

14th April 2026

>>> NEWSLETTER <<<

SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART PROVINCE OF INDIA



NEWS FROM THE POLYTECHNIC COMMUNITY

OUR MANIPUR OUTREACH

Sophia College and hostel reached out to 3 girls from Manipur in 2023 when there was ethnic conflict in the region which devastated the lives of so many inhabitants particularly students who were uncertain about their future life and career.

As a response to the call of the CRI, Mumbai Unit, Srs. Patricia D'Souza and Annie Peter took up the challenge to provide free education and accommodation to the 3 girls of Manipur who wanted to pursue graduation studies at Sophia College. The hostel staff, under the guidance of Sr. Rajani, very willingly accepted to accommodate them and took care of them while they were in the hostel.

For the first year the Mother House very generously granted money from the Emergency Fund for this crisis situation in India. The next two years we applied for funding to the Mother House Solidarity Fund to support the college and hostel fees of the 3 Manipur students and this was granted very generously by the Mother House once again. We are grateful to the Society of Sacred Heart for reaching out to this vulnerable group in India whose lives were at stake, let alone their future and careers.

The College became a safe haven for the 3 girls as they could complete their graduation in a safe and secure environment. As they leave College they are immensely grateful to the sisters and staff of Sophia College for changing their lives. They are particularly grateful to the Society of Sacred Heart for the unconditional support, both financially and emotionally, that they received. They remain indebted to the sisters and the College for being a source of light and hope in the darkness and uncertainty of their lives.

My sincere thanks to Sr. Anila as Provincial and Sr. Pratibha as Provincial Treasurer for making it possible to get funding from the Mother House Emergency Fund and the Mother House Solidarity Fund for these less fortunate sisters of ours. Special thanks to Sr. Ananda for guiding us in writing the project and to the SHEWI staff for helping us with the fund transfers. God bless them all.

Annie Peter rscj

My Daily Life

I retired from Sophia Nursery School, where I had worked for 30 years in the Balwadi section, when the Covid pandemic started. After that, I was not well for some time and was even admitted twice to St. Elizabeth's Hospital. I still have to go for medical checkups from time to time.

I am now 86 years of age. I have a new ministry – namely, of prayer. My time is spent now mostly in prayer. I also do some reading. This year, I read the lives of St. Philippine and of St. Madeleine Sophie written by Sr. Irene D'Souza in Marathi. At present, I am reading *Urdhva Mula*, the history of the Indian Province. It is well written and it is easy to read. Reading this book helped me to understand how much and what kinds of situations the Society had to face during the early years of the foundation in India.

In the mornings and evenings, I go for a walk in the corridor near our community quarters. I also do some exercises. In the early mornings as I walk sometimes I see the full moon as it is setting and in the evenings I watch the sun set. Each day I try to sit in the sunshine for some time. I enjoy watching the crows and also the kites in their large assemblies of hundreds flying round and round high in the sky. They go on and on doing the same thing every single day. I admire the beauty of God's creation and I thank God for it and I also thank God that I am able to take basic care of myself without help and do some small services in community.

Rosa Salve rscj

85 Not Out!

“Lord you raised me up...that I can stand on the mountain ...”

These are the words that keep coming to my heart as I look back on the 85 years of my life, and I marvel at how the Lord has provided me with what I need at every step of my life. As a young religious, I served for very many years in Haregaon in the early years of our presence there when life in this ministry was very demanding. There I learnt a lot from the poor – their faith and generosity despite the poverty challenged me to give of my best generously. I was very happy there and the relationships that were built with the students and families at Haregaon still continue to this day. For seven years I was in Pragnyalay, Pune; then I was in Torpa for four years which I enjoyed very much. I can never forget all that I gained from my years spent in Haregaon and Torpa with the rural poor. In between these years, for short periods of time I was in Mumbai, always in the Sophia Polytechnic ministry and community.

In my later life, the Lord through the Society brought me back to the Polytechnic and with a purpose: for during my last year in Torpa I fractured my left leg very badly and since then I am not able to move around with the freedom and confidence that would be required in a rural ministry. In the Polytechnic, the Lord has provided me with a lift so that I can go up and down without difficulty and still be active; my movements are now mainly restricted within Sophia Campus and here I have the opportunity to

interact daily with so many persons and with nature.

