

The Present Moment

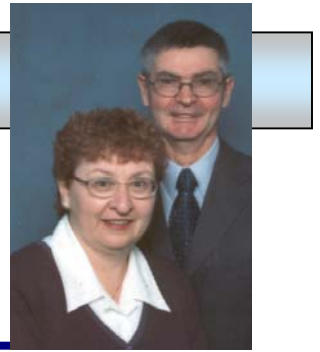
Volume 7 ~ Number 1

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- 2 From the Editors
- 3 From the Director General
- 4 Our deceased
- 5 From the Pen of Father Parent
- 6 News from Here and There
- 10 New Foundations ~ Project Africa
- 13 The Vocation and Mission Office
- 14 Anniversaries
- 15 Time Line
- 16 Stability
- 17 Testimony
- 18 A Seminarian's Experience
- 20 Ordinations
- 21 Couples in the India Region
- 22 Recollections on Life at Bethel
- 23 The Christian Faith in a Milieu That is Predominantly Hindu



FROM THE EDITORS ...



by *Raymonde Jetté and Fernand Turgeon*

Dear Readers,

We are pleased to bring you the 2006 edition of *The Present Moment*. Its contents will show you that our Institute is alive in different parts of the world.

Since Father Parent can no longer compose new texts, we are offering you a text on missionary adaptation, from his work, "Le Père nous parle..." This is a response to a desire of the 1998 Assembly General, when our Journal was created. It was decided that we continue to publish the writings of our Founder, which gives us in this way an opportunity to return to our roots.

In this issue are two articles on our new foundations in Africa, the Congo and Ethiopia. These foundations in Africa bring out the universal and missionary dimensions which have been with the Institute since the beginning. As you read the article on Ethiopia you will be impressed by the commitment of the members there who, despite their modest means, share with those poorer than themselves.

There is also a segment on the India Region, its history, and testimonies by a priest, two seminarians, and a

couple. Father Thannikkot, the regional director, has an article on Christian life in a predominantly Hindu milieu. Members of the Institute in India witness to their faith and give an example of life based on peace and fellowship in Jesus Christ.

"News from Here and There" reports on what is happening in different areas where we have Voluntas Dei members.

The article by the Director General points out the boldness of Father Parent, our Founder, and states that "witnessing to our spirituality is opening ourselves to the world." The dimension of "creating peace and brotherhood in Jesus Christ" becomes even more obvious, in this way.

We thank those collaborators who have contributed to this issue of *The Present Moment*, and we hope that you enjoy reading it. ❀

The Present Moment

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Stewards of a Spirituality

by *François Hamel*

The picture of the Institute is in constant change. To see this, all we have to do is look at what has happened since July 2, 1958: we realize that the situation is far from stagnant! Father Parent writes that he accepted to found our Institute in response to a request from Father Leo Deschâtelets, O.M.I., the superior general of his Oblate congregation. Seeing the will of God in the desires of his superior, Father Parent blazed a new trail to holiness. He has given us the spirituality of the Three Fives which he had first given to the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate (O.M.M.I.) in 1952. What I find the most fascinating in Father Parent is the boldness of his response to the calls of the Holy Spirit. He lived the present moment as the most excellent place for encountering God.

Where are we, today? Father Parent is certainly getting older, and some of our founding members have already returned to the Father: Fathers Augustin Stefko, Laurent-Paul Gendron, Paul Coutu, Maurice Roy, Daniel O'Rourke.

We continue to live according to the spirituality of the Institute; we are the stewards of this spirituality. "We should be regarded as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. The first requirement of a steward is that he

prove trustworthy" (1 Cor. 4:1-2). We do not own the spirituality of the 5-5-5: I have often heard Father Parent say that it belongs to the Holy Spirit.

In living the present moment, we want to place ourselves in the "now" of Jesus Christ. We are called to holiness, to a holiness that transcends the world in which we live because it introduces us to the proximity of God; a holiness, also, which is imminent because it makes God present in the world. As a matter of fact, at every Eucharist we proclaim: "Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory."

Besides being stewards of a spirituality, we are also its witnesses, hence the importance of a solid and real formation, intellectual but also one that is inhabited by the Spirit, because what we learn is not only knowledge per se, but the art of living. The team supports both initial and ongoing formation. "No one is an island," the English poet John Donne reminds us.

To witness to our spirituality is to open it to the world. In sports there is a type of race known as the relay race where several runners take over from one another; they run part of the relay

*To be a witness is to accept running with someone and passing on something to that person.
It means accepting to pass on to someone the spirituality that is our life's blood.*

together, then pass on a baton – called a “witness” – to the one picking up the race.

To be a witness is to accept running with someone and passing on something to that person. It means accepting to pass on to someone the spirituality that is our life’s blood. It means accepting that someone else continue to run the race. We must not wait until old age before doing this. By passing on our spirituality of the 5-5-5, we do not lose it... we only make it bear fruit, like good stewards that we are meant to be.

To look back on the life of the Institute is to look at its Canadian roots. Following this, we can look at its Haitian roots, its Laotian, and its

Sri Lankan shoots at Red Rapids, New Brunswick. Looking at the present means looking at the Institute in thirteen countries.

