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The Herald

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St. Mother Teresa of Kolkata

The Herald Vol. CLX No. 16

Kolkata | 26 April - 02 May 2024

₹ 10/-

Earth Day: Pope Francis urges responsibility for our common home



By Lisa Zengarini

On World Earth Day 2024, Pope Francis reminds everyone of our duty to protect the planet and safeguard peace.

As the world marked Earth Day on Monday, April 22, Pope Francis reiterated his urgent plea for bold action for our common home and for world peace. The international Day was established in 1970 to raise awareness about the critical environmental challenges facing our planet, and to mobilize efforts to address them.

The observance provides an opportunity for individuals, communities, organizations, and governments to come together and engage in activities to repair and heal ecosystems, combat climate change, and preserve biodiversity so as to preserve the planet for future generations.

World not doing enough:

In a post on his X social media platform (formerly known as Twitter), Pope Francis noted that his generation has bequeathed many monetary riches to later generations, but has done little to protect the planet.

He also commented on the link between current environmental problems and the many conflicts raging throughout the world.

"Our generation has bequeathed many riches, but we have failed to protect the planet and we are not safeguarding peace. We are called to become artisans and caretakers of our common home, the Earth which is "falling into ruin." #EarthDay

The Pope's post echoed his words in the 2015 Encyclical Laudato si' on care of our common home and its call for individuals, communities and governments to care for nature.

2024 Earth Day for a plasti-free world:

Each year, Earth Day has a specific theme to draw global attention on pressing environmental issues. Under the banner "Planet vs. Plastics," this 54th edition is focussed on plastic pollution and

on the urgent need to reduce its use and production.

Beyond its environmental implications, the proliferation of plastics poses a significant threat to human health, akin to the challenges posed by climate change.

400 million metric tons of plastic produced annually:

Humans produce over 400 million metric tons of plastic annually, which is roughly the weight of all human beings on the planet.

Only 9% gets recycled, and about 22% of plastic waste worldwide is either not collected, improperly disposed of, or ends up as litter.

As plastics degrade into microplastics, they release toxic chemicals into ecosystems, contaminating oceans (where over 1 million metric tons end up every year), food and water sources, and endangering all forms of life.

Detrimental effects on environment and human health:

This year's campaign, therefore, prioritizes spreading awareness about these detrimental effects. It calls for increased research into the health implications of plastic exposure and advocates for transparency in sharing findings with the public.

The immediate aim of the campaign is to swiftly eliminate single-use plastics by 2030 and to embed this commitment within the United Nations Treaty on Plastic Pollution by 2024, ensuring global cooperation in tackling this pressing issue.

The longer-term aim is to obtain 60 percent reduction in plastic production by 2040 so as to safeguard both human and environment health. To this end the campaign, also emphasizes the importance of investing in innovative technologies and materials to pave the way for a plastic-free world.



The invisible Christians in India's 'festival of democracy'

By John Dayal

It is the biggest show on earth. Ever. The 2024 general election in India, its 18th since the republic was declared, throws up mind-boggling statistics.

For the 541 seats in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament, approximately 970 million people out of a population of 1.4 billion are eligible to cast their vote. This includes 18 million who turned 18 this year.

In 12 states, there are more women voters than men. Among the registered voters are over 48,000 transgender people, identified for the first time in such an exercise.

The mechanics put in place by the Election Commission of India are equally gigantic — 1.05 million polling stations, manned by 15 million personnel to supervise the polling conducted through electronic voting machines (EVMs), which remain a source of much controversy but have been deemed legal by the Supreme Court of India. The results will be declared on June 4.

Christians make up approximately 2.3 percent of the population and, by simple arithmetic, will total about 22.31 million voters. This seems like an enormous number, but their presence will remain essentially unfelt for their impact on the results or the representation of their community in the new parliament.

As it is, Christians are irrelevant in India's electoral landscape, more so in the last ten years, during which they have been wholly invisibilized.

Many call this a pity at a time when Christian relief and outreach are sought to be criminalized, and its education institutions are under threat of total emasculation. The community sees overwhelming problems, ranging from physical persecution to curbs on institutional structures, some with a 150-year-old record.

Without a strong voice in parliament to press their concerns and demands, the community banks on the Congress and other secular parties for its advocacy and, ironically, the communist block, which the community's religious leaders otherwise see as an enemy in the state of Kerala.

The community's activity in the Karnataka elections of last year and the leadership shown by Bangalore archbishop Peter Machado against non-state actors persecuting Christians and Muslims helped galvanize civil society.

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The Herald

Vol.160 (CLX) No. 16

Kolkata Apr 26 - May 02, 2024

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-- Editor

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All material may be edited for the sake of space, clarity or editorial policy. Features, articles should not exceed 600 words, while reports should be within 300 words.

All submission should be made through email. Reports should accompany appropriate photographs. Deadline to submit articles is Sunday, for reports Monday evening, and for advertisements Tuesday 12 noon.

- Editor

Skip Velankanni pilgrimage to vote: Cardinal Ferrão

By Matters India Reporter

Panaji: Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão, archbishop of Goa-Daman, has urged his people to refrain from undertaking a pilgrimage to the Marian shrine at Velankanni in Tamil Nadu a day before the general elections in Goa.

"It is universally recognized, especially in a democracy, that the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual, guided by a properly formed conscience," the cardinal said in the circular addressed to the clergy, religious and faithful in Goa.

The cardinal's April 15 message comes against the backdrop of several people expressing concern on social media that many Catholics may end up missing out on the opportunity to vote due to the election schedule. Goa, which elects two Lok Sabha members, is scheduled to vote on May 7.

The South Western Railway on March 7, 2022, introduced the weekly train between Goa's Vasco Da Gama and Tamil Nadu's Nagapattinam, near Vailankanni. The train, No. 17315 "Velankanni Express," leaves at 9 am on Mondays and arrives Vailankanni the following afternoon.

In the return direction, the train leaves Nagapattinam at 12:20 am on Wednesdays and reach Vasco Da Gama at 3:25 am on Thursdays.

In his circular, the prelate reminds Catholics and "people of good will" to fulfill their civic responsibility by exercising their vote.

"In this connection, I see it as my bounden duty, as the head of the Church in Goa, to call the attention of our Church members to the fact that, in the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation," he said quoting "The Joy of the Gospel", apostolic exhortation by Pope Francis in November 2023.

This obligation, the cardinal said, is rooted in "our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do." "In this context, I appeal to every eligible voter to participate in the democratic process by casting the vote, not only as a right, but chiefly as a duty towards the nation. We have to collectively recognize that our vote is our irreplaceable personal contribution to the good of our country," he added.

"Every citizen ought to be mindful of his right and his duty to promote the common good by using his vote," he quoted from Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Second Vatican Council no 75.

"It is clear that Catholics moving out with family and friends on a holiday or even going on a pilgrimage on election day, thereby abstaining from the responsibility of participating in the voting process on the May 7, 2024, would be not only doing a disservice to the nation, but failing seriously in their important civic responsibility," the archbishop went on to say.

Cardinal Ferrao advised those who had already booked the train ticket for May 6, Monday, that "it is certainly worth losing some money" by cancelling the trip "for the sake of the greater good and the sacred duty of exercising one's franchise on election day and thus being positively responsible towards the greater good of the nation."

He invited "eligible Catholic voters" to exercise their franchise for candidates with secular credentials committed to working for the good of all people and upholding the constitutional values.

Pope prays for dialogue over conflict in the Middle East

Pope Francis issues a heartfelt plea for peace in Palestine, Israel, and Ukraine, urging dialogue over conflict and remembering the suffering of those affected.

By Francesca Merlo

Pope Francis once again turned his prayers to peace in the world. Following the Regina Coeli in Saint Peter's Square on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, Pope Francis once again expressed his hope that dialogue, negotiation, and diplomacy might prevail in the Middle East. He urged against succumbing to "the logic of assertion."

"I continue to watch with concern and sorrow the situation in the Middle East. I reiterate the plea

not to yield to the claims of war but rather to prioritize dialogue and diplomacy, which can achieve much. Every day, I pray for peace in Palestine and Israel, hoping these two peoples can soon end their suffering."

Ukraine

Pope Francis then recalled, as usual, the ongoing war in Ukraine. He invited the world not to forget the conflict-ridden land "which suffers so much."

Francis then turned his thoughts to Father Matteo Pettinari, of the Order of Missionaries of the Consolata, who has served in Ivory Coast for 13 years and tragically passed away in a car accident on 18 April.



PM Modi hints at papal visit to India next year

Pope Francis may visit next year, claims the prime minister in interview with news channel based in southern Kerala Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi says Pope Francis could visit India next year after revealing in a television interview that he had invited the pope during a 2021 visit to the Vatican.

"I have invited him sPope Francis to visit India... Maybe he will fix his program sfor the India visit next year," Modi said in the interview broadcast on April 21 by Asianet News, based in southern Kerala state.

The interview comes as the southern state, with a sizable Catholic population, prepares to go to the polls on April 26 in the second phase of elections. The seven-phase election will choose 543 new members of the national parliament.

Christians make up 18 percent of Kerala's 33 million people. Kerala is also the base of two Eastern rite churches, the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches.

The state elects 20 lawmakers to India's Lok Sabha or lower house of parliament. Modi's pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has not won a seat from Kerala so far.

The BJP also does not have a single member in the state legislative assembly, dominated by the communists and the secular Congress party.

"When I went to the Vatican sin October 2021t, I met the Holy Father. We had long discussions, and he was aware of the work of my government. We spoke on various issues... and on many matters, we were on the same board," the Indian prime ministersaid.

The Vatican has confirmed a four-nation papal trip to Southeast Asia in September. However, India is not included in it.

Despite his repeated visits to Asia, Pope Francis has never visited India. In October 2021, it was reported that he had "accepted" an invitation from Modi.

India told to scrap anti-conversion laws after polls

The law prevents Christians from sharing their faith with others, UK-based Release International said

A UK-based Christian advocacy group has urged I

Release International, which supports persecuted Churches worldwide, said: "We have seen a dramatic rise in intolerance towards Christians since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) first came to power in 2014."

Eleven Indian states, most of them ruled by the BJP of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have in place anti-conversion laws. Polls to the Indian parliament's lower house (Lok Sabha) are being conducted in seven phases, starting April 19. The results will be declared on June 4.

Paul Robinson, chief executive officer of Release International, urged India to act immediately to halt the spread of intolerance

and repeal anti-conversion laws after the polls.

The anti-conversion laws prohibit change of religion or any attempt to convert from one religion to another through misrepresentation, use of threat or force, fraud, undue influence, coercion, allurement, or marriage.

These laws fly in the face of India's constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion, Robinson noted on April 15.

