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>>> NEWSLETTER <<<
SOCIETY OF THE SACRED
HEART
PROVINCE OF INDIA



NEWS FROM THE PRAGNYALAY
COMMUNITY

WELCOME TO PRAGNYALAY

Here is Pragnyalay Community, all the Sisters and Helpers together, giving a warm welcome to Sr. Daphne Sequeira as she arrived here on July 3rd, to take up residence on Pragnyalay, first floor, and begin her term as Provincial. We welcomed her with a garland and an aarati, asking God's blessings on her and promising her our loving care and support for this role that she has so generously accepted, even after her eight years of courageous service on the General Council.



PRAGNYALAY CELEBRATES THE CENTENARY OF SOPHIE'S CANONIZATION



Pragnyalay, our Province *Elder Care* community, suddenly felt alive and ready to celebrate. *Covid* years and recent rscj deaths had kept spirits low and here was a celebration, a call to come alive and rejoice. It was a



family celebration of the Communities (priests and sisters) on our Campus and just around us – about forty in all – from seven communities. We planned a real festive liturgy, practising the hymns and arranging for accompaniment, both of which helped us revive and steady our voices!! Fr. Petras Khujur, SJ, was the main celebrant and he took time to read a short life of Madeleine Sophie and shared a reflection on Sophie's spirituality of the 'vine and the branches'

We showed a video prepared by Sr. Pratibha and then served cake and wine, with Sr. Mercy, fmm, raising a wish for us and the Society. There followed an agape. It was so good to see our corridors all set up with decorated tables and chairs, and all our neighbours, Fathers and Sisters, enjoying a lovingly prepared meal. We, as community, did our best as hosts with our young Seekers lending a very helpful hand. At the end we were tired, yes, but so full of joy and happy companionship. Life on the campus will surely be warmer for the celebration.



Marie Noronha rscj

WHISPERS FROM PRAGNYALAY

“Where do you live Lord? I’ve looked for you, waited for you, yearned to have your comforting presence as I walk these lonely days, really alone I hear you calling in each one ‘Here I am’.... I hesitate Lord, I do not know you Doubt and fear overcome me I hesitate again.... wonder what to do how to do. Deep down there is a strong desire to meet you in each one to walk the journey into the unknown that lies there What can I do...? be...? bring for you? Give me your eyes, your hands, your words, your heart to reach out **we need each other to find you.**” (My journal Feb 2025.)

These words express the essence of my journey during this last year in Pragnyalay. There is a basic sense of aloneness that is possibly part of the aging process, that comes with the distancing of ministry, of work companions and programmes to be followed, the fear of travelling alone, as well as the need of presence in the ministry here. Basically, I am a shy, fearful person and I do not know people here sufficiently well.... all of which made me explore a new spirituality I have come to believe that there is a ‘spirit’ that we have all lived and shared at depth and which, each person continues to live, in faith, despite her outward appearance and behaviour If not, what is our religious life about? Is it just the service we have given, the community life we have shared and the spiritual practices we have followed all these years of our life? It is this ‘spirit’ that I feel called and challenged to touch that deep spiritual core in each one, through a look, a touch, a word or song, a gesture or rhythmic movements. I believe and trust that life, love and grace are exchanged in those moments and there is a communion that touches the person and fulfils the need within both of us. This kind of companionship is a new kind of grace I am experiencing.



There is another way that has given me great courage and freedom, and the experience that I am not alone. We have an animating team, “as Scripture suggests we go two by two with an eye to holding one another up, helping one another on, goading one another on from place to place in order to speak where the voice of the gospel has been muted or has come missing entirely”. (Joan Chittister.) Not two, but three of us, share the different responsibilities of community life and the organising of the care and concern of the sick and elderly, the main ministry of the community. Something inside feels safe and free to be and act

because there are others sharing their gifts and learnings, thus making the tasks ahead so much easier, richer and enriching.

Kirti, Charu and I form the animating team for our life here in Pragnyalay, with Pratibha supporting us from above or afar, more a vantage point than an authority. This goes along with our efforts to make life in Pragnyalay more lively and involved through music, games, exercise, and fun evenings, with puzzles and singing, as well as T.V serials and movies, so that the late mornings and early evenings are alive. Of course, all this helps in building relationships, and creates an atmosphere of fellowship and joy that goes a long way in preparing us to face difficult crisis moments, when they arrive.

In the end, nothing can explain the atmosphere of peace and fellowship that fills our house and we can only exclaim with Jacob, “Truly God is in this place and I never knew.”