To live in the present is to accept journeying with new members in each of the districts and regions. In saying this I have in mind the Ethiopians we accepted in 2004, and the young men from the Congo we accepted in 2005. Do we leave any footprints, on our daily journey? Every period likes to believe that it is at the crossroad of fundamental changes, but only history will tell... In the meantime, we must blaze new trails for God... with the boldness that was characteristic of Father Parent. ❀



ROCHE, Louis

December 26, 2004 - priest - India - stability

LACHANCE, Fernand

February 13, 2005 - priest - Canada - stability



NAKKUNGU, Angelina

March 2005 – wife of KASIRYE, Emmanuel - Ouganda - pre-aspirant

DE LOS SANTOS, Andres

March 17, 2005 - husband of REYES, Fermina - Dominican Republic - commitment

BATISTA, Livia

May 10, 2005 – wife of CAMILO, Confesor - Dominican Republic - commitment

VARELA, Nelson

September 21, 2005 – husband of PACHECO, Lidia Maria – Dominican Republic – stability

RODRIGUEZ, Betania

September 25, 2005 – wife of DE LEON, Elias – Dominican Republic – commitment

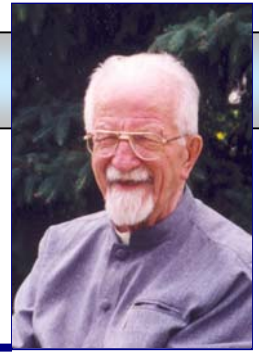
THULASI, Vareethadima

October 6, 2005 – wife of VAREETHADIMA, Manuel, India – aspirant

ANTOINE, Paul-Verel

October 24, 2005 – priest – Haïti - stability





Missionary Adaptation

By *Father Louis-Marie Parent, o.m.i.*

Dear “Voluntas Dei”,

This reflexion on missionary adaptation applies to every “Voluntas Dei”, wherever he is or wherever he works. Let us then seriously meditate on it and, in the team and individually, let us make practical resolutions.

Each one of our faculties must be dominated by charity. Let us nourish ourselves on charity, let us digest it, and live off it! God asks no less, and we have committed ourselves to this by our Christianity, our vows, and our spirituality.

Possessing Christ so as to Radiate Him

You are apostles by vocation, so you are called to radiate Christ: this is your objective. To radiate him you must possess him by being in a state of grace, and you must pass him on through the gift of yourselves for the benefit of others. Radiating Christ means to give him, to give him by word but especially by example.

Word and example will be strong if the team (...) we are part of is composed of members who truly love one another. Everything is there, it is the primary aim.

If we cannot get to love one another, let us adjust ourselves, taking the time necessary, because we shall not do any good in whatever country we go, because we are expected to be at least as good as those to be evangelised.

Respecting Civilisations, in Order to Better Give God

Wherever we go, these countries do not want to be taught lessons, they do not want teachers for missionaries. They do not want us to teach them how to live, that we bring them a civilisation which is not theirs. What they want is God: He is what we must give.

If we go to teach them, we shall miss the mark, we shall go as self-righteous professors, trusting in our so-called superiority. Despite ourselves, if we are the least bit proud, our attitude will be humiliating to the others who will close their hearts to us: we shall be years in the mission without being able to do any good whatsoever.

Every human being has his own natural pride. Is he not the work of the Creator? A man who has no self-confidence because he was born in a “mission” country does not do justice to God. Every human has a destiny, and to fulfill it he needs confidence: it is our duty to help him achieve this for himself and for his country. ✿

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Louis-Marie Parent, o.m.i." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

From: “L’adaptation missionnaire,” in *Le Père nous parle...*, Vol. 1, No. 6, April 1959.

NEWS FROM HERE AND THERE



by *Raymonde Jetté and Fernand Turgeon*

Central Council

The new central house was blessed December 3, 2004, in the presence of Bishop Martin Veillette of Trois-Rivières.



Laurier Albert, of the Canadian District, has been appointed chair of the committee on formation for the entire Institute.

The new Guide for professed and committed members is in preparation, and will be published in French, English, and Spanish. The Guide is meant to be a formation tool for members prior to stability.

The Institute's website, www.voluntasdei.org is accessible in three languages. It is a useful tool in making the Institute known to others. Roger Corneau and André Martinbeault have created a remarkable site. Its presentation is attractive, and information is updated regularly. Do consult it!

Canada

The English Western Sector was created in the fall of 2004 at the time of a visit there by André Côté, the district director, and members of his council. The sector is composed of the members in Manitoba. There were also meetings with Archbishop Émilien Goulet of Saint Boniface, and the Volunteers of God. "There were many occasions to give thanks to the Lord that the charism and spirituality of the Institute are alive and well in that part of the country."

Jean-Gérald Lominy was ordained a priest May 15, 2005.

Animation resources have been developed by the francophone committee on permanent formation, on the theme "Passionate about the Gospel and the Kingdom." A retreat was offered to the members in March, 2005. The summer congress theme was "You came as one of us : Being Missionaries in the Midst of the World", and was facilitated by Bishop Paul-André Durocher of Alexandria-Cornwall.

Chile

Members of the Chile Region held their annual meeting; the theme was Spirituality and Mission. There were two objectives: to continue the members' formation, and to study together in teams the new Probationer's Guide, in order to learn more about and deepen our understanding of the spirituality of the Institute.

The regional director, Manuel Cornejo, visited each team; this strengthens the bonds of attachment and fosters fellowship in the Institute.

Relations of members of the Institute with their bishops is good, in every diocese. Several members are involved in a number of parishes. Bishop Manuel Donoso of La Serena is very open to receiving members of the Institute.

United States

The United States Region is very dynamic. Membership is on the increase, and effort is made to introduce the Institute in parishes where we have members.

The region has its own website, so that information about the Institute and the U.S. Region may be obtained from everywhere: <http://www.voluntasdeiusa.org>.

A novelty has been the creation of an “internet team,” known as the St. Isidore Team, after the patron saint of information media people. The need for such a team became necessary because of the vastness of the country and the fact that some members live at a distance from the major centres. Members of the team keep regular contacts with each other, thanks to this virtual team.

Haiti

The members of the Haiti District continue to pursue their mission of creating peace and brotherhood in Jesus Christ despite the country’s socio-economic crisis.

Dominican Republic

The district held its annual congress from June 3 to 5, 2005, concluding with the priestly ordination of Julio Cesar Gomez.

Given an increase in seminarians, El Buen Pastor Residence will be expanded.