"These laws prevent Christians from sharing their faith with others," he said.

Quoting a report compiled by the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), a protestant group, Release International said pastors are beaten up, churches are attacked and prayer meetings are disrupted by hardline Hindu groups. (UCA News)

Church in the World

Brooklyn's breathtaking Eucharistic Revival



By Jeffrey Bruno

I'd never ridden the subway with a bishop before.

But then again, how many of us have? Bishop Robert Brennan from the Diocese of Brooklyn is not your typical bishop — and I mean that with the utmost respect for the men who hold the office. Each is unique, endowed with their own personalities, charisms, and abilities. So perhaps don't go telling your bishop he needs to start riding mass transit just yet. He's striking in the way he carries himself: You can sense a deep spirituality and humility within him. He's genuinely kind and attentive — a true pastor.

If there were a contest for "Most Likely to Ride the Subway With His Flock," I believe Brennan would win hands down. Bishop Robert Brennan takes a ride on the subway alongside other faithful heading to the Diocese of Brooklyn's Eucharistic Revival on April 20, 2024.

I first met him in 2021, upon his eventful reassignment to Brooklyn. He had barely settled into the Diocese of Columbus, Ohio, in 2019 — where the paint in his office was probably still drying — only to be moved, much to the sorrow of the Columbus flock.

On the bright side, he's a Mets fan. Though their recent performance hasn't been much of a consolation, maybe his prayers will give them a boost. Bishop Robert Brennan is greeted by one of New York's finest as he arrives at the Court Street Station on April 20, 2024.

So, early on Saturday morning, in anticipation of the Eucharistic Revival at Louis Armstrong Stadium in Flushing Meadows, he boarded the 7 train with members of his flock in tow. With each stop, more of the faithful joined, filling the carriages.

And they did exactly what you would expect a group of Catholics on a subway to do: They sang, they chanted, "Viva Cristo Rey!" and they laughed with a joy so palpable it electrified the air.

By the time we rolled into Mets-Willets Point Station, it felt like a rolling celebration.

That would have been enough to fill our hearts, but it was just the warmup.

The day unfolded with thousands traversing the borough to join a daylong

celebration of the diocese's Eucharistic Revival.

I could speak volumes about the day, but there was one moment — a moment that shook me to the core.

It was during the Eucharistic procession, a winding path around the stadium's exterior, mostly out of sight — until the point of entrance.

Bishop Robert Brennan carries the Blessed Sacrament during a Eucharistic procession at Louis Armstrong Stadium on April 20, 2024.

As Brennan, carrying Christ, became visible to the gathered crowd, applause erupted — not just any applause, but one of overwhelming joy.

It was the kind of spontaneous outpouring that occurs when words fall short and emotions soar.

They were applauding for Christ. The sound wrapped around the stadium, penetrating hearts and souls, as evidenced by the smiling, tear-streaked faces turning toward him.

I'll leave it at this: Something breathtaking happened in Queens that Saturday.

Brooklyn Bishop Robert Brennan carries the thurible around the altar inside Louis Armstrong Stadium on April 20, 2024.

And in mid-July, that same breathtaking event will unfold at the heart of the United States.

Priests who concelebrated Mass with Bishop Robert Brennan at Louis Armstrong Stadium on April 20, 2024.

In three weeks, the Catholic faithful will kick off four historic and unprecedented pilgrimages, each originating from one of the four compass points of our great land. Brooklyn Bishop Robert Brennan celebrates Mass for thousands gathered at Louis Armstrong Stadium on April 20, 2024.

Together, they will travel more than 6,500 miles with more than 100,000 participants converging on the 10th Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis from July 17-21 the first congress in 83 years.

Sri Lankan Church seeks fair probe, justice over Easter attacks



Deadly bombings at churches, hotels left 279 people, mostly Catholic mass-goers, killed and wounded over 500

Catholic Church officials in Sri Lanka have reiterated their call for an impartial and fair investigation to ensure justice for victims as they marked the fifth anniversary of the deadly Easter Sunday bombings on April 21.

"Today, I stand before you, demanding a true, fair and thorough investigation into the attacks, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith of Colombo said during the anniversary event in the national capital.

"Only by finding the truth, not through finger-pointing, can this country begin to heal. It's time to end this political theatre," he added.

Speaking at St. Anthony's Church in Kochchikade of Colombo, Ranjith said, "Truth and justice are not playthings to be tossed aside. You cannot suppress them any more than a rubber ball is held underwater forever."

The venue was among three churches and three luxury hotels that suicide bombers allegedly linked to a homegrown Islamic extremist outfit attacked simultaneously on Easter Sunday, April 21, 2019.

The bombings left 279 people, primarily Catholic mass-goers, dead and wounded over 500.

The press meeting at the church was attended by survivors, relatives of victims, and Colombo's diplomatic community, including Vatican ambassador Archbishop Brian Udaigwe, UN representative Marc-Andre Franche, and diplomats representing the 45 foreigners, including tourists who were killed in the attacks.

No politicians were invited to the ceremonies organized by the Church.

With the banner in the background that marked the standstill wall clock pointing 8.45 am - the exact time the extremists detonated the bombs that killed hundreds of churchgoers, it featured an accompanying text: "We are still awake until justice is done."

Candles were lit by families of victims, clergy, and representatives of religious leaders who participated in the ceremony in solidarity.

Malka Shalindi, who lost her father in the attack, spoke to the press on behalf of the victims and survivors.

Nimal Shantha died in the attack at Cinnamon Grand Hotel where he was the manager of the Taprobane restaurant.

"I lost the most important person in my life — my father. He won't be there to see me graduate from university in a few months. He won't be there to see me fulfilling his dream of becoming a doctor because he was killed in cold blood,"

Shalindi said in a choked voice.

"We were waiting for justice and truth. We knew that we would only be healed and reconciled by knowing the truth and by having justice. Five years have passed, and nothing is happening," she added.

Buddhist monk Omalpe Sobitha Thero noted that the Easter attacks exposed the country's leadership's perceived irresponsibility, resulting in a public outcry and frustration.

"The President, Prime Minister, the Cabinet of Ministers who were in power at that time are now targets of public anger today. While the government claimed they had identified the culprits, many view it as a political game. No concrete steps towards punishment have been taken, leaving the public demanding justice. The truth cannot be buried, and victims deserve justice," the monk stressed.

Sheik Moulavi Abdul Rahmahan Hazan, representing the Muslim community, said the political leadership seems "engaged in a blame game, refusing to acknowledge their own mistakes."

"Justice is truly what we demand," he said. Cardinal Ranjith said he still recalls a telephone conversation with former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa after the Presidential Commission of Inquiry recommendations were handed to him.

He said that the ousted president expressed his inability to implement the recommendations that would lead to the potential arrests of leaders he favoured and the organizations they represented.

"These attempts to disrupt the investigations and exert control by even removing and arresting investigation officers were deeply concerning. Our letter to President Rajapaksa demanding an impartial probe of the attacks received no response — not even an acknowledgment letter from his office," the cardinal said.

Similarly, the cardinal alleged that the president's office had not acknowledged a letter sent to current President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Oct. 6 last year.

Apostolic nuncio Archbishop Brian Udaigwe expressed hope that "the controversies regarding the deadly act" will be resolved and justice will be served following investigations.

Sri Lankans in various parts of the country joined peaceful prayer and commemoration ceremonies to mark the anniversary.

Bishops, priests, and Catholics joined a walk from Maris Stella College in Negombo to St. Sebastian's Church.

Catholics also signed a campaign letter seeking the Vatican's permission to start the canonization process for Easter Sunday victims. (UCA News)

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Vol. 160 (CLX) No. 16• KOLKATA 26 Apr - 02 May 2024

St. Joseph: the Patron of Workers (1st May 2024)

The Feast of St. Joseph, the patron saint of workers, is celebrated on 1st May every year, and the day is celebrated as International Workers' Day, also known as Labour Day. It holds great significance in the realms of faith and labour movements. Both have deep historical roots and continue to impact the lives of people around the world.

St. Joseph, the husband of the Virgin Mary and the foster father of Jesus, holds a revered position in Christianity. His significance as a worker and provider for his family has led to his association with labourers and workers.

International Workers' Day, observed on May 1st, has its origins in the labour union movement, specifically the eight-hour day movement, which advocated for eight hours of work, eight hours of recreation, and eight hours of rest. The date was chosen to commemorate the Haymarket affair in Chicago in 1886, where workers were striking for an eight-hour workday. The day has since become a global celebration of the achievements of workers and their contributions to society.

St. Joseph's life as a humble carpenter and his dedication to providing for his family serve as a powerful example for workers. His commitment to his work and his role as a protector resonate with the struggles and aspirations of workers worldwide. St. Joseph's teachings emphasize the dignity of work, fair wages, and the importance of family, values that are integral to the labour rights movement.

St. Joseph's principles have had a profound impact on the recognition and celebration of International Workers' Day. His emphasis on the dignity of labour and the rights of workers has resonated with labour movements, inspiring them to advocate for fair working conditions, just wages, and the overall well-being of workers. In countries with a strong Catholic tradition, St. Joseph's feast day is often marked with special prayers and blessings for workers, reinforcing the link between faith and labour rights.

Work is an essential aspect of human existence, and the dignity of labour encapsulates the profound significance of every form of work, regardless of its nature or societal perception. It is a timeless concept that underlines the inherent value and respect that should be accorded to all types of labour. The dignity of labour encompasses the idea that all forms of work, whether manual, intellectual, skilled, or unskilled, contribute to the betterment of individuals and society as a whole. It emphasizes that every occupation, from the trader to the scholar, from the farmer to the artist, holds intrinsic worth and deserves admiration and respect. Embracing the dignity of labour fosters a culture of inclusivity and respect for all professions. It encourages individuals to appreciate the contributions of workers across diverse sectors, recognizing that each role is indispensable to the functioning of society.

The dignity of labour stands as a foundational tenet in the quest for societal harmony, economic fairness, and human dignity. By recognizing and honouring the value of work in all its manifestations, we affirm the inherent worth of every individual and the essential role they play in shaping the fabric of our communities. Embracing the dignity of labour is not merely a moral imperative; it is a catalyst for shaping a more just, inclusive, and equitable world where the toil of every individual is esteemed and celebrated.

St. Joseph and International Workers' Day stand as symbols of the dignity of labour and the ongoing struggle for workers' rights. The historical significance of these observances continues to inspire and unite communities, fostering a spirit of solidarity and advocacy for fair treatment and just compensation for workers worldwide. As we commemorate these occasions, we are reminded of the enduring legacy of St. Joseph and the collective efforts to uphold the rights and well-being of all who labour. The celebration of St. Joseph and International Workers' Day should serve as a poignant reminder of the shared values of faith, labour, and social justice, and the enduring quest for dignity and fairness in the workplace.