Marie Noronha rscj

KIRTI SHARES:

When I first came to Poona, I had no clear idea of what I was supposed to do. I wanted more work than I was doing in the community so that I could help more people who were really in need. When I shared this feeling with Sr. Mary B. who had always guided and encouraged me in my choices, she suggested that I attend Parish Council meetings; and I did so. I also took the opportunity to attend a workshop held in Ishvani Kendra, Poona, which opened my eyes to the responsibilities and duties of members of the Parish Council. Later, I joined the “Poona Diocesan Animation Team” (PDAT), but soon realised that this was a mistake as the work was too vast. In spite of this, I opted to work towards the PDAT, balancing my responsibilities in the community with the BECs/SCCs. I reach out to Hindi-speaking migrants too.

I have been a member of the PDAT since 2015. In the beginning, I knew nothing about the PDAT work. I had no notion of what I was supposed to do! I did not even know what PDAT stood for! (Poona Diocesan Animation Team) which includes BCCs, SCCs, and BECs.



It started with BCCs: (Basic Christian Communities), then SCCs: (Small Christian Communities) and now the name of the Commission is “The Commission for BECs/SCCs (CCBI)”. Although the term widely used in India and many other countries is SCCs, the Commission for BECs/SCCs decided to change it to **Basic Ecclesial Communities**. The reason for this change is that these communities are “**Basic**” in the sense that they and their faith are based deeply in their day-to-day life as well as all the normal issues of the place. The faith of a community is visible in the relationships that exist with neighbours and in the mutual affection for one another. They are **Ecclesial** in the sense that they are of the Church, not prayer groups, or associations, but obliged to carry out the mission of the Church in the area. Without this sense of mission, receiving Baptism and Confirmation would be useless. It is no longer possible to be passive as a Catholic.



Our Vision in “BECs/ SCCs” is a *Communion of Communities* built on the Word of God and on the Eucharist, leading to life in abundance for all, for each one.

The BEC/SCC Animation Team looks after the ministries in its own parish in the areas of Christian life: Education, Liturgy, Faith Formation, Youth Ministry, Health ministry and Social and Civic ministry. The SCC

Parish coordination Team offers the opportunity to reach out to people by acting in all these ministries, within the Church, by the Church and for the Church, the People of God.

Contributing to this work will strengthen my own commitment, and offer me a deep grasp of the life and death of Jesus for us all, as well as for the world.

Kirti Bhuinyan rscj

ONE-YEAR JOURNEY IN PRAGNYALAY

In the month of June this year I completed one year in Pragnyalay. I was sure that I did not have the gifts or training in health-care for elderly people. I was troubled and concerned as to what I would do in the elderly community. I started praying for myself daily and on the feast of Pentecost, I picked up two slips, which said 'Compassion' and 'Understanding'. I took this message seriously and, in my retreat, I strengthened it by prayer and reflection. I accepted this service in faith.

Hardly had I settled in the community when there were two deaths; Sr. Fleurette on June 23rd, 2024, and Sr. Benedicta, two months later. This shocked me and made me realize that the call to eternity can come at any time, one has to be ready. The words written in Konkani at the entrance of the Malvan cemetery, came to my mind, "*Aj maka, udyā tuka*". (*Today me, tomorrow you*). "Be alert, you never know when ..."

A wise person once said that a journey of thousand miles begins with a single step... the step of acceptance of the situation of my elderly sisters. Deep down in my heart this made me aware of their vulnerability, their powerlessness. Once upon a time some of them held responsible positions and served the Society selflessly. It was hard for me to see their vulnerability. I started responding with love and joy, and in return, I watched their grateful smiling faces that gave me immense joy and satisfaction.

At the same time, I became aware of my own physical limitations and the condition that I am in at present. I was empathetic towards their pain and restlessness. I tried to be supportive, just being available to them by talking to them or singing bhajans or chants; even if they did not respond in words, talking to them about their past apostolates brought a smile to their faces and this made me happy. -

When I look at them and reflect on their life of commitment, I feel proud and grateful to God for their contribution in their respective ministries. I feel each of them is a "spiritual house". To reach that height I, too, have to make greater efforts to meet God, to be my true self and to do His will. It invites me to deeper commitment.-

Besides each of the RSCJ in Pragnyalay, the beautiful garden, flowers and plants, their arrangement and colour, add to the life of prayer and contemplation. Walking though the garden with a grateful heart, I am reminded of our Almighty God – Creator, Painter and Artist – and I bow down before Him.