Sri Lanka

The Sri Lanka Region is divided into three geographic sectors: Jaffna, Colombo, and Mannar. The Voluntas Dei Major Seminary has three seminarians from Sri Lanka and two from India. The minor seminary has 14 young men from Sri Lanka and 1 from Laos. The Sri Lanka Region has over 30 couples.

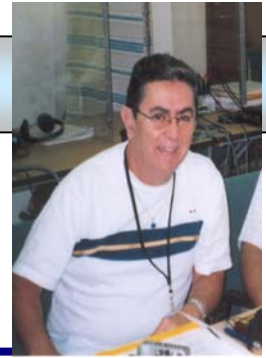
Father James Dunstan has returned to Sri Lanka after obtaining a master’s degree in missiology from St. Paul University in Ottawa, Canada.

The tsunami hit Sri Lanka on December 26, 2004. The Institute showed its solidarity by helping the victims of the catastrophe. Some of our members went to the displaced persons’ camps to help the people, and others were involved in collecting and distributing basic supplies. Still others showed empathy by listening to the victims’ sad accounts, and encouraging them as best they could. Financial support was given to some of the neediest victims.

The Sri Lanka regional council (director: Fr. A.R. Lloyd Shanthikumar) had to move its Colombo residence to more appropriate quarters because the house which was used until then would have had to undergo major modifications to accommodate the growing number of seminarians.

Colombia

by *Alonso de Jesús Posada Echeverry*



During 2005, three young men began training as aspirants in the Institute. They reside at the preparatory seminary in Pasto, Colombia. They want to become priests. The three aspirants are: Pedro Fabián Giraldo, from Pereira, Dian Farney Betancourt, from Armenia, and José Javier Peña, from El Valle.

Their journey officially began January 20, 2005, under the direction of the regional director Alonso Posada Echeverry.

There are two teams, in the Region. One is in the town of Tumaco, and the other is in Armenia. The Tumaco team has two couples, three aspirants for the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and young man who wants to be a priest. There are two meetings monthly. We discuss and meditate on different points of the Aspirant's Guide. We also have a monthly retreat.

The aspirants are interested in the spirituality of the Institute, and they appreciate our sense of welcome. In the Tumaco region the Institute has become known in several parishes and social milieus. Our aspirants work with the "Educating in the Streets" programme, in the town's most deprived sector, with children and youth who have known nothing of affection and kindness, and who receive bad treatment at home. Another of the

activities in which our aspirants are involved is pastoral ministry with the youth in the diocese of Tumaco.

The Armenia Team was started by Fathers Guillermo Antonio Pérez and Jaime Alberto Henao, five associate couples, an Oblate



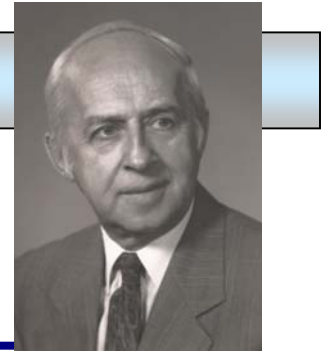
Missionary of Mary Immaculate, and a celibate layman. They have two monthly meetings in the parish of Quimbaya in Quindío; they also have family integration meet-ings. Father Guillermo Pérez is now in Montréal replacing a priest on holiday. One of the couples have had to

move to Venezuela for economic reasons. In the Armenia team, the members study the Probationer's Guide in reference to Father Parent's *In the Footsteps of Jesus*.

In Armenia as in Tumaco, we insist that the members memorise the most important elements of our spirituality, such as the charism, the apostolic objective, and the spirituality of the 5-5-5. We make a special effort to study the writings of Father Parent at our team meetings and during spiritual retreats, as we mentioned at the 2004 Assembly General. ❀

Ecuador

by Guy Veer, *President of the ETM (555) Corporation*



Michel Charbonneau – A Voluntas Dei in Ecuador Since 1968

The first members in Ecuador were Michel Charbonneau and Pierre Lemaire, in January, 1968. They did their theological studies in Quito and were ordained to the priesthood in 1971. Other members of the Institute from Québec also went to Ecuador, for shorter or longer periods of time: Claude Lacaille, Leo Deshaies, Denis Labelle, Maurice Roy, and a few others.

Let us follow the journey of Michel Charbonneau in service to the Church, the Ecuadorian people, especially the children and youth.

At Nobol, a parish of the diocese of Guayaquil, Michel ministers to the faithful. He built six chapels dependent on Nobol, a pastoral centre, and a medical centre. He brought back the remains of Blessed Narcissa de Jesus who died in a state of holiness in 1869; Nobol has since become a pilgrimage site. Michel founded a college of which he was the first rector: in 2004 the student body comprised 1600. For the poor in his milieu Michel succeeded in having a huge property expropriated, enabling 2,000 parcels of land to be used for building houses. Michel has been in Nobol for ten years.

In 1980, the archbishop gave him the mandate of constructing the Shrine of Czestochowa, for the Pope's visit. In January, 1983, Michel welcomed the Pope who asked him whether he was Canadian and a member of a religious order; he answered that he was indeed Canadian, and a Voluntas Dei. Michel is proud of the Pope's answer: "I know your Institute."

Another period of his life was the one passed in Pascuales, a town in the suburbs of Guayaquil, home of very poor people. Michel became pastor of the parish of St. John the Baptist. Besides parish ministry, Michel ensured the establishment of the Misericordia Sisters. He looked after religious services in the cemetery in the Peace Park. He then invited Maurice Roy, I.V.D., to come to Ecuador to care for homeless and poor children: this led to the founding of the Casa Hogar del Amigo Jesus.

The Casa Hogar del Amigo Jesus is a complex of an orphanage housing some forty children, and a Voluntas Dei college with a student body of 400. This has been the work of two Voluntas Deis, Maurice Roy and Michel Charbonneau. The Enfants Tiers-Monde Canadian Corporation (5-5-5) financially supports this work.