Attack on Telangana school: Where are Church organizations, office-bearers?

By Jacob Peenikaparambil

Indore, April 18, 2024: Ever since the BJP came to power at the center under the prime ministership of Narendra Modi, violent attacks by the Hindutva organizations on the Church personnel and institutions have been increasing. Even in the middle of elections to the Lok Sabha there is no respite from such attacks.

The latest is the attack on St. Mother Theresa School managed by the Missionary Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in Telangana's Mancheril district. Saffron clad Hindutva groups on April 16 damaged the school and assaulted the manager, a priest. Videos of the brutal attack were circulated on social media.

The reason for the violent attack appears to be flimsy. The principal noticed two days back that some students had worn saffron attire to school. When he asked the students about this, they replied that they were observing Hanuman Deeksha, a 21-day ritual. The principal then asked them to bring their parents to school so that he can discuss the issue with them.

The issue escalated when someone shared a video on social media and claimed that the principal was not allowing Hindu attire on campus. It resulted in mobs in saffron clothes rushing to the school and indulging in violence. Videos show the police struggling to control the mob.

An NDTV report says a case has been registered against the school management for hurting the Hindu sentiments, but no mention about any case

against the hooligans who destroyed the school property and attacked the principal, causing injuries to him.

No response to this violent incident has appeared in the media from the Church authorities like the bishop of the diocese, regional bishops' council and the Office of Education and Culture under the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India.

When attack after attack takes place why don't the office-bearers of these organizations condemn them and demand accountability from the governments? Every citizen has the right to life and it is the duty of the government to protect the life and property of its citizens.

Why are the authorities afraid of registering their protest? What is the use of these organizations and their office-bearers, if they are not coming to the support of the priests, nuns and brothers who work in the church institutions?

If each institution or congregation has to fight for itself what is the significance of these multi-layer organizations? In the absence of protests from higher authorities, violent attacks on the Church institutions will continue to increase.

The attack on the school and its principal in Kannepally village also reveals the extent to which India is saffronized. According to the media reports, about hundred saffron clad Hindu right-wing cadres rushed to the school and indulged in destroying whatever came to their notice. It also shows that these groups take the law into their hands with impunity.

Letters to the Editor

The authorities of Salesian College

(Autonomous) Siliguri, West Bengal deserve praise for taking up the "United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 2 – Zero Hunger" credo (report in the Herald 19-25 April). In the fitness of things, this initiative must first be implemented in each of our parishes under all the dioceses in India.

Along with the Zero Hunger initiative, malnutrition need to be addressed in each of our parishes through MUAC tests on children, say once a month. Malnutrition means deficiencies, excesses, or imbalances in a person's intake of energy and/or nutrients. Malnutrition addresses three broad groups of conditions: under-nutrition, which includes wasting (low weight-for-height), stunting (low height-for-age) and underweight (low weight-for-age).

Malnutrition can be tested by MUAC tape measure (Mid-Upper Arm Circumference) which is a simple measurement that can be used to identify children (06 - 59 months) who have malnutrition and are at risk of dying.

MUAC tapes come in a variety of lengths and increments, however, most use the red-yellow-

green colour bands to indicate nutritional status. RED indicates severe acute malnutrition (SAM), YELLOW indicates risk of acute malnutrition, and GREEN indicates adequate nourishment. It is wrapped around the left upper arm. MUAC tests can also be conducted on pregnant women for early detection of malnutrition.

India is expected to become the third-largest economy in the world with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$5 trillion in the next three years and touch \$7 trillion by 2030. Today, it is the 5th largest with a GDP of \$3.7 trillion after the USA, China, Germany and Japan (Source: The Hindu 29.01.2024). Despite our steady GDP growth and Food Corporation of India (FCI) godowns having surplus stock of food grains and pulses, we still come across numerous cases of starvation and malnutrition.

The Salesian College can be a trailblazer if it trains Family, Women's and Youth Commissions of each parish in Bengal to ensure not a single parishioner goes without food. Parish family database and mapping thereof will come handy in this initiative. This will also help in reduction of cases of Wasting, Stunting and Underweight in all our parishes.

ISAAC HAROLD GOMES

"The advantage of writing"

The article by Arokia Dhas Rayappan, "The advantage of writing" (The Herald-19-25th April) was interesting. Being a writer and poet I know the advantage of writing and how it helping in developing the society and surroundings around us. I started writing in the Letters to the Editor column in different newspapers when I was still in school and in those days there were no computers

but only typewriters. When my first letter was published I was only in Std. VII, thus began my road to writing. Through my letters to Editor I made the authorities clean up the drains, repair the potholed roads and through my poems I united separated loved ones and couples. This hobby of writing develops in school when we write essays on different topics, thus awakening the writer hidden deep within ourselves.

CAJETAN PETER D'SOUZA

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Liturgy

MY FAVOURITE
SAINT

Saint of the Day for April 29

Saint Catherine of Siena

The value Catherine makes central in her short life and which sounds clearly and consistently through her experience is complete surrender to Christ. What is most impressive about her is that she learns to view her surrender to her Lord as a goal to be reached through time.

She was the 23rd child of Jacopo and Lapa Benincasa and grew up as an intelligent, cheerful, and intensely religious person. Catherine disappointed her mother by cutting off her hair as a protest against being overly encouraged to improve her appearance in order to attract a husband. Her father ordered her to be left in peace, and she was given a room of her own for prayer and meditation.

She entered the Dominican Third Order at 18 and spent the next three years in seclusion, prayer, and austerity. Gradually, a group of followers gathered around her—men and women, priests and religious. An active public apostolate grew out of her contemplative life. Her letters, mostly for spiritual instruction and encouragement of her followers, began to take more and more note of public affairs. Opposition and slander resulted from her mixing fearlessly with the world and speaking with the candor and authority of one completely committed to Christ. She was cleared of all charges at the Dominican General Chapter of 1374.

Her public influence reached great heights because of her evident holiness, her membership in the Dominican Third Order, and the deep impression she made on the pope. She worked tirelessly for the crusade against the Turks and for peace between Florence and the pope.

In 1378, the Great Schism began, splitting the allegiance of Christendom between two, then three, popes and putting even saints on opposing



sides. Catherine spent the last two years of her life in Rome, in prayer and pleading on behalf of the cause of Pope Urban VI and the unity of the Church. She offered herself as a victim for the Church in its agony. She died surrounded by her “children” and was canonized in 1461.

Catherine ranks high among the mystics and spiritual writers of the Church. In 1939, she and Francis of Assisi were declared co-patrons of Italy. Pope Paul VI named her and Teresa of Avila doctors of the Church in 1970. Her spiritual testament is found in *The Dialogue*.

Though she lived her life in a faith experience and spirituality far different from that of our own time, Catherine of Siena stands as a companion with us on the Christian journey in her undivided effort to invite the Lord to take flesh in her own life. Events which might make us wince or chuckle or even yawn fill her biographies: a mystical experience at six, childhood betrothal to Christ, stories of harsh asceticism, her frequent ecstatic visions. Still, Catherine lived in an age which did not know the rapid change of 21st-century mobile America. The value of her life for us today lies in her recognition of holiness as a goal to be sought over the course of a lifetime.

By KT Thomas, SJ

People love darkness rather than light
It is because their deeds are wicked!
And they are afraid of getting exposed
They want to conceal their shameful acts.
This is what a sacred scripture tells us
And our own experience affirms the same
Yes, people prefer the darkness of evil
Untruth, injustice, and unrighteousness.
Because they have a strong proclivity
To worship beauty and shun the ugly.
But the truth is often ugly and unsettling
And falsehood, beautiful and alluring!
It's not just deeds but thoughts and fancies too
Can be evil and infelicitous.
Deep within the privacy of our hearts
We do indulge in thoughts and fantasies.
If they are heard or seen by those around
Surely we will blush with embarrassment.
We hate to see such an ugly state within

PRIMORDIAL
ENIGMA

Therefore, off we turn the light of truth.
We're zealous to protect our false image
And the perception of the populace
To safeguard our status, name, and fame
And pass for accomplished gentlemen!
The most dreaded thing in the world is truth;
And those who speak it, the most hated!
But those who block or hate the light of truth
Have something dark and sinister to hide
Truth indeed is an awesome Terminator
It demolishes one's false self-image
And bursts the bubble of megalomania
Self-conceit and all pretentiousness.
The truth will lift the masks and veils we wear
Reveal our true selves behind the veneer
With warts and tags, scars and carbuncles
And destroy our carefully crafted persona!

Stripped of all such trappings and pretensions
It makes us stand naked and fully exposed
But we don't want to lose our self-respect
Or endure shame and public disgrace.
Therefore, we fear the searchlight of truth
And desperately try to snuff it out!
All powers of darkness from everywhere
Will fight to extinguish their common foe.
There's a primordial hostility
An eternal duel, warfare, between
Light and darkness with their loyal forces
And good and evil in their varied forms.
In this unrelenting deadly warfare
Hellish darkness seems to eclipse light,
And ugly evil is all set to conquer good.
This conflict is there within us too!
This battle will last till the end of times
As long as our nature remains the same
But one day this evil will be defeated.
When the reign of God is fully established!

Sunday
Reflections

EASTER V [B] (April 28)

Acts 9:26-31; Ps 22; 1Jn 3:18-24; Jn 15:1-8

Introduction: Today's Scripture selections emphasize the need for Christians to abide in Christ as a condition for producing fruits of kindness, mercy, charity, and holiness.

Scripture lessons summarized: The first reading, taken from the Acts of the Apostles, testifies to the abundance of spiritual fruits yielded by the apostles because of their close bond with the risen Lord. The reading tells us how the Lord pruned the former Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, a fanatic who had persecuted the Church, to produce a fruit-bearing branch called Paul, the zealous Apostle to the Gentiles, entirely dedicated to the proclamation of the Gospel. Even Paul's forced return to Tarsus for a brief period is an example of God's pruning of the vine to bring forth a greater harvest, namely, the mission to the Gentiles. In today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 22), we sing the triumphant end of the Psalm which begins, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

The scripture lessons summarized: The first reading, taken from the Acts of the Apostles, testifies to the abundance of spiritual fruits yielded by the apostles because of their close bond with the risen Lord. The reading tells us how the Lord pruned the former fanatical Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, who had persecuted the Church, to produce a fruit-bearing branch called Paul, the zealous Apostle to the Gentiles, a man now entirely dedicated to the proclamation of the Gospel. Even Paul's forced return to Tarsus for a brief period is an example of God's pruning of the vine to bring forth a greater harvest, namely, the mission to the Gentiles. In today's Responsorial Psalm we sing the end of Ps 22, "... to Him My soul shall live ... let the coming generation be told of the Lord that they may proclaim to a people yet to be born the Justice He has shown," drawing our strength from Jesus' courage and trust in His Father. In today's **second reading**, John, in his first letter to the Church, explains that only if we remain united with Christ by putting our Faith in him and drawing our spiritual strength from him, will we be able to obey God's commandments, especially the commandment of love. **In the Gospel**, taken from the Last Supper discourse, Jesus uses God's Old Testament image of the vine and branches to help his disciples to understand the closeness of their relationship with him and the necessity of their maintaining it. They are not simply rabbi and disciples. Their lives are mutually dependent – as close as a vine and its branches. In fact, in using this image, Jesus is explaining to them and to us what our relationship with him should become.

