

**SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART**  
**PROVINCE OF INDIA**  
NEWSLETTER



9th September 2021

## **NEWS FROM COLLEGE COMMUNITY**

### **HOPE, RESILIENCE AND INSPIRATION DURING THE PANDEMIC**

Life has lots to offer provided we have the right mindset. I realized that my normal routine which I had followed for years had to be changed in order to maintain my health and emotional well being. Heading an Institution and having the responsibility for little children, parents and Staff, I first had to be of sound mind and body. Faithful to my daily walks, health drink, and positive thinking, through the grace of God I kept well during this crisis.

However, I really want to focus on people whose struggles during Covid-19 inspired and challenged me.

**Sulochana Rodrigues** – Sulu as she is affectionately called – wakes up daily at 3 a.m. She leaves her home for the station near her home at 4 a.m., walks to Sophia Nursery from Grant Road station and reaches school by 8 a.m. I make it a point to come to the school early so that she should feel secure using the school washroom with hardly anyone around.

The Gym Master had to be replaced and so Sulu who had no experience of online classes had no choice but to take over. With help from the other staff and Ramraj, the gardener, she conducts her online gym classes successfully.

**Ramraj**, who lives in Santa Cruz, had no option except travelling by bus. I often scolded him for coming late till I was informed by a reliable source that he waits for hours for a bus and finally boards one with difficulty.

I felt humbled by the experience. Sitting here in my comfort zone, not having to travel daily to work, I was out of touch with reality and the struggles our staff face even apart from having to spend money on conveyance. It made me more understanding and less demanding.

**Ancila Fernandez** – our Balwadi helper – took a loan from the bank and bought a scooter. Her husband brings her to work and picks her up. For most of the year, public transport was not allowed for anyone coming to the school.

Incidents that disturbed me when I went shopping to Crawford Market were the harassment of vendors and shopkeepers. It distressed me to see how much they struggled to sell their goods only to have them sometimes snatched away by the BMC staff. On my part, I avoid bargaining with these poor people as far as possible.

Another incident that disturbed me was to see a policeman dip his biscuit in a glass of water! Many of them worked overtime during the worst time of the Pandemic.

I shared this with my staff and they decided to reach out to 100 of our Mumbai Police Force with goody bags. All 20 staff took on 5 policemen each, in different areas.

The deadly Virus took so many lives - Young and old. Looking at the TV news, the death toll was tragic but distant, till it hit us closer home and people we knew died of Covid. It then became a frightening reality.

The need to stay socially connected with family and friends was of great importance. A heightened awareness came that each was a bonus and a Gift from God.

My personal contribution to uplift the spirit during this very distressful time was to take every opportunity to celebrate Events both at work and on the Campus to create moments of Joy, Laughter and Togetherness that was energizing and healing.

**Charlotte Bastion, rscj**



### **EARTH IS HEALING, I AM GLAD**



April 2020, the Indian government announced the nationwide lockdown to fight the pandemic. Suddenly the world went quiet, and all activities stopped. This quietness for some was a deafening silence. For me, it was **BLISS**. It gave me the chance to experience the orchestra of the birds, bees and insects, to exhale and look back with amazement, at the risks taken by frontline doctors, nurses, sanitation workers etc. Seventeen months later, the noise has returned to its near-normal levels, but millions are on the brink of livelihood collapse. Covid fatigue and boredom have set in, despite infections resurging and many countries locking down again.



I am at **PEACE**, even **EXCITED** because the Planet is healing. Disruptions pricked my conscience. Am I a better human being today because of the global catastrophe? A cancer survivor with limited energy, I could do nothing for the fleeing migrant workers; but **I did experience their pain**, and reached out to a few, by getting finances, food, medical help etc. through my many contacts. Images of their



desperation etched like tattoos on my memory will haunt me, but my optimism convinces me that empathy and compassion, the most powerful of human traits, have not been forgotten by humankind.



My herbal health terrace garden has flourished, as I disseminated information and saplings e.g. Curry Leaves *podu*, Mint Chutney, fresh Turmeric (root and leaves), Tulsi, Aloe vera, Ajwain, Chillies, Malabar Spinach, potted plants like Money Plant and the Bedroom Snake



Plant, that purify the air, grown and given as gifts. Culinary skills improved, making immunity boosting pickles, jams and vegetables. My *Bimbli* pickle and jam were a great hit! Art from waste, mending old garments, making pot-holders, garbage segregation and disposing of *raddi/scrap* (which fetched Rs 2730), composting, making fertilizers and soil were some of my other green initiatives.

