

SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART
PROVINCE OF INDIA
NEWSLETTER



10th April 2023

NEWS FROM PRAGNYALAY COMMUNITY

Golden Jubilee of Sr. Phyllis (Anjali) D'Souza - 21st February 2023

Twenty-first February 2023 will always be remembered by me as a GOLDEN DAY! The Mass at 11 a.m., celebrated by Fr. Wilfred Fernandes, was my main focus that day. Veni Sanctus Spiritus was sung at the Entrance, invoking the Spirit to make me His own. The Psalm was "From my heart breaks forth this lovely poem. My life entire, O Lord is yours evermore."

Thus I renewed with all my heart the Vows that I promised the Lord 50 years ago, to glorify the Heart of Jesus. I am grateful to the Lord for His fidelity through all these 50 years!

As I step forward into my future years, I pray to be ever faithful to the Heart of Jesus, to live in a different way, a new way. I commit myself anew to our Mission of manifesting the Love of Christ. Our Society's Chapter 2016 says: "I am doing something new." I too, must, therefore, allow myself to love anew, to be compassionate to those in need, to be ready to change and be different in the future.

I would like to share some of Fr. Wilfred's homily. He referred to what St. Paul said in the Bible, that our Christian lives have to be an abiding in God's Presence. So when others interact with us, they must feel His Presence. We have to work constantly towards holiness; work constantly on being perfect. He addressed me, in simple words: "Sister, you have put in all these years of perfection, though you struggled with yourself, and made them as God wanted. We are so grateful to you because of your commitment to the Lord, thus bringing transformation in the world. Our lives are most fruitful, when we are in communion with God."

This Spiritual Celebration was followed by a family celebration with all the Sisters and visitors, in the corridor outside the Chapel. My niece, Beulah, started this, by Raising the Toast! She spoke of her Aunty Phyllis, with such affection and joy, that it warmed my heart! This was followed by the cutting of the jubilee cake. I was delighted and happily surprised that the cake was wonderfully made by Sr. Fatima. Thank you Sr. Fatima! The cake and wine were distributed to all! After this, a delicious lunch followed.

Some of my nieces and nephews present found it a wonderful privilege to celebrate my Golden Jubilee with me. All through the day I felt great peace and joy, and was happy to see others enjoying themselves.

The questions I continue to live with are: What is God calling me to Be? What is God calling me to Do?

I thank all of you for your wishes, affection and prayers, which will support me always.

Phyllis (Anjali) D'Souza rscj

Sr. Niela's 90th Birthday

One of the major events of our community year was Sr. Niela's 90th birthday. The prelude to the celebration on the actual day took place on 3rd November. One of her nephews, Len, and his wife Lorraine came to Pragnyalay to spend a few days with her and to celebrate in anticipation her birthday. On the 3rd November we assembled in Anandalay at 11.30 a.m. supposedly for a Yoga class by Lorraine. The room had been transformed with big balloons of different colours, a wall hanging saying HAPPY BIRTHDAY, black paper serviettes with 90 printed on them in gold spread on the table. Niela walked in, in a new outfit sent her by her sister Betty, and was more than surprised to hear the community cheering her as she came in and to see the room brightly decorated. A beautiful cake had been ordered for the special occasion which Niela cut after we had sung Happy Birthday. We then listened to the greetings sent to Niela by different members of her family – the majority from those in Perth and one from Prem in Canada. Niela was overwhelmed by it all and thanked profusely her family and the community. Great appreciation for Niela and all that her family has received from her were expressed by Mario (the husband of Niela's niece Lillian) and by Len. Around 12.45 p.m. we moved to the dining room where a sumptuous lunch was awaiting us.

31st December 2022: The liturgy for the actual birthday was prepared by Ambuja, with Manisha accompanying us on the organ. Manisha and Pratibha had come to Pragnyalay a couple of days earlier to join us in the celebration and to help us with the practical arrangements and decorations. Jude and Anita, Ramina's nephew and his wife, whose coming had been kept a secret from Niela, arrived mid-morning in time for our fun get-together in Anandalay. Manisha had composed a special song for Niela which we sang with gusto. The videos which had been prepared by Niela's family in Australia for her first celebration were played again, this time on the TV screen. Later, as we tucked into some dry fruit and sipped drinks we each shared our first impressions of Niela. The lunch was a festive meal.