Jesus claims that he is the true vine: Since Israel has become a degenerate vine producing bitter wild grapes, Jesus makes the unique claim that he is the true and ideal Vine and his disciples are the living and fruit-producing branches. He clarifies his statement, explaining that his Heavenly Father is the Vine-grower (v. 1), he (Christ) is the Vine (v. 5), his disciples are branches (v. 5) and those who do not abide in him are useless branches, suitable only to be cut away and thrown into the fire (v. 6). Jesus is the true Vine, because the old vine, the original chosen people, was succeeded by the new Vine, the Church, the Mystical Body whose Head is Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3:9). To be fruitful, one must be joined to the new, true Vine, Christ. It is living the life of Christ, the life of grace, which gives the believer the nourishment which enables him or her to yield the fruits of eternal life. This image of the Vine also helps us to understand the unity of the Church.

Homily starter anecdotes: "Jesus nut" The "Jesus nut," also called the "Jesus pin," is the nut that holds the main rotor to the mast of some helicopters, such as the UH-1 Iroquois. The long, strong metallic fans of the helicopter are fitted to the main rotor of the mast by a single nut or pin. This single connector got the name, "Jesus nut" from American soldiers in Vietnam; the technical term is MRRN or main rotor retaining nut. The origin of the term comes from the idea that, if the "Jesus nut" were to fail in flight, the helicopter would detach from the rotors and the only thing left for the crew to do would be to pray to Jesus before the helicopter crashed! — Today's Gospel explains why Jesus must be the pivotal point in our lives, through the little parable of the vine and the branches. (<https://frtonyshomilies.com/>).

— Fr. Anthony Kadavil

Archdiocese

Basic Ecclesial Communities Orientation to sustain BECs/SCCs



By Mr. Jyotirmoy Shah

Participants from 12 parishes of Asansol diocese attended an Orientation on Basic Ecclesial Communities at Chetana, Diocesan Pastoral centre, Burdwan April 12 to 14, 2024. The participants started the sessions with the Holy Bible procession each day in the beginning, enthroned and shared the Word of God.

On the 1st day the guest speaker was Fr. Jothi, SJ of Calcutta Province. He was introduced by Mr. Mathias Murmu of Kamarpara parish. Fr. Jothi detailed the present situation of the country with various statistics. He elaborated how the tribals and poor are exploited economically, socially and politically.

Fr. Jothi presented with powerpoint how Christian Community are overburden with various policies of the Government. He also explained the importance of every vote to cast in the forthcoming election to save and uphold our democratic constitution and Generation. Frs. S. Britto and D. Antony moderated the question-answer sessions.

About 60 priests, religious and laity attended the session and benefitted immensely. All promised to vote in the coming elections and also pray for the country. The participants were enlightened about the political situation of the

state and the country.

Fr. Jothi also detailed the importance of Nazarene Manifesto based on the Gospel of St. Luke (4: 16 - 21). He exhorted all to follow the Manifesto of Jesus Christ who gave his life to defend and redeem all of us. Thanksgiving was given by Mr. Michael Shah.

The main facilitator for the second and third day was Fr. IP Sarto. He took sessions on the Bible, the four significant marks of the BEC/ SCC and the role of every Christian in the neighbourhood.

The second day started with the Gospel sharing in three groups.

After the Bible procession and Veneration, the Seven Steps of Gospel sharing was explained in details to the participants by Srs. Roshita Murmu, SCCG, Rosa Marandi, FJ & Mr. Michael Shah.

Four Marks of BEC/SCC and Agenda for the BEC meeting was thoroughly elaborated by Fr. Sarto with various examples. He also taught them how to keep minutes of the BEC meetings in the villages. All understood the importance of BEC in their villages.

In the evening Bishop Cyprian Monis, Emeritus of Asansol celebrated the Holy Eucharist.

Talk on faith formation and Sharing the Gospel was given by Fr. Rony Vincent of Chetana. The participants also displayed their skill by staging dramas on various Biblical themes.

Fr. Sarto helped them to make concrete Action Plan for positive growth in each Parish. All proposed to have follow up sessions after two months. The participants assured to revive the BECs which are not functioning well in the villages.

Ten candidates were chosen to continue BEC animation in the parishes and to help one another in village animation.

SXUK conducts FDP on IPP



By Dr. Somak Sen, SXUK

St. Xavier's University Kolkata (SXUK) organised a Faculty Development Programme (FDP) on 'Institutional Values and Best Practices - Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP)' for its faculty members on March 23 and from April 8 to 16, 2024 at the university campus.

The objective of the FDP was to delve deep into the dynamics of Jesuit higher education, exploring its foundational principles, influences, and institutional frameworks.

While delivering the inaugural address, Rev. Dr. John Felix Raj, S.J., Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor of SXUK said, "The university provides a comprehensive understanding of Jesuit higher education which inspires our teachers to uphold its values and principles in their respective roles within academia."

He also said, "A collective desire among teachers is needed to explore further and reflect on the transformative potential of Jesuit education in shaping individuals and communities towards the common good."

Fr. Dr. Peter Arockiam, SJ, Vice Principal of St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, deliberated on profound influence of Ignatian charism on Jesuit education and its collaborators. His session illuminated the transformative impact of Ignatian spirituality in shaping educational practices, emphasizing the holistic development of individuals within the Jesuit educational ethos.

Fr. Jeyaraj Veluswamy, SJ, the Rector of St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, explored the concept of teaching and learning in the spirit of MAGIS. He advised faculty members to embrace excellence, service, and continuous growth in their educational endeavors, encapsulating the essence of Jesuit pedagogy.

Study materials were given to participants for deeper understanding of Ignatian Worldwide for Personal and Professional Transformation, Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, Characteristics of Jesuit Education, Understanding Teaching Learning in the spirit of MAGIS, Servant Leadership: Self and Others, etc.

As part of rural immersion program, a visit to the St. Xavier's College, Kolkata (Raghabpur campus) provided first hand insights into the transformative impact of Jesuit education in rural settings.

Dr. Panchali Sen, Dean, International Studies and Programmes of the St. Xavier's College, Kolkata and Cheryl Francis, Director of social work & NSS at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata highlighted the contributions of Jesuits to educational collaborations at the valedictory sessions.

OBITUARY

ANTONY KULANGARA A MAN WITH A GOLDEN SMILE

By JOSEPH CHACKO

Antony Kulangara, a parishioner of Church of Christ the King, Park Circus, for over 55 years passed away peacefully on the 16th of April, 2024 at his residence at 34, Karnani Estate, Kolkata. Antony Kulangara was truly a committed Parishioner who lived an exemplary life. A person known for his infectious smile by which he touched the lives of many.



Mr Antony Kulangara was born on the 15th of October 1931 in Chempu, Vaikom. After his SSLC examination in Kerala, he came to Kolkata to build his career in the year 1958. He studied his intermediate at Surendranath College and thereafter completed his B. Com from St. Xavier's College. He joined 'The Herald' and worked in the circulation department for over five years while studying at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata. He gained a lot

of knowledge in Journalism and wrote several articles and journals. He married Rani Kulangara in the year 1964 at Kottayam, when his wife Rani was working as an officer at the Sales Tax Department of the Government of Kerala. They were blessed with two sons, Sajan and Soni. His son Soni tragically passed away in 2013 due to cardiac arrest. Antony was heartbroken yet took this loss in prayerful resignation.

After his graduation, Mr Kulangara worked in Apeejay Shipping lines from 1963 to 1970. It was then that he opted for a VRS and embarked on his business venture of starting 'Queens Stores' at Park Circus Market. Mr Antony always had a radiating smile and warmth whenever he dealt with his customers at his shop. Whenever a Christian used to come into his shop he used to always give them a medal or a Holy Picture or even share a verse from the Bible. He had a close encounter with everyone while transacting business and always with a mind to touch and transform lives. He always had a good word for everyone who trooped into "Queens Stores"

Mr Antony Kulangara served Kerala Catholic Social Service Centre in various capacities such as committee member, Treasurer and President (1982-83). During his presidency, Antony played a pivotal role in KCSSC's acquisition of property with an old building at Thakurpukur, later transformed into St. Thomas Bhavan, a gentleman's hostel. It was his initiative that

led to the commencement of the Syro-Malabar Mass at the Church of Christ the King in 1983. He was the President of the Evangelisation cell at Christ the King. Mr Kulangara along with his wife Rani were active members of the Basic Christian Community from its very inception. Their home became the hub of several prayer meetings and gatherings. As associates of St Jeanne Jugan at St. Joseph's Home for the Aged, run by the Little Sisters of the Poor they regularly helped the inmates. As a dutiful parishioner Antony used to religiously go to Church and assist the Parish Priest in counting the Sunday offertory collection. The Parish recognized his dedication and efforts and conferred on him the "Laity award"

Since 1964, Antony had been a benefactor of Morning Star College in Barrackpore, regularly supporting the education and training of the seminarians. At 92, both Antony and Rani attended the Benefactors meet in April 2023. Antony was truly a man of God. And the family and friends who paid their last respects to him, as he went on his eternal journey, spoke volumes of the man he was, living life in simplicity and humility and bearing everything with a beaming smile. The legacy of Antony Kulangara will forever be etched in the minds of countless lives whom he touched. His Obituary card rightfully has the verse which describes the man, "Well done, my good and faithful servant.....enter into the joy of your Master" (Mathew 25: 21)

Youth

Election of Youth Office Bearers St. Patrick's Church Dum-Dum



By Akanksha Maria kerketta

The election of new youth office bearers for St. Patrick's Church Dum Dum was held on 21st April, in a spirit of enthusiasm and participation. The election process aimed to select capable individuals to lead and represent the youth of St Patrick's Church inside and outside the Parish.