In 2004, Michel was appointed episcopal vicar whose main endeavour is bereavement ministry. In 2005, he is still episcopal vicar, director general of the Casa Hogar del Amigo Jesus, and respondent for the community of the Sisters of the Visitation founded by Maurice Roy. Michel still looks after services at the Peace Park cemetery. He is a person of service whose first concern is for others and not himself.

In the course of his thirty-seven years in Ecuador, Michel was recipient of a number of decorations for services rendered to the Ecuadorian people, among which is the Order of Ecuador. His work is not finished.

AD MULTOS ANNOS! ❁



Project Africa

by Jacques Harvey

Since 1998 the Central Council has been paying close attention to new vocations in the Institute. Efforts have been made to make all the members aware of this basic dimension of our Institute. Since 2002, several young Francophone Africans have asked to join us. They are mostly from the Congo, though some are from Cameroun. While a member of the central council at the time, I was given the mandate of discerning with them God's call to them.

After having been named director of the V.M.O in June, 2004, with residence at the central house, the central council asked me to continue working with the Africa group. Since then I have received a number of requests, while a few young men have stopped writing. Last February, as we could no longer postpone the admission of the first group of young men, the central council voted to accept fifteen of them, whose file was up-to-date.

At the time of the acceptance of the members from Ethiopia, last year, Father Parent said: "The Lord is opening a window to the Institute." After having prayed, discerned and analysed the situation, we had to look at reality and recognise God's call in the hearts of men, as well as the call He was making to us members of the *Voluntas Dei*. The central council let itself be challenged by the boldness

of our Founder, at the beginning of the Institute.



There will eventually be a visit to the African teams to meet with the candidates, those who have been accepted to aspirancy and those who are waiting. We must also meet the bishops with whom we are now in regular correspondence.

More and more bonds are being created: let us let them be, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. ❀

Ethiopia

by Michael J. Craig, Respondent

Ethiopia is a landlocked country located on the Horn of Africa, in the northeastern part of the continent. It covers more than 435,606 square miles (or 1,128,176 sq Km). Ethiopia is the oldest independent nation in the world, with a history that spans more than 3,000 years. It is known as the "Land of the Queen of Sheba," the " birthplace of the Nile " and " the cradle of mankind."

Amharic, a Semitic language related to Hebrew and Arabic, is the official language of the country. However, more than 80 other tongues are spoken as well. With dialects, the figure rises to more than 200.

Ethiopia's population is nearly 70 million people. While Addis Ababa, the capital has nearly 2,887,000 inhabitants, most people live in rural areas. About 40 percent of all Ethiopians belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which has been a leading cultural influence since the fourth century A.D. The predominant Orthodox Christian Church is headed by a patriarch and is closely related to the Coptic Church of Egypt. Of the total population, Muslims account for 40%, Protestants for 10.2%, and Catholics for 0.5%. Roman Catholicism has been a presence in Ethiopia since the sixteenth century. Much of the rest of the people of Ethiopia believe in animism, with traditional religious beliefs that stress a reverence for all living things. The Constitution of Ethiopia provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

When the repressive Marxist Government fell and democracy was established in 1991, Ethiopia was plunged into a new series of disasters: a civil war, a border war with Eritrea, further famine, a drought in

2000 and flooding a year later, and the twin disasters of malaria and AIDS. The spread of AIDS today is particularly alarming.

The Catholic Church enjoys good relations with all religions in Ethiopia. Most people look upon the Catholic Church as a valuable social influence: "On the whole, the Catholic identity in Ethiopia is quite positive, as the Church manages some of the best schools, vocational training institutes, and health facilities in the country," says Terfa Dinka who is the team leader in Addis Ababa.



Most Christians influenced by the presence of the Orthodox Church emphasize the importance attached to fasting. "We try to fast on all holy days," explains Terfa, "and therefore for 200 days in the year. We fast for Jesus Christ's fast in the wild, because our Churches retain the customs of Jesus' time." Such abstaining includes a prohibition against all animal-based foods every Wednesday and Friday, and a 55-day Lenten fast.

Ethiopians are very suspicious of foreigners or foreign - influenced institutions, so secular consecration of locals under our spirituality is welcomed by the bishops and the clergy.

There are two teams of the Institute in Ethiopia, one in Addis Ababa diocese and one in the diocese of Nekemte in Western Ethiopia. The team in Addis Ababa, established with the kind collaboration of Archbishop Beranjesus Souraphiel, meets weekly and has fifteen members attending weekly meetings.

Four of the members are committed and the others are in the process of applying for aspirancy. They also have a team of Volunteers of God which is mainly made up of Orthodox Christians. The Archbishop has given his blessing to the team to engage in caring for the abandoned elderly. In March of 2004 the team opened Michael's House to offer free meals, health services and spiritual comfort to homeless elderly men and women.



The team in Nekemte consists of ten married couples, most of whom are trained catechists. They likewise are caring for the homeless and refugees who come across the border from Darfur. The ten couples, under the direction of Terfa and Teshome G/Hanna applied for aspirancy this summer.

Terfa Dinka has translated all the basic documents of the Institute into Amharic, so that all the members and the local Church leaders can be familiar with our spirituality and charism.

The enthusiasm of the members in Ethiopia for the Institute is nothing short of remarkable. They are deeply spiritual, and even in their own extreme poverty they give to those who are less fortunate. The following is an excerpt from a letter received from Archbishop Souraphiel which indicates the welcome and hope that he has for the Institute in Ethiopia.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the presence of your Institute in our Diocese since March of 2004.

I am particularly impressed by the spirituality of the Institute which calls ordinary men and women from among the people of God to be peacemakers and live a life of unconditional love in action.

I have introduced the Institute to the Archdiocesan Catholic Secretariat, and also to the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat office.

The members of the Institute are remarkable in that they are at one and the same time developing their own sense of identity and spirituality as consecrated seculars and also establishing a very strong sense of apostolate. They are very committed to their spirituality. I appreciate and admire their initiative especially in the area of works of charity and their awareness of the dignity due to those whom they serve.