At 3 p.m. the entire group of the younger Professed RSCJs of the province who had been attending Gera's sessions in Montfort Sadan arrived with Gera and Mariaelena. They danced and sang for Niela and gave her some gifts. The house was full of joyful noises, talk and laughter. It was a full and happy day for Niela.

Phila Gomes rscj

Composed by Sr. Niela Farias (to the tune of I'm 21 today)

I am 90 years today (2)

God has been so good to me

So pray and sing and dance with me.

“We thank you God, you're a wonderful God,

Let's shout: “Hip, hip hurray”

I'm a jolly old sister, 90 years today.

Phila Gomes Shares

“Thy infinite gifts come to me on these very small hands of mine

Ages pass and still Thou pourest and still there is room to fill.”

This extract from one of R. Tagore's poems never fails to speak to my heart. These were my sentiments as I celebrated my 80th birthday on 9th January 2023. My sister, Janina came all the way from Kalyan to spend a few days with me and to be present for the birthday. Her presence was the biggest gift. She offered the Eucharist that morning for my intentions for which I had chosen some of my favourite hymns.

The meals were special and festive. The community did all they could to make the day memorable. Maureen D'Souza, Supervisor for several years in St. Clare's school, and Fatima and Venizia from Prerana community were invited to lunch. Fatima had baked the cake for the occasion – Prerana's gift to me. It was a lovely, rose-coloured cake which tasted good as well. Anjali had prepared the board in the Dining Room with much thought and love. Thank you to all who called to wish me that day. It was a truly blessed day.

Phila Gomes rscj

My Involvement in the Synod and Synodality

In March 2022 Rev. Bishop Thomas Dabre of Pune diocese called for a meeting of representatives of all the Religious Congregations working in the diocese to discuss “Synod and Synodality”, ways and means of making these words clear to every member of the parishes of Pune. The Synod group then divided their Zones into groups according to the area to which they belonged.

Without expecting it, I was suddenly called for a Zone meeting in March 2022. At the meeting there were 10-12 Sisters representing various congregations. This sudden meeting was quite disturbing for me as I had heard nothing about this process. I was both surprised and anxious. What was I doing here? The first question they put to me was “Would you please take over as coordinator for Zone 3?” What were they talking about? I did not want to take on that kind of responsibility. My answer was “I will get back to you in 2 days.” During those 2 days memories came back of my great-great grand parents working whole heartedly for the Church. I could recall the stories they recounted while they sat under the old Sal tree (still in front of our house!). Was I going to be different from them? No.....NO! Memories came back.....The family sitting under the Sal tree, my priest uncle officiating, preparing for the Eucharist. The

Sacred Vessels were of Sal leaves woven together, 3 small Sal leaf holders for wine and water as well as a small plate for the hosts. (Is this not the same way Jesus must have celebrated with His apostles?)

All these thoughts inspired me to accept the responsibility as Coordinator of the 8 Religious communities including Novitiates in Zone 3. I was happy later when I heard their sharing about the different fields they are involved with. I felt deep joy being involved with different religious congregations. I understood better about Synod and Synodality. I learnt how to be in a wider community (Church). I appreciated the early Christian Communities, their simple life sharing and learning Jesus' life in story form. What they heard, saw and touched, they believed and lived as real followers of Christ.

Now again for PUNE CRI, Zone 3, I am elected to be Coordinator for several congregations of men and women religious (Please pray for me). I can only rely on God and the support of my RSCJ sisters to guide me for what He wants of me. I am grateful for the awareness of this unique call that He made to me even in my ups and downs. And I accept what He intends for me. I am in His Hands.

Kirti Bhuinyan rscj

The Wonders of God's Creation

If only you could join me sitting on Pragnyalay veranda each morning engrossed in the colours, shapes, lights and dark smudges of leaf and flowers and stems decorating many twigs on every plant, and the butterflies happy to spring from one leaf to another, one petal to the third.

Our gardener (Kirti) this year with all her experience of exotic plants seemed to have settled for beauty in simplicity. Known and new flowers were encouraged in large plots or pots to grow separately in God's kind hands. They bring out His beauty in the various shapes, sizes, bright or soft colours, e.g. eye-catching hibiscus dotting the whole garden in unexpected and eye-grabbing positions.