The election process began with an inaugural speech by Mr Oscar Gomes, the Youth Animator who welcomed all the youth members, senior youths, and Fr. Raju, the Parish Priest, followed by a short prayer to create an atmosphere to welcome the Holy Spirit which would guide each one to make the right choices. Mr Ajay Bilung and Ms Koyelica Chakraborty (senior youth mentors) then further explained the Election process through which deserving candidates will be chosen for the designated posts. They explained the authority, roles and duties that each post holds. The youths were enlightened with the eligibility and quality one must possess in order to shoulder such responsibilities. Ms Koyelica ended this briefing with a very remarkable line "with great power comes great responsibility."

Mr Ajay then introduced everyone to ICYM (Indian Catholic Youth Movement) which is the parent body of every Catholic youth cell in a Parish. He then invited Ms Akanksha Kerketta, a DEXCO invitee to enlighten everyone on the ICYM Memorandum. Ms Akanksha explained to everyone what the ICYM Memorandum consists of. The vision and mission of ICYM; the aims and objectives and that we all have the same goal as a young army of Christ our Lord and as the future

leaders of the Church as well as the World to come; the Parish Youth group, the Zonal Youth group, The Diocesan Youth group and how the ICYM hierarchy works; and lastly, the Rules and Regulations and how a youth group must work.

After this, all the nominees for the respective posts were called upon to give a short speech before the election process. Followed by a ballot system of voting where all eligible youth members of the church were invited to cast their votes. The voting process was conducted smoothly and transparently, ensuring that each vote was counted accurately.

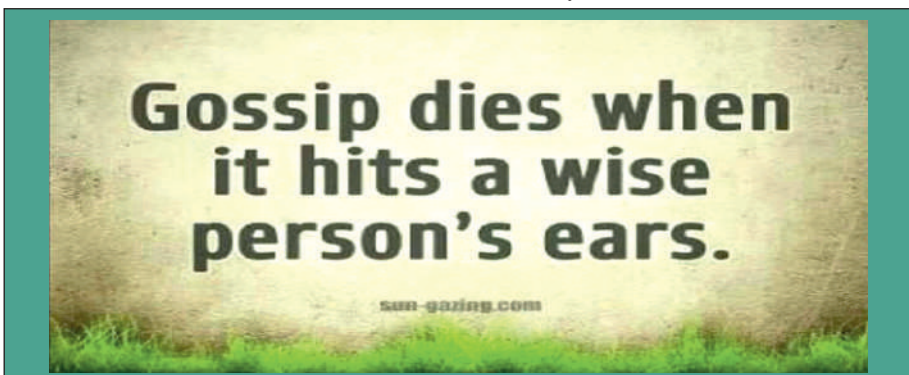
Results:

After the votes were cast and counted, the following candidates were elected on the basis of absolute majority as the new youth office bearers:

1. President: Suzanna Young
2. Vice President: John Gomes
3. Secretary: Jayati Ghosh
4. Treasurer: Smriti Ghosh

The Parish Priest Fr. Raju concluded the election meeting by congratulating the new office bearers as they embarked on their journey as the leaders of the Parish youth group for the following 2 years. He then asked everyone to join in for a closing prayer followed by a photo session.

The election of new youth office bearers for St. Patrick's Church Dum Dum was successful through a democratic process. The newly elected office bearers are expected to work diligently to fulfill their responsibilities and serve the youth community within the church. Their leadership will be instrumental in organizing various activities and events that will enrich the spiritual life of the church's youth members.



CAREER GUIDANCE SEMINAR FOR CHRISTIAN YOUTH

By JOSEPH CHACKO

The searing temperature did not deter Christian students numbering over 500, to attend the Career Guidance cum Motivational Seminar organised by the Catholic Teachers Guild of the rchdiocese of Kolkata. The Seminar was held at Don Bosco School, Park Circus, Kolkata on Saturday, 20th April, 2024 from 9 am to 1 pm. The program began by an introduction by the President of the Guild, Mr Joseph Chacko, where he welcomed the dignitaries and participants and outlined the purpose of the Seminar, to empower the young Christian students to take up well placed careers in future and be exemplary Christians wherever they are placed in the country.

The Chief guest of the event, Bishop Nirmol Gomes SDB, Bishop of Krishnanagar, picking up his accordion began the seminar with two hymns in English and Bengali, followed by a meaningful prayer. The inaugural lamp was then lit by Bishop Nirmol Gomes, Fr Anthony Rodrick,



Director of Seva Kendra, Fr Dominic Gomes, Vicar General, Fr Sebastian James, Vice Principal (XI-XII) St. Xavier's Collegiate School, Fr Joy, Rector of Don Bosco School, Park Circus along with the Spiritual Director of the Guild, Fr Moly D'Costa.

The keynote address was given by Bishop Nirmol Gomes. He exhorted the young to have a proper mentor and vision in life. He referred to Victor Franklin's book "Search for a Meaning in Life" and urged all to live meaningfully the life that God has given each one of them. He reiterated that today's youth are multi-talented but if God is not the center of their life, then all their efforts would be lost and fruitless. He urged the youth to work towards unity and said "Today oneness is missing. We are living in a polarized divisive society" The Bishop's speech was truly inspirational and set the tone for the Seminar.

The next speaker, Fr Anthony Rodrick outlined the social service projects undertaken by Seva Kendra. He highlighted Seva Kendra's 22 planned programmes across Bengal and its short term vocational training for dropouts to help them stand on their own feet and earn a living. He gave a call for young volunteers as there is so much work of social service but labourers are few.

In the next session "Call to Religious Life" -Sisters Helen and Regina from The Little Sisters of the Poor made an excellent presentation on their Vocation to serve the aged and invited the young to come as volunteers to their Home for the Aged. Fr

Sebastian James, then presented a power point presentation on how to discern Gods call to embrace the life of a Priest or a religious.

The Christian resource persons were then introduced and felicitated. They were then led to the different classrooms to interact with the students on their preferred choice of careers.

We had Dr Sipra Goswami for those who wanted to take up the medical profession, Mr Raja Xavier an expert in Law, Mrs Althea Philips for Journalism, Mr Xavier Gomes for those interested in the Hospitality industry, Mr Luke Gomes for Management, Mr Michael Rocha for the IT Sector, Mrs Tanishka Safri for Psychology, Mr Farrell Shah for Media, Mr Peter Gomes for Music and Mr Terence John who inspired young people to take up teaching as a career as well assisted in the General stream. Mr Robert an UX designer also motivated the students on web design.

After an hour of fruitful interaction with

our Christian resource persons in the respective classrooms the students assembled in the hall. Mohit Pradhan from the Guild then presented two motivational videos. This was followed by a session conducted by Mr Shane Calvert, (Ex MLA) Vice-Chairperson, Minorities Commission, Government of West-Bengal who shared about the different Government loans, Scholarships and other schemes for the minorities. He expressed regret that these schemes and loans are not availed by the Christian community as most of them were unaware of such schemes offered by the Government for the minorities. The Catholic Teachers Guild could also help the students to initiate this process.

Fr Moly D'Costa then called on Mr Peter Gomes, lead singer of the Band 'Messengers' who presented a melodious Hindi song bringing the young people on their feet. Fr Moly D'Costa then rounded off an extremely fruitful Career Guidance Seminar speaking about the "Way ahead". Mr Joseph Chacko, delivered the Vote of thanks expressing his gratitude to the Salesians at Don Bosco School, Park Circus for their hospitality rendered every year when the Guild hosts the Career Guidance Seminar. He appreciated the hard work and commitment put in by the Exco members of the Guild. Mr Raja Xavier, a practising lawyer said, "Wish there was a proper infrastructure to offer regular career counselling and support for our Catholic youth."



Indian archdiocese seeks to leave Eastern rite Church

At emergency meeting, around 300 priests from Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese sought independent status under the pope

Priests of an archdiocese belonging to the Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church want the Vatican to recognize their archdiocese as an independent Church after their Church's synod failed to resolve a five-decade-old liturgy dispute.

During an emergency meeting on April 19, some 300 priests of Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese asked archdiocesan apostolic administrator Bishop Bosco Puthur to communicate to the Vatican that they wished to be separated from the Syro-Malabar Church.

Father Jose Vailikodath, public relations officer of the Archdiocesan Protection Committee, a body of the archdiocesan priests, said the priests made their stance known after the administrator made it clear that the Church's synod would not yield to their demand to continue with their Mass.

Vailikodath, in a statement, said the priests wanted Puthur to inform the Vatican to recognize their archdiocese as a separate church under the pope outside of the Syro-Malabar Church.

The priests also told the apostolic administrator that even if they agreed to celebrate the synod-approved Mass, their parishioners would not allow them to change a liturgy they had been following for five decades.

The dispute stems from a synodal decision to implement uniformity in liturgical celebrations. The synod wanted all priests to turn to the altar during Eucharistic prayer, but the archdiocesan priests refused to accept this and continued to face the congregation throughout the Mass.

A separation could further complicate the situation as the archdiocese is the seat of the Church's head, Major Archbishop Raphael Thattil. The Syro-Malabar Church, based in southern Indian Kerala state, has 35 dioceses and some 5 million Catholics. Some 10 percent of its Catholics belong to the archdiocese.

During the meeting, Puthur read a letter from Thattil that threatened disciplinary action against priests who refused to celebrate the synod-approved Mass.

Vailikodath said the priests were unperturbed by the threat. According to Vailikodath, one of them said, "It would be better to establish a religious court to try the 450 priests as soon as possible and start punitive measures instead of negotiating."

The Archdiocesan Movement for Transparency (AMT) is a movement of priests, religious and laity that spearheads the demand for traditional Mass.

"We will not allow a synod-approved mass in our churches," said the movement's spokesperson, Riju Kanjookaran.

"If the synod is not ready to grant liturgy variant status to our Mass or allow us to continue with it, it will be good for us to remain committed to the Vatican and become part of it as a separate church," he told UCA News on April 22.

The archdiocese witnessed several violent incidents over the liturgy dispute, especially after August 2021 when the synod decreed that all its dioceses follow the synod-approved Mass for liturgical unity in the Church.

The dispute dates back to the 1970s over the orientation of the priest during the Mass. In 1999, the Church's synod devised a uniform Mass as a compromise. It required priests to face the altar during the Eucharistic prayer and face the people at other times.

However, following opposition, it was not implemented in all dioceses. In August 2021, the synod ordered all 35 dioceses to implement it from November 2021, reviving the controversy.

After initial opposition, its 34 dioceses adopted the synod-approved Mass in November 2021, but priests in Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese refused and continued to celebrate Mass facing the people.

"You define your own life. Don't let other people write your script."

OPRAH WINFREY

Youth taught to use social media to become Good Samaritans

By Magimai Pragasam

Trichy: A workshop organized by the Tamil Nadu Church's online television channel has taught young people to use social media to help society.