From the outset the members here in Addis Ababa started their mission of charity by identifying and addressing the needs of the vulnerable elderly. This is a population which previously had not been given much attention. They began making home visits and providing clothes and donations for their daily subsistence. They are also undertaking a feeding program, at "Michael's House" which they maintain as a center for the elderly. At the center they are using the occasion to give basic health care instruction, such as nutritional advice along with encouraging good eating habits, the importance of doing regular exercise routines, taking care of personal hygiene and reducing stress and anxiety. They also provide the opportunity for these often marginally housed people to take showers and to wash their personal clothes.

The team here in Addis Ababa, under the direction of Terfa Dinka, is always available to me, and they keep me informed of their development. I am happy to hear that they have already begun a second team in Western Ethiopia. They are always welcome to talk to me about the Institute, its mission and their needs.

I wish you every success in your ministry and look forward to a long and fruitful relationship with the Institute in Ethiopia." ❀



Presentation

by Jacques Harvey

Several of you know about this “branch” of the Institute whose aim is supporting in a more concrete way the formation of our members in mission countries. Our task is to raise awareness to needs and find funds in order to help the most needy.

Since “The missionary dimension is basic to the Institute, and it is an indispensable component of the initial grace of its founding” (Const., Art. 13), awareness-raising is made through the monthly newsletter to several benefactors and other interested persons. This letter raises a point of interest concerning the Institute or the Church of which we are part. The reverse side of this one-page newsletter presents a particular need or request coming from a country or region where we are. We can also interest people to our cause through our preaching in those parishes which are allocated to us by the dioceses.

In response to the newsletter, several people send donations to be eventually sent to the country in question. The money taken up at the special collection during missionary preaching expeditions is deposited in the general account for missions.

Every year we write to our missions to ask them about their material needs and to ask, also, that they submit a specific project to be presented in one of our monthly newsletters. We also ask the different dioceses to give us permission to preach in some of their parishes that welcome us for the sake of our missions. We also ask diocesan financial services to send us mass stipends, if possible.

We are trying to set up personalised contacts with our benefactors. If the occasion arises, a personal visit helps us create ties with them, and the opportunity to show them the importance of their financial support. We also show interest in what they experience daily.

For example, collections received from missionary preaching brought in \$10,000.00, and the monthly newsletter brought in \$81,000.00 between June, 2004 and June, 2005. These amounts do not include what is sometimes given to help a particular missionary, the seminarians, or to respond to a particular project.

Through all these activities, we always try to respond to the will of God, with the help of your prayers. ❀



Anniversaries 2005

25 years of priesthood

SHANTHIKUMAR, A.R. Lloyd (Sri Lanka) 2005-05-01

25 years of marriage

DUKE X., Carmel and Rajasingham (Sri Lanka) 2005-01-28
SUSAI VAZ, Ayya and Inghasy (India) 2005-02-13
DINKA, Ityane and Terfa (Ethiopia) 2005-02-24
FRANCIS, Sherly and Jerome (India) 2005-04-27
JEBAMALAI, Sahaya and Francis (India) 2005-06-09
MARTINEZ, Luc Maria and José (Dominican Republic) 2005-10-04
MARCELINE, Yagappan and Leela (India) 2005-10-22
NAVARRETE C., Lidia and José (Chile) 2005-11-01
THENGAPURAKKAL, Mariam and Joseph (India) 2005-11-22

50 years of marriage

ARAUJO R., Rosa L. and Angel M. (Dominican Republic) 2005-01-02

Anniversaries 2006

50 years of priesthood

HIGGISTON, Malachy J. (United States) 2006-12-08

25 years of priesthood

MONPAS, Paul-Alain (Canada) 2006-06-06
SZAMRETA, John (Japan) 2006-06-06
LAROQUE, Paul-Émile (Haïti) 2006-08-30
FURLONG, Thomas E. (United States) 2006-10-31

25 years of marriage

VILORIO, Lucrecio and Cecilia (Dominican Republic) 2006-01-17
STANCILAU, Jonas and Felicitta (India) 2006-05-27
NAJLE MARTINEZ, Luis B. and Maria Teresa (Chile) 2006-05-30
MAINVILLE, Jacques and Michelle (Canada) 2006-07-04
AUGUSTINE, Pedro A. and Augustine (India) 2006-08-24
GNANAPRAGASAM, Lazer and Roselin (India) 2006-09-16
SAVUNTHARAM, Swampillai F. and Reeta Rohini (Sri Lanka) 2006-11-28



Historical Sketch of the India Region

by Joseph Thannikot Variath

The Voluntas Dei Institute was founded in India in the year 1967 at the instance of its founder, Father Louis-Marie Parent, OMI, with Monsignor Mark Netto, the then Vicar General of Trivandrum as the lone member in India, under the Sri Lanka District. Subsequently a few priests of Trivandrum Diocese joined the Institute and immediately, a batch of students numbering nine were identified as candidates to the priesthood. These seminarians were undergoing studies in the schools at different places. Later they were accommodated in a rented house at Puthenthope, a suburb of Trivandrum City.

Consequent to the sad demise of Msgr. Mark Netto, Father John D’Bosco was entrusted with the responsibilities of the India Sector. During his tenure a few married couples were incorporated as associate members and divided into different teams. Those days, both the team meetings and sector meetings were held at places convenient to all. As time passed, the Institute spread to Tamil Nadu and later to Ernakulam. By that time, the India Region was erected with Fr. John D’Bosco as the Regional Director assisted by the Regional Council. During his tenure the Institute established its identity in India by having a house of our own, Bethel, (on a piece of land measuring 1.2 acres) recruiting more and more candidates to the priesthood and admitting a large number of married couples. Three priests, viz. Fr. Napoleon Gomez, Fr. Xavier Ponnayyan

and Fr. K.P. Immanuel Lawrence were ordained as priests incardinated to the Institute.