We are waiting expectantly for the cluster of Poinsettias which will bloom at Christmas – most colourful flowers to warm the light in our eyes blinking with the Pune cold! This year they have actually already started blinking at the brilliant cactus right beside our front veranda, the startling pink cactus flowers which seem to grow out miraculously from dark thick green (seemingly uninteresting) leaves.

These striking colours and arrangements are not merely natural but have within them God's gentle and gracious kindness for our tired eyes to rest upon, recognizing His greatness everywhere and in His every smallest deed. Thank you God.

Millicent Francis rscj

News! News! News!

It was on 12th March 2023 that they came at twilight time to Pragnyalay, softly, quietly and unobtrusively... our three candidates and their mentor and things have not been the same since! There is a new and enterprising development to the Society's ministries in the province of India, namely, Pragnyalaya College. The course given is

of global import, the teachers are veterans in the educational ministry, the students are from the deep South and our ancient indigenous North. The climate of the education given in this College has a certain ascetical, ashramic and disciplined rhythm arising from our nation's deep spiritual roots, which should be pleasing to our present government.

Subjects taught: Theology and Church History; History of the Society of the Sacred Heart; the English language strictly along British lines; and Needlework, together with accomplishments: singing melodiously, scriptology, international etiquette and cuisine – quite an agenda

What has it been like for participants and teachers? Well, truthfully, while the agenda and time table are full, no one has yet had a breakdown! And the teachers, as far as I can see and experience, are thriving on the new challenges set before them. Personally, the return to teaching has energized me more than I ever thought I could be at age 89 years! How long I shall be able to keep it up I do not know, but the return to the old enthusiasm of my teaching days with young people has returned for the moment. Yes, I drive them hard... but I don't experience resentment from our students, and the sparkle in their eyes and their keenness to learn reward me.

A personal observation I have come to – take it or leave it as you will – is that it is Ministry which infuses into consecrated religious life its creative energy and dedication. Praised be Jesus Christ now and forever. Amen

Ambuja rscj

My experience in Pragnyalay

Pragnyalay is the house of wise people. Staying with our elderly sisters gives me more ideas, thoughts and encouragement. I see our sisters very attentive and observant to the needs of others. Looking at their helping nature towards their companions helps me to give more service and love to others. This house is well updated with the pictures of all the former Superiors General and all the elderly sisters of the Indian Province who have gone to God.

Our sisters try to do their own work. They cut vegetables, arrange for liturgy and prepare community prayer sessions. They set up the dining room and prepare the notice board for the week and for feast days. Our sisters always try to connect with the world through the news which they read daily. All the sisters have beautiful voices and they are extremely active in the holy liturgy. The most enthralling occasion we had was on St. Joseph's Feast day when we were all asked to come with a new "hairdo" and our elder sisters actively participated in that.

Pragnyalay gives me positive strokes to build my self-confidence.

Nithya Raj (candidate)

My Experience in Pragnyalay Community

I am very happy to serve our old sisters, those who worked hard and gave their life and time for our Society. I see that not only I am serving, but also they are serving me.

I find them very active and ready to serve now even in old age. They are serving me lovingly through teaching and guidance.

Once the community got together joyfully in honour of St. Joseph's feast. Each one was asked to come with a new 'hair-do' and all came with something unique. It was a very enjoyable evening, to see our sisters' smiling faces. I rejoiced to see the creativity in all the community members. All were asked to bring a joke with them and all of us enjoyed the jokes. It was enriching to learn new "hair-dos" for the future. All had a genuinely happy time together. The whole thing was a great entertainment for me.

Kumudini Tirkey (candidate)

My Experience in Pragnyalay Community

It is a privilege to live with our older sisters and to provide some service in the community. Coming to this place is very worthwhile for me because it is preparing me for the future. Even though our sisters are old, they are still very attentive to the needs of others and punctual, also they are ready to share their love and knowledge with us through teaching and in other ways.

On 20th March we had a community get-together in honour of St. Joseph's feast. It was a very enjoyable evening. All the community members came with new hair-styles as they were asked to and it was great fun to see each one arriving. At last I came to understand the meaning of "Hair-Do". We also shared jokes that evening. The whole experience was enlightening for me and I got bright new ideas for the future.

Victoria Hapadgara (candidate)