"We have to decide whether to become Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders," said Father Jenith Sekar, the technical manager of Madha TV and the coordinator of the April 12-13 workshop on "Storytelling in the Digital Age."

participants the Vatican document "Towards Full Presence - A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media,"

Quoting the document, he described social media as another road to Jericho. "Social media is not a tool but a space. We need to foster a sense of community, become attentive to shared values, experiences, hopes, joys and sorrows in the digital space," he asserted.



The priest pointed out that social media is a gift of the modern era that offers "a great opportunity to express our inherent sense of fraternity, to become Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles rather than provoking greater hatred and bitterness."

Around 45 young people from various dioceses in Tamil Nadu attended the April 12-13 workshop at Kaviri Communications Centre in Tiruchirappalli or Trichy. Madha TV, the online Catholic Satellite Television of the Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council, organized the workshop to form socially responsible and committed young media warriors in the digital age.

The participants were taught the art of content creation, the art of storytelling, the process of short film production, cyber activism, and pastoral reflections on engagement with social media.

They produced short videos on social issues and organized group activities to generate content for social media.

Father Sekar also explained to the

Father Sekar also addressed the dangers in the digital highway, ways to care for neighbor and spread Good News on the internet and the style of Jesus in the internet age.

Father Innocent who spoke on Cyber activism stressed the need to use social media to fight for human rights, mobilize people and to be responsible citizens.

"When you use the internet constructively for community building and awareness creation among people on social issues, you are engaged in cyber activism," he explained.

The short films produced by the participants were screened in the presence of Bishop Savarimuthu Arokiaraj of Tiruchirappalli, who applauded the young people for their creativity and presented certificates to them.

"I am deeply touched by your concern for the Church, and its mission. Whenever you promote human values, you are sharing Jesus with others, said the prelate.

Vatican official wants Asian bishops to communicate with heart

The Church needs lessons from Asia on communication, says Paolo Ruffini, the prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Communication

The Vatican's communication head, Paolo Ruffini, told a group of Asian bishops that the Church should communicate through love and sharing more than technology and techniques.

Ruffini was speaking at the opening of the April 15-20 program organized by the Bishops' Institute for Social Communication, which functions under the Asian bishops' Office for Social Communication in Bangkok.

"Evangelization is not dependent on media," and the "secret of communication is not technique but love," Ruffini, the prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Communication, told the 13 bishops

attending the program.

The Church needs lessons from Asia on communion, Ruffini said, adding that Asia thrives on communication.

The word communication comes from the Latin word "communicare," meaning to 'make common' or share, Ruffini said and asked the bishops to stress the concept of sharing and togetherness for better communication.

"Christian communication, like Christ's, must be marked by self-giving and not self-satisfaction prevalent in business and marketing," he said.

Before the internet and social media networks arrived, the Church existed as a network. However, the Church must plan to welcome digital culture to "evangelize the world and strengthen communion among all peoples," Ruffini said.

Perspective

The invisible Christians in India's 'festival of democracy'

(continued from pg01)

The community's activity in the Karnataka elections of last year and the leadership shown by Bangalore archbishop Peter Machado against non-state actors persecuting Christians and Muslims helped galvanize civil society. This, together with a shift in loyalties by an ethnic community, led to the defeat of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and brought the Congress back to power.

The general election has just seen the first of seven phases completed, covering 50 of the seats. However, with six rounds to go, the final one on June 1, it is becoming clear that there may not be even 20 Christian candidates among the 1,000 or so that will be put up by the two alliances seeking to come to power.

These two are the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the ruling BJP, and the 'INDIA' or Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, a loose democratic and religious minorities-friendly coalition led by the Congress, together with the Communist parties, and strong regional parties of Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Bengal, Jharkhand, Delhi and Maharashtra states.

In the past, the BJP has given only token representation to Muslims and Christians. In the last Lok Sabha, the BJP had a lone Christian MP, John Barla from Bengal, who was made a deputy minister for minority affairs. Throughout the five years of the last parliament, there was no Christian or Muslim cabinet minister in the government headed by Narendra Modi.

Modi is now seeking a record third straight term in office. But he has shown little change in attitude towards Muslims, who remain his main target in election rhetoric, instead of issues of development, economy, or standards of living in the world's most populous country.

The prime minister is trying hard to woo the Christian community, especially those in the rich and powerful Syro Malabar and Syro Malankara sui juris Rites, both based in Kerala. They have a significant presence in five of Kerala's 20 seats, which are in the central part of the state, which stretches along a narrow 500-kilometer strip between the mountains of the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea.

Modi and his party have tried hard to gain a foothold in Kerala, where the power balance alternates between the Marxist alliance and the Congress. Currently, the Marxists are in power in the state, but 19 of the 20 seats in parliament are with the Congress. To this end, they have tried to widen the wedge between the Christians of central Kerala and the Muslims in the neighboring northern regions.

Fanning latent Islamophobia among the Christian groups on the one hand and trying to break the Congress monopoly, especially over the Catholic Rites, Modi was able to win over Anil Anthony, the son of prominent Congress leader and former Defence Minister A K Anthony.

This is a blow to India's oldest political party, which has deep roots in the state as it has been able to represent the fishermen and boatmen on the one hand and the rich tea, coffee, and rubber estate owners and business segments of the Christians. With little industry in this state, no significant corporate and industrial elite exists. The BJP, however, has not put up any more Christian candidates in Kerala. The Congress alliance UDF has five Christians in the fray — Dean Kuriakose, Hibi Eden, Benny Behanan, Anto Antony, and Francis George.

The Congress has fielded Viriato Fernandes in Goa. The number of Christians contesting on behalf of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu is not known, but the state usually has at least two Christians in parliament.

In Andhra and Telangana, the two Telugu-speaking states, the count is always challenging to make as several candidates from the Dalit community may register themselves as Hindus. The Congress has fielded at least one known and one Dalit candidate from Telangana.

The situation is even more startling in the eight states of

the Northeast, which people assume to be largely Christian-dominated. Arunachal has a Christian candidate from Congress, and the large state of Assam has just one Congress candidate, Roslina Tirky. Jones Ingty Kathar, a former bureaucrat, is backed by the Autonomous Hills People Party.

Barring Orissa and Jharkhand, which may have between them perhaps four candidates from the Christian community, representing the Congress and its allies in Jharkhand and the Biju Janata Dal in Orissa, no other party in the remaining states is likely to put up a Christian candidate.

Many may join the election fray as independents. Some claim the backing of little-known entities, including a well-known former official and popular campaigner against white slavery, Anson Thomas from a little-known party, the People's Party of India (Secular), and Samuel Soni, a candidate in the Punjab put up by a group of independent churches.

Historically, only a very few independents, either rich men or scions of former feudal ruling families, have succeeded in the past.

In a way, the community has brought this upon itself. Over the decades, the young in rural areas, urban areas, and universities have not shown the same enthusiasm as other communities in grassroots politics — trade unions and advocacy groups.

Aspirations are geared towards early employment. For women, nursing remains their eternal favorite, with its promise of immediate jobs and an opportunity to make a living in the United States or Europe.

In industry-less Kerala, millions of middle-class and working-class youth have gone to the Islamic countries of the Middle East to work as engineers, construction laborers, and shepherds. Their places have been taken by poor migrant laborers from Orissa, Jharkhand, and Bihar. Their remittances support family and the state economy, but their political power is lost.

In Kerala, there is a strong relationship between the Church, especially the three Catholic Rites, and the politicians from the community. It is a symbiotic relationship that is fruitful for both but does little to create grassroots cadres across the political spectrum.

Elsewhere in the country, unlike the Muslim political dispersal, the Christian community is spread sparsely along former mission stations, railway and military headquarters in towns in the Indo-Gangetic plains and the Deccan plateau, and the old port cities.

Two districts of the Punjab, Gurdaspur and Amritsar along the border with Pakistan, and the Andhra and Tamil Nadu coastal areas have some pockets of Christian dominance. However, they do not translate into parliament seats.

The lack of grassroots-level activism and training has kept young people from reaching the political heights they could otherwise have reached.

Independence. The focus was on getting political seats. It would seem that the Church hierarchy has not been interested in the area historically in the decades since through the hierarchy's relationship with the Congress party. There is no assessment of the Christian presence in influential village and district-level self-governance structures like panchayats and district boards.

Of late the hierarchy has tried to help youths pass government selection examinations to find places in federal and state civil and police services. But this has not been a well-thought-out program and remains random, with a very limited success rate.

The Church leadership has also sent very confusing signals to its people. A strong segment of the hierarchy seems inclined to align with the ruling BJP, as for decades, they aligned with the Congress. Modi's infamous Christmas party, which saw cardinals and bishops, sports icons and gold merchants, bend and bow before the prime minister, was the zenith of this thesis, or the nadir of its political understanding.

And yet, there are a handful of hierarchy who have shown some rare backbone in the face of this storm. Archbishop Machado of Bangalore is one such person, along with a band of brave religious from the ranks of the Jesuits, Salesians, and others and several congregations of religious sisters.

The most recent example is Cardinal Filip Neri of Goa, who outed a seditious government bid to sabotage voting in Goa by organizing a train pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine in Vellanakani. To paraphrase the cardinal, people should give up the pilgrimage and instead cast their votes for secular candidates.

Correctly so. Recent years have seen a change in the body politic and the religious and demographic landscape, which inflicts great stress on religious minorities. It has rapidly eroded constitutional rights and disrupted the democratic development of Christians (and Muslims).

Twelve states in India have anti-conversion laws, which are often used to harass and target Christians. Many fear that the election results could see more states adopt these laws or even implement a nationwide law. Tribal Christians face attacks and threats from activists of the BJP's non-state gangs.

The ethnic group of the Kuki-Zo in the state of Manipur has for the past year seen terrifying violence, including rape and killings, with most churches totaling over 320 destroyed in the Imphal Valley.

Christian NGOs are being labeled agencies of religious conversion and are having their licenses canceled.

The election manifestos and campaigns of political parties show that the BJP is banking once more on the Hindu religion and Lord Ram, rather than on its development record. The most influential party has also shown its majoritarian bias. Every vote will count to limit the electoral juggernaut. (UCA News)

The Elephant Rope

When walking through an elephant camp, a man noticed that the elephants were only secured with a small rope that was tied around one ankle. He wondered why the elephants didn't break free from the rope, as the elephants were certainly strong enough to do so.

He asked a trainer why the elephants didn't try to break free, and the trainer responded by saying that they use the same size rope for baby elephants all the way up to adulthood.

Because they're too small when they're babies to break free from the rope, they grow up being conditioned that the rope is stronger than they are. As adults, they think the rope can still hold them, so they don't try to fight it.