For this community year I am going to participate and help even more in the Tadiwala Road parish church *Faith Formation* groups; as animator for the BEC (Basic Ecclesial Community) and team member of RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults). The first group is to strengthen the faith of those who are already Catholics but not rooted deep in their faith. These are mostly semi-skilled and unskilled migrants from remote villages of India, and their families, who come for employment and job opportunities in Pune.

The second group consists of adults of other religions who want to be baptized, in spite of the law against conversion. Their initiation needs to begin from scratch, through a one-year programme planned by the diocese.

I am happy and grateful to the Lord for this opportunity. While strengthening these groups, I will also be strengthened, and continue to discover the person of Jesus who will challenge me and my continuous search of him in my faith journey. I thank God and the community for giving me this opportunity to explore ways of service in the parish while continuing to be available in the community.

Charusheela Gaikwad rscj

MY EXPERIENCES OF THE LAST TWO MONTHS.

On May 25th, we had a lovely celebration of the centenary of the canonisation of St. Madeleine Sophie. The 26th was an unlucky day for me. After supper due to an act of thoughtlessness on my part, I had a bad fall on the corridor outside my room and fractured my femur and ball and socket joint. I had surgery in Ruby Hall on 28th and was in hospital for three days. Though my mind was troubled by the implications of this fall for the future, there were many life-giving experiences during my three days' stay in Ruby Hall.

I was in a general ward. Crowds of visitors kept coming and going. The love of family members for their elderly, and how different members took turns to be by the bedside of the one who was ill or had had surgery, was heart-warming. Young, neatly-dressed nurses in pink were on their feet from early morning to late evening, mostly smiling. but focused on their work. Some are from Kerala, others from Karnataka or other parts of the country. I appreciated greatly their commitment and sense of responsibility. Those who had been there longer were guiding the newer ones. There were also the ones in khaki. whose work is to sponge and bathe people. Heads held high, smiling, as they did their work, I was also impressed by their sense of dignity and willingness to be called upon at any time. Seeing so many young persons, active, fully engaged in what they were doing, gave me life.

And now about our helpers in Pragnyalay. I was in the infirmary for over a month, sharing the room with Elisha. The tender sensitive care of the helpers, especially for Ramina who is now very helpless, unable to move any limb or do anything for herself, is admirable, praiseworthy. Giving her a bath and getting her dressed, is a massive job. Experiencing my own irritability with Elisha on days when she is restless and wants to be taken for rides in the wheel chair down the corridors, or in the garden, for several rounds, I admire the playful, loving tone of voice with which our helpers speak to Elisha most of the time. I hope I am learning to be patient about many things. I am also immensely grateful to the community for all that is being done for me daily by our helpers and the community and for the overall concern and care that I have received.

Philomena Gomes rscj

LOOKING BACK; MOVING FORWARD

I have now reached the age at which Our Holy Mother was called to her heavenly home. Like her, I feel drawn to spend time **looking back** over my years in the Society of His Heart.

At the same time, our Mother General, Sr. Claire Castaing, tells us that today St. Madeleine Sophie "would invite us to let go of the past, and **to rediscover new roads, new ways of doing and seeing** – personally, in community, in the New Provinces, in the Society."

These two reflections inspired the title of my sharing.

Looking back to the Constitutions, the Spiritual Journeys, the General Chapters, and my own formation, the invitation is to prayer and the interior life. Our spirituality flows from an intimate relationship with Jesus, knowing and imitating the virtues of His Sacred Heart.

However, the Special Chapter 2021 calls us **to Look Ahead**, to find new ways of organising ourselves, so that all may have life; a call to journey together in the spirit of Synodality.

Behold, I am doing something new!

Similarly, the Zoom meeting with my Generational SE-SASIA group was enlightening. All the reflections were positive and inspiring, encouraging us to **Look Forward** to the New with hope and an open heart.

Kneeling before the Eucharistic Lord, I see the past and future merging into the **PRESENT**; Both calls are identical: Rooted in the Heart of Jesus – the Source and Centre of my life. JESUS. My FOREVER FRIEND!

So, I draw comfort from the following message of our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, to the Elderly: “You possess the freedom to love and to pray. Your affection brings hope, which is a constant source of joy, whatever our age. Let us be signs of hope. Don’t let another day pass.”

Phyllis (Anjali) D’Souza rscj