The Region had the privilege to have Father Mario Laroche as its Regional Director when Father John D’Bosco had to relinquish charge of the Region because of his responsibilities in the diocese. The Region remembers with gratitude the service rendered by Father Mario during the short span of one year, especially in matters relating to rebuilding the splintered relationship with the Diocese of

Trivandrum. When Father Mario left India, the Region was entrusted to Father E. Wilfred as Director. By that time, Father Joseph Thannikot returned to India, after being ordained and serving in the Dominican Republic, and was appointed rector of the seminary. To accommodate the increased number of seminarians, an additional dormitory over the refectory was built



Residence of seminarians - Trivandrum

during this period.

After serving two terms as Regional Director, Father E. Wilfred handed over his charge to Father Joseph Thannikot. He is assisted by Father Remigius John, assistant regional director, Father G. Stephen, regional councillor and rector of our seminary, Mr. Sesaian Ambrose, and Mrs. Lourde Mary Sesaian as regional councillors. It was the desire of Father Joseph Thannikot to have a house of study for our major seminarians, which resulted in identifying a piece of land measuring 5.35 acres

on the banks of Periyar River near Alwaye Municipality, thanks to the initiative of Father Joseph Thannikot and the timely encouragement and promises of financial assistance extended by his German benefactors. Now, the construction of a major study house on this land is in progress. This property, being full of rubber and coconut plantations, will yield a reasonable income, too.

When completed, we hope, the house can accommodate all our major seminarians, which will ensure our own proper formation to all the

seminarians. Bethel will continue as I.V.D. headquarters in India and to accommodate all the junior seminarians, as at present. The region that started with one lone member on its roll has at present 168 members, as shown below:

Priests belonging to the Institute	5
Priests belonging to the dioceses	8
Celibate Laymen	2
Major Seminarians	26
Minor Seminarians	55
Married couples	72 ❁

STABILITY

<p>Canada : Guy MAILLÉ Alain BISSON and Sylvie BROCHU Marc PLOURDE and Nicole LABRANCHE</p> <p>United States: Robert S. BORIS Andrew SIOLETI</p>	<p>Chile: Luis Bernardo NAJLE MARTINEZ and Maria Teresa MONTECINOS Lucia del Carmen FUENTES AMARILES Henry Omar BERNAL ARANCIBIA</p> <p>India: Mudiyappan INNASI</p>
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The Witness of a Vocation

by *Napoleon Gomez*

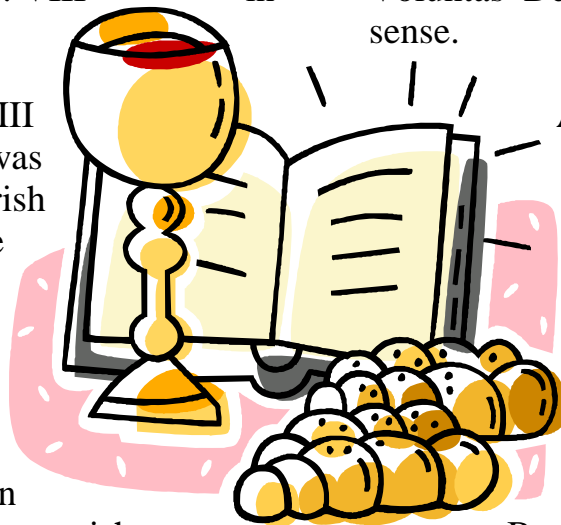
I had been cherishing the desire of becoming a priest since my childhood, but I did not know how to realize this desire. Normally, the selection of candidates to the priesthood in the diocesan minor seminary takes place when the candidates complete Std. VII and go on to high school studies in Std. VIII. I passed Std. VII and nothing happened. Together with my classmates I joined for Std. VIII in the village high school.

It was after passing Std. VIII that things changed. I was an altar boy in the parish church at that time. So the parish priest had a soft corner for me. At that time, late Msgr. Mark Netto, my compatriot, was serving as parish priest at St. Dominic, in Vettucaud, the neighbouring parish.

One fine evening, Fr. John Panakkal, the parish priest, called me and asked, "Would you like to join the seminary?" As the question came at an unexpected time, I was puzzled. He explained to me that Msgr. Netto was going to start a minor seminary in his parochial house and he would like to have one candidate from his native parish and that, immediately, my name had come

to mind. I replied that I would discuss it with my parents, and then I came. As devout Catholics, my parents were very happy to send me to the seminary.

Thus, in the fine evening of May 24, 1977, I started my journey to become a priest in the Voluntas Dei Institute. And that was the humble beginning of the functioning of the Voluntas Dei Institute in India in its real sense.



As with every new beginning, the functioning of the formation house of the Institute also had to undergo many trials and tribulations. We had to live in rented houses, when Msgr. Netto was appointed administrator of the diocese, after the sad demise of Bishop Peter

Bernard Pereira. We became our own superiors during this period. But God was always guiding us to go forward, and I was ordained a priest in the Voluntas Dei Institute on July 22, 1991.

When I look back, I am proud of being part of the history of the Voluntas Dei in India, and I am trying to witness to the charism and spirituality of the Institute in my priestly life. ✿

Greater than the Greatest Privilege

by Shaiju Dessayan

INTRODUCTION

When I was asked to write about my experience as a seminarian in the Voluntas Dei Institute, I tell you frankly, actually, I was afraid. Why? Because, to narrate the life story of a seminarian was a Herculean task. Effortlessly we can ask to write something about somebody. But, when we ourselves put it into practice, it is not so easy.

Oh! My dear voracious readers would please note the taste of sugar cane experienced by you? How could you express or share the taste of sugar cane? Is it really possible to share the personal experience of sugar cane as such? Solemnly, I would say, no. Why? If you want to really experience the taste of sugar cane, you should go through it without any presupposition, biased ideas, or one has to swallow it himself. Likewise, I can't do justice to my given topic.

