of the singing and chirping birds perched above on trees or the power lines accompanies this stillness. George Bernard Shaw wrote, "The best place to find God is in a garden. You can dig for Him there." As I faithfully care for my garden, I am nurtured spiritually.

*Ms Rita D'souza (Volunteer)*