The Moral: The elephants in this case are experiencing learned helplessness. This phenomenon occurs when



someone has been conditioned to anticipate discomfort in some way without having a way to avoid it or make it stop.

After enough conditioning, the person will stop any attempts to avoid the pain, even if they see an opportunity to escape.

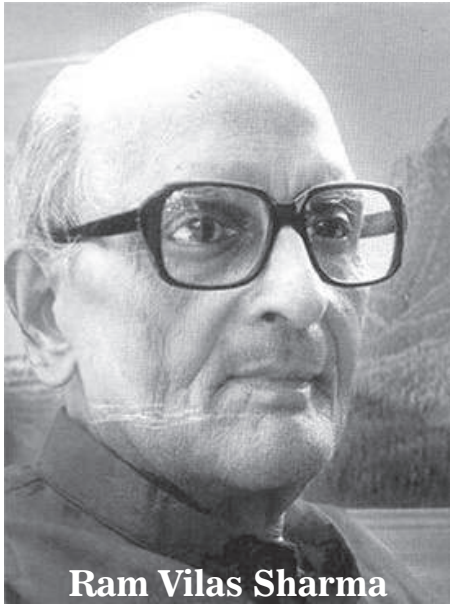
If you go through life thinking that you can't do something just because you have failed at doing it in the past, you're living with a fixed mindset.

You have to let go of your limiting beliefs in order to make the breakthroughs that are required for

your ultimate success.

Don't let other people tell you that you can't do something, and don't hold onto an assumption that you can't grow and learn from past failures.

Relevant Concerns in Series – 142
Poets of India – 69
Prophetic Voices from the Periphery



Ram Vilas Sharma

By Francis Sunil Rosario

Ram Vilas Sharma (10 October 1912 – 30 May 2000) was a progressive literary critic. Besides, he was a well-known essayist, thinker and poet of modern Hindi literature. He wrote extensively on the works of renowned Hindi poets such as Maithili Sharan Gupta and Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala'. His critical essays are highly regarded for their insightful analysis and scholarly rigor. In a career spanning nearly five decades, Sharma authored over 50 books.

He was born on 10 October 1912 in Unchgaon Sani, Unnao District, Uttar Pradesh. He received his early education in his native village and at Jhansi. He went to Lucknow and gained his Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in English Literature.

He was also a professor of English. Dr. Ram Vilas Sharma was India's first 'Vyas Samman' winner. Ram Vilas Sharma in his long writing journey created nearly 100 important books. "Bharatendu Yuga", "Mahavirprasad Dwivedi and Hindi Renaissance", "Nirala's Literature Sadhana Classical works like 'English Raj and Marxism in India', 'Western Asia and Rigveda', 'Indian Renaissance and Europe', 'Indian Culture and Hindi Territory', 'Gandhi, Ambedkar, Lohia and problems of Indian History'.

His Career: Sharma completed his bachelor's degree in English Literature from Allahabad University and went on to earn a master's degree in English Literature from the same institution. He then pursued a Doctorate in English Literature from the University of London, where his thesis focused on the works of the poet John Milton.

After returning to India, Sharma began his career as a lecturer at Allahabad University. He later became a professor of Hindi Literature at the same university. He was also a lecturer at Lucknow University, and then moved to Balwant Rajput College, Agra, as head of the English department. Sharma was a prolific writer and poet, and his works are known for their depth, complexity, and profound philosophical insights.

He retired finally as Director of KM Hindi Institute, Agra. Basically a critic, he gave

new dimension to biographical-historical criticism, and analyzed Linguistic and literary issues from a Marxist viewpoint.

His Works:

His study of Nirala's Ram ki shakti puja, Tulsidas, Saroj-smriti and parimal is a model of creative criticism. In 1939 he wrote a scholarly paper on Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala', presented at a session of Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. He won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1970 for his Nirala ki Sahitya Sadhana (in 3 parts).

His massive work Bharat ke Pracheen bhasha parivar aur Hindi won him the first Vyas Samman (1991) instituted by the K. K. Birla Foundation. He was Socialist both in thought and deed.

Among the Hindi writers those who impressed him most, besides Nirala the poet, are Acharya Shukla the critic, Bhartendu the pioneer and Premchand the novelist. He took them up for detailed study and wrote authentic literary criticism on them, though from the progressive angle. He analyzed their personality and brought out their contribution to Hindi literature. According to him Bhartendu Harishchandra, Premchand and Nirala are outstanding not only as litterateurs but also as men endowed with magnanimity of soul.

His Assessment of Acharya Shukla:

In his assessment of Acharya Shukla (Acharya Ramchandra Shukla aur Hindi Alochana) critic Sharma emphasises the fact that the writer opposed feudal and courtly literature as it did not give a true picture of the life of the common people and contemporary society.

Award and Legacy Sharma's contributions to Hindi literature were widely recognized, and he received numerous awards and honors throughout his career.

Sharma received the Sahitya Akademi Award, in 1959 for his collection of poems titled "Bharat ke Pracheen Bhasha Parivar aur Hindi" (The Ancient Language Family of India and Hindi). This work explored the historical and linguistic roots of the Hindi language and its connection to other Indian languages. The Sahitya Akademi Award is considered one of the highest honours in Indian literature, and Sharma's win further solidified his reputation as a leading figure in Hindi poetry.

In addition to the Sahitya Akademi Award, Sharma received numerous other awards and honours for his contributions to literature. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan, one of India's highest civilian awards, in 1976, in recognition of his outstanding achievements in the field of literature.

Sharma's legacy extends beyond his poetry. He was also a respected literary critic and wrote extensively on the works of other Hindi poets. His critical essays are highly regarded for their insightful analysis and scholarly rigor, and they continue to be studied and referenced by scholars and students of Hindi literature.

Sharma passed away on May 30, 2000, leaving behind a rich legacy of literary works that continue to inspire and influence generations of readers and writers.

Find the Writer in You and Become One!

By Arockia Dhas Rayappan

Hi reader! So far, you have been a reader of the prestigious The Herald - The tabloid-size Christian weekly carrying local and international Church news; now onwards you can begin your new journey as a writer! Do you believe that you can write? We often entertain the thought to become writers. At times we are inspired by either a significant other or a digital influencer to explore writing. Other times, we do self-talk about it and discard it later!

Recall your initial response to becoming a writer! When I enquired my friends and relatives if anyone wished to become a writer, their instant responses rhymed: "How's it me?" "Do you believe that I can write at all?" "Are you kidding?" "Come on! Stop it!" "No way!" "I have no time for it!" "I will write after the completion of studies." "Writing isn't my cup of tea!" "Please, leave me alone." "Why are you after me?" "Don't you have anything else to do?" "Don't you have anything else to talk about?" "What do I get if at all I will land up becoming a writer?" "I will write when I want." Do you second their responses? What have been your response so far? Relax a while... Now, let's proceed!

Hi reader! My attempt through this article is to use vocabularies that are part and parcel of our daily conversations. Be rest assured: you can read it without looking for the synonyms of the words in the dictionary to finish reading the article. This article is presented intentionally to you in the form of a letter to the writer in you - to rise from the slumber! Today, let us awaken the writer in you! Are you ready to have a go at the writer in you?

This article has a clear focus: it is to encourage you - the reader to contribute as a writer. Do you mind investing some of your valuable time asking yourself this simple question: "How many people do speak and write in English in India?"

<<https://www.livemint.com/news/india/in-india-who-speaks-in-english-and-where-1557814101428.html>> ; and "How many children do have access to basic education in India?" You will be in for a real surprise!<<https://ijcep.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40723-023-00117-4>>.

Why don't you make use of your privilege of knowing English to contribute something for the betterment of the society? For example, along with The Herald, there are other well-known diocesan magazines/ bulletins. You may send your contributions in the form of a comment to the published article, a report of an event/ competition that you were a part of, a poem, or an article. Feel free to send a write-up. You may ask: Why not in newspapers or other weekly, or fortnightly, and or monthly magazines, or even online newspapers? Sure, I second your suggestion and proposal. Please, go ahead.

Who is my target audience here? Yes, the target audience could be all The Herald readers as well as the followers of other denominations and communions.

I think, you are mostly families and parishioners, advocates, professors, journalists, human rights activists, Adivasi Rights Activists, Christian rights activists, even including youth from college and university, and institutes in English Medium, teachers (educationists),

professionals, entrepreneurs, religious sisters, religious priests, diocesan priests, and bishops and even politicians and government officials / members of other denominations even regional, and national institutes. Some could be even close collaborators of the organizations that are connected to Social Service Centre, CRI of both women and men religious, seminary, novitiate, philosophical and theological institutes. The message I wish to drive home here is that you too can write! Age is not a bar!

Remember, The Herald is distributed across the Archdiocese of Calcutta. "This publication has a national and international subscriber base among the faithful." It has more access to the people who shape the current and future generations. Your write-up could become an instrument to conscientize the readers - the future leaders of India and of the world. You as a writer can make a positive impact on the quality of the articles that would be published in the future. Your writing can offer an alternative perspective to someone who wishes to see a bright light at the end of the tunnel. Your writing can create a spark to help someone to turn into a new leaf.

Who knows? Have you already found the writer in you? Congrats if you have! It will mark a new beginning in your life. It is your day. Find the writer in You! Decide! Believe! Become one! Yes, You Can! Please, give it a try with The Herald.

Daniel H. Pink says, "Writing is an act of discovering what you think and what you believe." You may ask me the number of the themes/ topics/events that you wish to write. Here are some you may wish to explore: critique an event you came across as reported in newspapers; an ideology of a political party; a press release by a politician/ political party; a governmental policy; Supreme Court's judgment like that of Bilkis Banu; How Olympics in India would shape the future generation; ongoing wars; quality of education in India; secular India; box-office success of recent films that portray violence; influence of OTT on students; inspiring sports personalities; participation of youth in politics; and your expectations of a political leader in India. You may discover many more by yourself.

You have been readers of The Herald so far! Now, you begin your journey of writing. Why not start writing right now? You got it. Do not throw that idea away? Remember: You are the guardian of your dreams and hobbies.

Hi reader! You'll find a common mantra in all the stalwarts of writers. There is no exception to the mantra of becoming a writer, except practice! Practice! and practice! They all have been hesitant and nervous as you are now. So, go at it. I will be eager to read your contribution in The Herald!

The YouTube link of Florencia Andres on Transform Your Dreams into Reality with 'The Mindset Code' <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xWSeoVhMVE>> may offer you some best insights to make your dream into reality. Yes, you can make your dream a reality! I am sure, you will start humming the words of inspirational speaker saying, "Oh! What the heck! Go for it anyway!"

Wish you the best for the writing! A big thumbs up to the writer in you!