While keeping this idea in my mind, I try my level best to share my seminary experience as a true Voluntas Dei member.

Greater than the Greatest Privilege

It is my simple faith and conviction that to be a true Voluntas Dei member is the greatest privilege to myself. I am one hundred and one percent obligated to my Institute. My life-long commitment is to Christ through the spirituality, charism and motto of the Voluntas Dei and the living model of my priest elder, in the Institute. I am proud of being a member in the Voluntas Dei family.

Gift of God

What I am, what I have are the showers of blessing from above. They are actualized in my life through the loving care and concern of my superiors. With God and my Institute, I am a Hero. Without God and my Institute, I am a big Zero. On account of this reason, I am ever ready to share my is-ness and have-ness with my fellow beings. God has given me *eternal life* as a free gift. This *eternal life* is perfect love of God and perfect love of neighbours, that means I have to make a mutual relationship with man and God since Jesus Christ is both God and man.

Eternal life is a relationship of love, knowledge, and communion with the Father and the Son. To know Jesus is to have this relationship of knowledge, love and communion with the Son and the Father.

Spirituality

While I was going through the spirituality of our Institute, I realized that we too have a clear-cut life style; it is not mere slogan, but to be lived amongst the people. By pronouncing the vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty, we are totally surrendering to God. The special significance of our Institute is this: we are living in the midst of the world, we are totally committed to the worldly affairs and we are trying our best to sanctify this world. We do not have the poor spirituality of *fuga mundi*, i.e. running away from the world.

When we are in the midst of the world or cosmos, it has three meanings:

1. Universe (as we understand)
2. Humankind or humanity and
3. The sinful world.

The sinful world is the world which hates the Son of man. So be innocent as a dove and prudent as a serpent.

Our spirituality is very simple and humble, but at the same time very radical, too. So, when we live this spirituality, be careful. Our spirituality is highly inflammable. Do not be a counter witness. When one decides to live these spiritual values, one's attitude must be that of our Mother Mary, i.e. total surrender into the hands of God. By this, we mean that only by the grace of God, can we live these spiritual values. Without her assistance and the mercy of God, we cannot do anything.

Voluntas Dei : Will of God

Our life must be a life of Gospel. This is the will of God or the plan of God. Jesus has come to give us life. The concept of Jesus' life must be the central theme of our life.

Attitude and Aptitude

A few lines of an English poem:

Do not walk in front of me because
I cannot follow you
Do not walk behind me, because
I want to guide you
But...walk along with me
And we can work together.

Intelligence and Discernment

Until the last breath, man continues his studies. There is no age bar for beginning study or ending it. He must thirst for knowledge. In order to solve the problems of the 21st century, we need the power of

wisdom, intelligence, discernment, etc. Our knowledge of horizons should be widened. We need not have the minimum knowledge, but we need maximum knowledge. In this modern world, we need more knowledge, intelligence, discernment, wisdom, caliber, talents, because today's world is growing faster than us.

We must not be inferior in knowledge, but should be superior. We must not be illiterate, but literate. On the whole, prayer and holiness must be our foundation stones. Remember, knowledge without prayer is futile.

The Holy Bible or Word of God is not meant for studying but learning. The word "learning" comprises three L's. They are Listen, Love and Live. These three words go together. How to listen to the Word of God? How to love the Word of God? And how to live the Word of God? Inculcate these questions in your mind.

Voluntas Dei Superiors (India Region)

Fr. Wilfred Emilias, the Regional Director of the Voluntas Dei and Fr. Napoleon Gomez, IV Dei, the Rector of the Bethel Seminary welcomed me in the year 1995. They are my models to give respect and to take respect. They sowed the seeds of gentleness in my heart. Can we make sure that I have this life? How can I know that I really possess this life? Life is equal to belief, i.e. a positive response to God's love, faith and revelation. Death is a lack of this belief.

Who is a Real Seminarian ?

He must be filled with love of God, because God is ultimately love (I John 4:8 & 16, Romans 5:5). This love of God must pave the way to service, enlightenment, mobility, sincerity, genuineness, straightforwardness, holiness and transcendence. First and foremost, seek the Kingdom of God ...

Do I Have a Divine Call to Become a True Seminarian?

It is very difficult to state this experience. One thing is very sure, that God calls me for a special purpose, i.e. to become a Gospel. We can experience this element in our life as a constant inclination to God's words, attraction to the Will of God, fear of God, tension, disturbance of the mind, etc.

These are some of the hints, which throw light on the same. Thus, in order to have the clear-cut vision from the above said hints, we need the grace of God. During the time of these experiences, we are sure that we are not alone, but God is with us. So, in order to identify my vocation, I need the power of discernment-the gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal.5:25). For this grace pray to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Seminary life is life in community. Community life is a life of unity in diversity. We are living together, eating together, playing together and praying together. We are also sharing our difficulties, joy, happiness and the hardest realities of day to day life. We appreciate each other and exhort each other. We scold each other and smile at each other. Each and every one of us has the greatest expectation about the Institute, because the Institute loves us and protects us. So, we too love and protect the Institute through our prayers, learning, living its spirituality and fulfilling the duties. We are all preparing ourselves to grow up to the mind of the Institute and above all, the Will of God.

Remember us forever

Forget us never

This is our prayer. ❀

Ordinations



LOMINY, Jean-Gérald

May 15, 2005 – priesthood – Canada

GOMEZ VERAS, Julio Cesar

June 5, 2005 – priesthood – Dominican Republic

Couples in the India Region

by Mrs and Mr. N.G. Paul

The first gathering of the IVD group was on August 2, 2000 with 12 couples under the leadership of Rev. Fr. Joseph Thannikot, at Pachalam, Kochi. By the grace of Our Lord we had the opportunity to come to the mainstream of the Voluntas Dei Institute, the very same day. We praise and thank the Lord for His abundant grace of making us an instrument of peace and true members of Voluntas Dei. Mary's Song of Praise (Luke 1:46-50) was read and shared by all of us. We were happy to be born in a new secular way of life, dedicated to God.