I have learnt new IT skills, experienced virtual human warmth; and made global presentations on eco-spirituality, values, gospel reflections etc. and have also been able to help many by way of generative listening/speaking and counselling, and sharing my life stories, via phone and internet. Writing scientific papers in integral ecology added to my joys. As students lost their socialization, academics and their mid-day meal, I had the privilege to share my teaching expertise with Sisters Mukta and Anita who regularly come to me and a few other students who needed help and guidance in other matters.

Eco-Spirituality has grounded me to understand that God has a purpose and is in control of everything, including the pandemic. The future is bound to see more disruptions, new variants and mutations. We all need to prepare ourselves and others to handle the next global catastrophe. We need to cultivate resilience, enjoy solitude, develop hobbies and increase genuine friendships. Happy crisis, happy pandemic and a happy new year as some will die of the pandemic and some of old age, but we will not let our youth, children and the future generations die of Climate Change or **lack of cheer! God loves a cheerful giver.**

Let us EVOKE HOPE – SEE THE DOUGHNUT AND NOT THE HOLE!



**Mudita Menona Sodder, rscj**

### **PANDEMIC OF THE PANDEMIC....**

One serene evening as I strolled in nature, enjoying the birds soaring in the deep blue sky, the gentle wind blowing through the trees, my thoughts ran through the last years when the Pandemic of Covid-19 hit the world.

I thought of the deadly virus invading the world, the cyclones and floods in different parts of our country. The innumerable poor suffering because of loss of jobs and loss of loved ones made me wonder what exactly is going on. Is this a man-made disaster or is it nature giving it back to us in full measure?

Reflecting a little more deeply, I feel the hand of God in all that is happening in our world. I realize that when we destroy nature, we actually destroy ourselves. The saying goes “God is in nature” and scripture also tells us that we are images of God; hence destroying nature essentially destroys our very selves.

The pandemic reminds us that we are called to be compassionate towards one another. It is high time we support each other and live as a true community of God, as a family. Every pandemic is just a passing phase. However, how it transforms us will decide what our future will be.

I wondered whether there are bigger pandemics that have hit our world for which we need vaccinations. What about the pandemic of greed? What about the pandemic of revenge? What about the pandemic of talking ill of others – individuals and political parties? Does not this virus destroy more communities and families and nations than the corona that has invaded our mother earth?

The only way to get vaccinated from these viruses is to turn to the Lord of heaven and earth and ask him to help us mend our ways. Lord make us builders of communities of God's very own love, justice and mercy.

**Poonam Gaikwad, rscj**

### **A HEART FILLED WITH GRATITUDE**

There is so much to be grateful for!

I want to thank all my sisters for the good wishes and prayers and phone calls on my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was indeed a special day. All the preparations were done by Sr Charlotte, our community coordinator, and Sr Ananda, my principal with whom I have been working for some years. From the mass that morning followed by the special breakfast, the whole day was one of a quiet celebration, leading up to the campus celebration in the evening.

My community sisters prepared the hostel dining-room for the evening's party – it was beautifully decorated with banana plants, balloons and coloured lights in addition to the flowers that smiled and nodded everywhere. Delicious dishes were planned by Charlotte and Ananda, and prepared by our kitchen staff. One of the highlights of the celebration was our special invitees – the cooks and kitchen helpers who ate with us that evening. They were delighted to be with us, and it was a joy to see them join us, all dressed in their best.

This birthday reminded me of my other special birthday – my 60<sup>th</sup>, in Patna. The theme, on that occasion, was 'Jeevan Jal'. I have learned over the years that just as water is important for life, so sharing joy with others helps my spiritual life.

Another gift for which I am so grateful is the gift of sight. Now, after my cataract operation, I have become more aware of the gift of my eyes. Some weeks ago, I suddenly became almost blind, with a haemorrhage in the other eye. I was shocked that I was not able to write, read or even see clearly. With tears, I turned to the Lord and with deep faith I said, 'You have opened the eyes of the blind. Touch me and heal me.' The next day I went to Sr Ananda and told her that I had a problem and was not able to see. She scolded me for not having gone to the doctor earlier, and immediately arranged with Sr Rajani to take me to Dr Shroff. Through the treatment that followed, and through the cataract operation and its aftermath, Sr Rajani has accompanied me and helped me with all my needs. My sisters in community too have been both supportive and helpful. My eyes are improving now. Thank you for your prayers!