Miscellaneous



Six women's congregations empower youth at risk in Bengaluru

By Thomas Scaria

Bengaluru: Members of six women congregations have come together to empower "youth at risk" in Bengaluru, a southern Indian city with more than 3 million youth. "This is the perfect example of synodality in action as envisaged by Pope Francis," said Apostolic Carmel Sister Maria Nirmalini, leader of the Conference of Religious India, representing the country's more than 130,000 Catholic women and men. The "Sisters Led Youth Initiatives" project is jointly implemented by the members of the Apostolic Carmel, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, the Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate, the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, and the Sisters of St Joseph of Tarbes. "Our aim is to make youth dream high, think better and act great," said Sister Jane Wakahiu, head of the Catholic Sisters Initiative, which supports nearly 1,200 young people under the program. The Kenyan nun was speaking at the March 19 graduation ceremony for the first batch, mostly women who were trained in vocational skills by the six congregations. "Women religious in India have played significant roles in empowering youth at risk, especially the vulnerable women in society," observed Wakahiu, a member of the institute of the Little Sisters of St. Francis. Sabrina Wong, a project officer who oversees the project in India, finds the program's uniqueness in the "beauty of various religious congregations working together to empower the youth." Nirmalini, who is also the superior general of her congregation, told GSR that the women congregations in India will experiment more with such collaborative projects as part of its strategic plan. On the occasion, the Conference of Religious Women India released its strategic plans for the next five years. The 2024-29 plan stresses projects and programs to empower youth, women and underprivileged populations in India, to be implemented as a partnership project of nuns from different congregations. Nirmalini, who chaired the graduation ceremony, said the program reinforces the feeling that "we are not alone" and "we are for everyone." She applauded the congregations for coming forward to empower the weaker sections. "We don't know the future of our missions in India, but we are sure to stand united in

partnership and face the challenges together," said Nirmalini, hinting at certain hate campaigns against Christian institutions in India. "The strategic plan stresses intercongregational collaboration, research and outreach to champion inclusiveness, empower the marginalized and drive systemic change," Nirmalini told the gathering. Wakahiu, who received the first copy of the plan, noted that it resonates with the Hilton Foundation's motto to promote intercongregational projects for its sustainability. Later speaking to GSR, Sister Wakahiu said the Bengaluru program is a pilot project supported by the foundation, which plans to support more such collaborative programs in India. Sister Molly Mathew, the executive director of programs and projects for the Conference of Religious Women India, said the "Sisters Led Youth Initiatives" began with 600 youths in September 2023. "Almost half of them have undergone a three-month refresher course, and they have already secured jobs after graduation," explained the member of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, who coordinates the Bengaluru program. "Others are still undergoing the yearlong course." Some nuns shared their experience of working for youth empowerment. Apostolic Carmel Sister Jenita Mary said her congregation enrolled 150 students for its tailoring and fashion designing courses. "Most of them are women in at-risk situations who lack self-esteem. So, we offer holistic training, combining vocational skills and life skills," she said. St. Joseph of Tarbes Sister Irudaya Mary said her congregation recruited 120 young men and women from Bengaluru's slums to train them as entrepreneurs. "Besides training them in some vocational skills, we have connected them with various government projects where they can get loans and subsidies to start self-employment programs," she said. Salesian Sister Praveena Madhavan said the Salesians cover some 150 students under the Hilton project. "Our goal is to ensure each student gets jobs after the course. For this, we invite corporates for a campus recruitment and it has really worked," Sister Madhavan pointed out. Some students who have found jobs or started entrepreneurship after the training, shared their experience at the graduation program.

COMMON QUESTIONS ON LITURGICAL NORMS

Solemnities, Feasts, Memorials

Answered by Father Edward Mc Namara, professor of liturgy at the Regina Apostolorum university.

Q: We as Catholics commonly use the word "feast" to cover everything from church feasts of various saints and the Blessed Mother, to Corpus Christi, etc. We also understand that there are three kinds of feasts/celebrations: memorial, feast, solemnity. Could you kindly elaborate on these three categories? Also, why is Corpus Christi not a holy day of obligation? — R.D., Enderamulla, Sri Lanka

A: Effectively we use the word "feast" to cover all levels of celebration, even though the word also has a precise technical meaning in the hierarchy of celebrations. There is no great difficulty in this, as the context usually clarifies whether we are speaking technically or in general.

The three basic classes are those mentioned by our reader, although memorials are often divided up into obligatory and optional. There are some other means of classifying the celebrations which give different numbers and categories. For example, if one classifies on the basis of which Masses may be celebrated on a given day, one comes up with seven groupings of celebrations.

The difference between the three basic categories resides in their importance, which in turn is reflected in the presence or absence of different liturgical elements.

Solemnities are the highest degree and are usually reserved for the most important mysteries of faith. These include Easter, Pentecost and the Immaculate Conception; the principal titles of Our Lord, such as King and Sacred Heart; and celebrations that honor some saints of particular importance in salvation history, such as Sts. Peter and Paul, and St. John the Baptist on his day of birth.

Solemnities have the same basic elements as a Sunday: three readings, prayer of the faithful, the Creed and the Gloria which is recited even when the solemnity occurs during Advent or Lent. It also has proper prayer formulas exclusive to the day: entrance antiphon, opening prayer, prayer over the gifts, Communion antiphon, and prayer after Communion. In most cases it also has a particular preface.

Some solemnities are also holy days of obligation, but these vary from country to country.

A solemnity is celebrated if it falls on a Sunday of ordinary time or Christmas-tide. But it is usually transferred to the following Monday if it falls on a Sunday of Advent, Lent or Easter, or during Holy Week or the Easter octave.

A feast honors a mystery or title of the Lord, of Our Lady, or of saints of particular importance (such as the apostles and Evangelists) and some of historical importance such as the deacon St. Lawrence.

The feast usually has some proper prayers but has only two readings plus

the Gloria. Feasts of the Lord, such as the Transfiguration and Exaltation of the Holy Cross, unlike other feasts, are celebrated when they fall on a Sunday. On such occasions they have three readings, the Gloria and the Creed.

A memorial is usually of saints but may also celebrate some aspect of the Lord or of Mary. Examples include the optional memorial of the Holy Name of Jesus or the obligatory memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

From the point of view of the liturgical elements there is no difference between the optional and obligatory memorial. The memorial has at least a proper opening prayer and may have proper readings suitable for the saint being celebrated. The readings of the day may be used, and the lectionary recommends against an excessive use of specific readings for the saints so as not to interrupt too much the continuous cycle of daily readings.

On the other hand, the specific readings should always be used for certain saints, above all those specifically mentioned in the readings themselves, such as Martha, Mary Magdalene and Barnabas.

During Lent and Advent from Dec. 17 to 24 memorials may be celebrated only as commemorations. That is, only the opening prayer of the saint is used and all the rest comes from the day.

Nov. 2, All Souls' Day, is something of a special class that, without being a solemnity, still has precedence over a Sunday.

It is also important to note that the same celebration may have a different classification in various geographical areas, as some celebrations and saints are venerated more in one place than in another. For example, St. Benedict, an obligatory memorial in the universal calendar, is a feast in Europe since he is one of its patrons. But he rates a solemnity in the diocese and abbey of Montecassino where he is buried.

Finally, the decision on whether a solemnity such as the Body and Blood of the Lord is a holy day of obligation falls primarily upon the bishops' conference, which decides based on the pastoral reality of each country. Some have maintained the traditional Thursday celebration and kept it as a holy day; others might have maintained the day but without the obligation. Many have preferred to transfer the celebration to the following Sunday so as to ensure its celebration with the greatest number of faithful.

The Vatican, for example, continues the traditional Thursday celebration and thus the Holy Father's procession with the Blessed Sacrament is held on that day. The Diocese of Rome, however, along with the rest of Italy, celebrates it on the following Sunday.



New film 'Unsung Hero' emphasizes the 'power of family'

By Francesca Pollio Fenton

St. Teresa of Calcutta once said: "If you want to change the world, go home and love your family."

Her words appear at the end of the new movie "Unsung Hero," which tells the true story of the Smallbone family, widely recognized in the music industry for brothers Luke and Joel Smallbone of the Grammy-award-winning Christian band For King and Country, and their sister Rebecca, better known as singer-songwriter Rebecca St. James.

After David Smallbone's successful music company collapses in their home country of Australia, he moves his family to Nashville, Tennessee, in the hopes of a brighter future. With nothing but the clothes in their suitcases and an empty house waiting for them in Nashville, David, his pregnant wife, Helen, and their six children embark on a journey of faith to rebuild their lives.

The film, which will be released in theaters on April 26, depicts how a mother's faith can stand firm against all odds and inspire her husband and children to do the same. Helen teaches her family how to turn to the Lord in prayer for all their needs and, in time, to begin to see God answer.

Luke Smallbone spoke to CNA in an interview about the inspiration behind the movie, the importance of family—especially in today's society where the family is under attack and what he hopes people will take away from the film.

Smallbone explained that he and his brother have shared their family's story at concerts and have been told several times that they should write a book but instead thought of making a movie.

"You don't ever think you're living a movie when you're living it. This is just my childhood. We weren't trying to do anything special. We were just a

family that had a great love for each other, a great love for Jesus, prayed for things, saw things take place," Smallbone, a producer of the film, said.

He pointed out that "the heartbeat behind the movie actually really is this—I believe in the power of family, I think family is more powerful today than ever in the history of the world yet we don't value it like we should."

"Mother Teresa says, 'If you want to change the world, go home and love your family,' and I think that's actually really the blueprint behind the film," he added.

The major theme running throughout the movie is the importance of family. James Smallbone, David's father (Luke and Joel's grandfather), says in the film: "Your family isn't in the way, they are the way." "But you don't ever find the framework of government in the Bible, but you do get the framework of family in the Bible."

"So what that tells me is God's true intent for people is to belong and have healthy families... So for me, when I read Scripture it tells me that I should take family incredibly seriously," he said.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF A DEAR HUSBAND & FATHER

TAPAN LAL CHOUDHURY

MISSING YOU ON YOUR FIRST DEATH ANNIVERSARY (23.04.2024)

*The days go by without you
And each one is the same,
Our minds are filled with thoughts of you,
In tears we call your name.
They say that time's a healer
And that life has to go on,
But our lives will never be the same,
Now the one we love is gone.*

ALWAYS IN OUR HEARTS FOREVER.

YOUR HEART BROKEN WIFE JEAN, DAUGHTER MICHELLE
AND SON DOMINIC CHOUDHURY
AND SISTERS-IN-LAW BRENDA AND SADIE,
FAMILY AND FRIENDS IN INDIA AND ABROAD.

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