My ministry in the Polytechnic gives me life and joy: daily, after prayer, mass and breakfast, I am down early to welcome the staff and students as they come to the institution. My work as the Institute Warden is of practical nature – seeing to the general maintenance, cleanliness and repairs, with the help of the support staff, as well supervising the garden. I find all the staff, especially the support staff, very cooperative and helpful. They are always willing to do whatever is required. My work in the Polytechnic hostel keeps me in touch with young people and helps me to understand the challenges that they face. I enjoy the garden very much. Before the Covid pandemic we only had trees and flowers in our little garden. During the pandemic I got some fruit trees planted in it and it now gives me much joy to see bananas, papayas and even guavas growing in our little patch. It is a privilege to share some of our fruit with other communities as well.



Sr. Joanna in the Polytechnic garden

I am really grateful to God for providing me with a ministry at this stage in my life which enables me to be fully active, but with the supports that I need.

Joanna Alphonso rscj

The Changing Profile of the Students of Sophia Polytechnic

I have seen Sophia Polytechnic and its students at different stages in its history from almost its beginnings in 1970.

In the early years, the student profile of the Polytechnic was very different from what it is today: except for the HAFT department, all the departments had only girl students; the students mostly came from middle class families (a few even from the upper class) and the majority spoke English. My impression used to be that the Polytechnic was fairly ‘elite’. However, when I returned to the Polytechnic in 2013 after a gap of more than twenty years, I noticed that a significant change had taken place in the student profile. Now, English was no longer the spoken language of the majority of the students – in the fifth and sixth floors where the Art department is situated the vast majority spoke in Marathi; in the other departments when talking to each other students spoke in a variety of languages, but mostly in ‘Mumbai Hindi’!. I noticed that very few students were from upper middle class families; the majority of the students were now from the middle or lower middle class and twenty to twenty-five percent come from poorer families – children of domestic workers, small shopkeepers, auto rickshaw drivers etc. Another change in the student profile is the gradual shift from ‘girls only’ to ‘co-ed’. Till fairly recently, except for the HAFT department which was co-ed from the start, all the other departments were for girls only. In 2014, the SCM department went co-ed and this year, i.e. 2025-26, the Art department too admitted a few male students to its first year classes – at present there are only four boys in this department but we envisage that the numbers will increase.

The transition in our student profile from the middle class to largely the lower middle class and even the poor is a welcome shift in keeping with the original vision of the Polytechnic which was to provide quality professional education to students (at that time mainly girls) from the lower income groups. But, this brings with it a big challenge – for the poor find it difficult to pay our fees. Hence, from the time that I became the Director of Sophia Polytechnic one of my important responsibilities is raising funds to subsidise the fees of the poorer students. We appeal to various Trusts and Charitable organizations as well as to individual donors for help towards fees of needy students. Some give small scholarships, others give more. Prof Meenal Joshi, Head of the Art department, put our students in contact with one organization – Vidyadaan Sahayyak Mandal (VSM) – that is willing to cover the whole or major part of the fees, but only of really poor and deserving students who have to meet VSM’s very strict criteria. It is indeed a joy to reach out and help many of our needy students. For example, this year 100 needy students (nearly 25% of our student strength) received some financial aid, the total amount exceeding Rs. 25 lakhs! One of our biggest donors is the Suman Ramesh Tulsiani Foundation which each year has given scholarships to around 80 to 100 students.



Tulsiani Trust's Scholarship giving function at Sophia Polytechnic – 9 Oct. '25

Over the course of the last ten to twelve years very many needy students have been helped and many are doing well now. It is very touching when a few of these come back to give something in turn to help others. Many go forth after their studies with a sense of confidence and empowerment. To illustrate this, I would like to share extracts from the speech made by one of our graduating students of the Art department, a girl from a very poor family, at the 'Ashirwad' ceremony for

them that was held on 6th March 2026. “When I first walked in, I was someone who hesitated to speak. I was unsure about making friends, unsure about where I belonged, and unsure of my own voice. But this college slowly changed that. It did not just teach me subjects. It taught me how to communicate, how to present my ideas, and how to stand with confidence... From the girl who once hesitated to speak, to a woman who now speaks with confidence, this journey has truly been a transformation.... This college also gave something even more valuable than academics: support and compassion...”