Truly the Lord has worked marvels for me, holy is His name!

**Terezita Puthiampuram, rscj**

### **WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAMME**

Sixteen years ago, our Women's Centre at the College began a collaboration with the Archdiocese of Mumbai – together we launched a six-week training programme aimed at empowering Catholic women from the various parishes and equipping them with the skills that would enable them to take up a leadership role in the community. Many of these women would subsequently get actively

involved in the work of the Women's Desk at the parish and deanery levels. Even more gratifying, for many it proved to be a very positive, liberating and empowering experience. Sr Philomena D'Souza, FMA, who was then in charge of the Women's Commission of the Archdiocese of Mumbai, and I had worked together to conceptualise and structure the course, and each year, the Women's Commission and our Women's Centre would plan the programme trying to incorporate improvements and adapt the course to the changing needs of the various groups of participants.

A typical schedule would include sessions on Women's Empowerment, Women's Leadership, Patriarchy through the Ages and a History of the Women's movement, Jesus's Vision for Women, Gender Policy of the Catholic Church and Gender Sensitisation— all these would lead towards an inner transformation and an attitudinal shift. Side by side with this would be sessions geared to developing a knowledge base and a skill set – Women's Legal Rights, Assertiveness Training, Basic Counselling Skills, Rational Emotive Behaviour, Public Speaking, Women's Health Matters, Stress management.

The schedule is rigorous, demanding that the participants commit themselves to three hours of class every Saturday and Sunday over a period of 7 weeks. Certificates would only be awarded to those with 100% attendance, but if you had missed a session or two, you could make up for it by attending those sessions in the following year – then the certificate would be awarded.

Over the years, the batches slowly grew in number from our very first group of 28 to nearly 50 in 2019. The pandemic forced us into the online mode in 2020 and 2021, which imposed its own challenges. But a huge spin-off benefit was that so many more participants could enrol – and participants from all over India, at that! Both last year and this, we have had a little over 100 participants, from Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Surat, Kolkata... And, at the last valedictory session when Oswald, Cardinal Gracias was the Chief Guest, and Bishop Bartol and Bishop Allwyn presided over the event, I couldn't help thinking of the very first session, 16 years ago, when only Sr Philomena and I were present to make the occasion solemn and memorable for the participants....The WLTP has certainly come a long way!

What has made it most meaningful and rewarding has been the transformation that is visible in the lives of so many of the participants. The energy and joy that was evident during the last valedictory ceremony presaged well for the path ahead for each of them!

**Ananda Amritmahal, rscj**

### **A YEAR AND HALF ON...**

It's almost 18 months since the nightmare of the Covid Pandemic started clutching our world in its claws. We have lived through unforgettable horrors of the deadly virus and the memories of it will remain for some decades to come!

Our lives and the world around us have changed so much. The so called 'New Normal' is slowly and steadily becoming 'the normal' for us. Online and virtual is 'the reality' for us right now. 'Work from Home' has been taken in stride. New technologies and ways of communication evolved rapidly in response to the need.

Aren't we humans amazing at adapting and adjusting to the changes in our environment? The Covid Pandemic is the proof of this.

Along with all this, there are things happening which, perhaps, we can count as the blessings of the lockdown! Many people started doing things which they would have not done in the pre-pandemic world!! Several discovered their hidden potential for doing a variety of things like cooking, baking, craft, art, sewing, gardening etc.

Among the many things that I did and learnt during the lockdown is nurturing plants. I had tried several times to grow plants and failed. I discovered my green thumb during this time and now I have 9 happy and healthy small potted plants. Caring for plants is a very gratifying experience.



It could be that the lockdown does have a thin silver lining to it. As news reports say, the air quality has improved; studies shows that there is 15% reduction in nitrogen oxide in the atmosphere. And slowly we realize there could be other positive effects to it, as well.

This brings me to the theme of the year of our college – Hope, Courage, Resilience....

**Rajani Khandagale, rscj**