Anila Verghese rscj

The Beauty of Togetherness: A Journey to Remember

I am working as an Administrative Assistant to the Principal in Sophia College for Women. My daily life is filled with responsibilities that require care, attention, and dedication. I supervise the work of the support staff, ensure that cleaning materials are always available and I attend to the students who are unwell. I see to the arrangements for different events of the College. Each day brings new tasks and, through them, I have learned the importance of patience, coordination and understanding people.

While my role keeps me busy, it also keeps me closely connected with the support staff who work hard. I realized that work is not only about completing duties but also about building relationships. It was this understanding that led to a special journey in the month of December 2025—a journey that beautifully combined work, care, and togetherness.

What made this trip unique was not just the places we visited, but the spirit in which we travelled. Away from our usual work environment, we shared moments of joy, laughter, and companionship.

Our journey took us to several remarkable places. We stayed with our Community in Ashankur Women's Training Center, Bhokar. The Bhokar community arranged everything for us and they made our outing meaningful and memorable. From Bhokar we visited Daulatabad Fort, Bibi Ka Maqbara, Ellora Caves, a few temples, a sugar factory, the Sai Baba temple at Shirdi, our Haregaon Community and the Haregaon Church.



This trip made me to understand that it is possible to balance work and meaningful human connection. By stepping out of the usual routine, I was able to understand the support staff better—not just as

workers, but as individuals with their own pains, struggles, and joys. Travelling together allowed us to build trust, respect, and a sense of unity that cannot be achieved through work alone. The beauty of togetherness lies in sharing simple moments—walking together, eating together, helping one another, and being present for each other. This journey was about creating memories, strengthening relationships, and learning the true value of companionship.

As I reflect on this experience, I realize that work and togetherness must not be separated. This journey was about building relationships and understanding the beauty of togetherness. This journey will always remain a cherished memory—a reminder that we can come together with respect and kindness. This journey became truly special.

Anita Hamsroj rscj (PTV)

Pragnyalay – a House Echoing with Peaceful Silence

As one steps through the entrance door of Pragnyalay, one is greeted by the stunning architectural design, with walls crafted from gray and white stones that exude a timeless charm. The rooms overlook a beautifully landscaped, well maintained garden adorned with vibrant flowers and blooming bushes, set in the middle of expansive verandas that invite the gentle breeze. When the lights are switched on at dusk, the sight is truly breathtaking—a visual delight that captures the essence of serenity.



This house stands as a picturesque sanctuary for our elder

sisters, embodying the Society's dedication to honouring and caring for its aging members. This house, dedicated to caring for our senior sisters, is always ready to welcome visitors, whether they are old friends or younger sisters whom the elder sisters have mentored over the years. The sisters of Pragnyalay take great joy in celebrating birthdays together, harmonizing their voices during Liturgy celebrations.



As one interacts with the senior sisters in Pragnyalay one can sense that, as old age advances, they are embracing their reality with grace and with a deeper appreciation of their present life with its new challenges. This graceful acceptance brings wisdom, perspective and strength to the whole community. Despite the limitations of their age, when one talks to them about their past days their eyes still sparkle with the fire of a lifetime of service and the ideals they held once dear and the realities they faced in ministry or in community. Each has her own stories of encounters, trials and successes.

Sisters from other communities often choose this house for their retreats, cherishing its peaceful atmosphere.

I visited Pragnyalay two years ago to bid farewell to a close friend and for reconnecting with senior sisters who have been for me a source of support and joy during challenging times and with whom I have shared memories. As evening approached, and it was time for our departure, I couldn't help but think of the seniors I had met during my previous visit to Pragnyalay who have already crossed to the other side, leaving in my mind lingering thoughts of whether I would see a few of those whom I met this day again.

Mary Varghese rscj