Gradually, as we proceeded with our team meetings, we were taught that the 5-5-5s are to be followed, which bring us to Jesus, and share His love with others. We could see that we were transforming ourselves into a sharing community – in our prayers as well as in our activities. Incidentally, almost all the members belong to the Charismatic Prayer Group. We actively participate in monthly retreats conducted by Vachanalayam - a renowned Retreat Centre at Pachalam. Voluntas are working here to bring the kingdom of Our Lord into the life of their children.

Subsequently, we began to lead a sacramental life deeply rooted in the Holy Eucharist which enriches our souls and is the energy source to defend from the 'enemy'. Thus the Voluntas call is a call within a call, which is set in a life of harmony by surrendering ourselves to God. We are also working in unison along the activities of the Institute. We have a great privilege to contribute our mite by giving cassocks to all the 12 seminarians who were pronouncing their first vows and were allowed to wear cassocks.

Wedding anniversaries and special occasions in the couple's family are celebrated with the members of the team. On one such occasion we celebrated the

christening of the child of Mr. Paul Thannikot at Aluva and the celebration started after the prayer gathering. Many relatives and friends of Paul were happy to see the way of sharing and living of IVDs together in the Spirit of the Lord Jesus and of true Christians. Similarly, once, the team meeting was conducted in a hospital room when my wife Lucy was bed ridden after a surgery. It was the first time that a prayer session was conducted in that hospital which is managed by Hindus. Many patients and bystanders clustered in and around our room and requested to prayer for them. So it is a wonder to see that God is using us in places where we cannot think of beforehand. Many are watching the IVDs, and it is our prime duty to witness to Jesus whenever and wherever there is a chance.

Our team is also proud to have 4 out of 8 seminarians in the Voluntas Dei Institute, hailing from Verapoly Archdiocese. We were also happy to participate in the Annual Day celebrations at Bethel and in the foundation stone laying ceremony at Vellarappilly where a new study house is coming up. We also had an opportunity to rehabilitate Tsunami victims of our neighbouring areas.

Now that our team has grown, it has been divided into four different teams which helps us to have close sharing and more personal intimacy among the members of the team. These teams meet independently, and all the teams meet together once a month.

As days pass by, we have to think how best we can serve the present world of chaos and confusion. Family relations are breaking at a rate the world has never seen. Media often confuse children in selecting right or wrong. The family is the unit of a society where peace and harmony are to be cultivated. Thus, as IVDs, we have a great role in serving the Church to spread the Good News all over the world. ❀

Recollections of Life at Bethel

by Ajin Albernass, pre-philosophy

Let me begin by gratefully remembering the beautiful memories that I had in the first year of my priestly formation. Along with my friends, I was starting a new life. The routines we were having so far had been changed. All were new faces, personalities! July 2 is the day I welcomed everybody. That was the beginning of everything.

Now, let me go to my experiences: Father Joseph Thannikot, the director has been a good, loving guide, not only for me but for everybody. Like a father, he could gather us under one umbrella. He enabled us to seek the Will of God in everything. He convinced us how to be in the presence of the Lord in chapel and elsewhere. As a good father, he made available to us whatever we asked for.

Likewise, these were the personalities I admire most. Father G. Stephen, Mr. Ambrose Sesaian, professors and the kitchen staff who gave us parental care. Some of them have become important characters that influenced us in formation.

Though I had a well-built body, I had also human weakness. A person who did not dare to sing two lines on the stage became the choirmaster. What a surprise! Though I had setbacks in helping my weak classmates in studies, I considered it as the will of God.

The next honour that I was given was 'Kala Prathibha'. On Parents' Day celebrations, Bro. Sony led us effectively. All members of our team were good singers, humorous. They occupied the stage on Talent Night. The team and the Seminary atmosphere were helpful for me. When there were difficulties, I found solace in front of the crucified Lord on the altar.

Bro. Jacob influenced me very much in my seminary life. He was a model and support for me in my struggle. He is a good leader and a mature person in my team.

All good wishes for the I.V. Dei who gave me a lot of experience. ❀



The Christian Faith in a Milieu That is Predominantly Hindu

by Joseph Thannikot Variath

Introduction

The predominant religion in India is Hinduism. 82.4 per cent of Indians belong to that religion. Christianity in India is insignificant in number. The Christians are only 2.34 per cent of the population. However, the Christian minority does enormous work in education, the social service and public health, so its presence is felt all over India. Those activities build a bridge between Christianity and other religions.

Christianity reached India in the first century AD, and until the rise of Islam it flourished in numerous parts of India. Due to the invasion of Islam and especially the Moghal regime, centers of Christianity died out in the North. By the 15th century it survived only in Kerala. Because of the missionary works of the Europeans, some centers emerged in the North. Now Christianity is facing terrorism and fanaticism there.

The Constitution of India granted religious freedom (Art. 15, 25), but there are terrorist attacks in the North. In this situation, direct evangelization is almost impossible in India. Yet, Christians witness to the faith in many ways.

1. Inculturation

Inculturation is one of the ways for the Christian faith to penetrate Indian culture. In Kerala, Christians keep even today more than a hundred customs of orthodox Hinduism. The European missionaries testified in the 15th century that the Christians in Kerala are “Christians in faith, Chaldean in liturgy and a Hindu in customs”. Co-existence and cooperation continued in Kerala in all matters of religious life. In the modern age, special attempts were made by some European missionaries for inculturation. The Venerable Robert De Nobili

who worked in Tamil Nadu is to be remembered, in this field of activity. The Christian faith could live peacefully with its Hindu neighbours.

2. Inter-Religious Dialogue

India has a very ancient tradition of dialogue between religions. It may have begun in the 6th century BC with the rise of Buddhism and Jainism. The Jains held the theory of ‘relativity of knowledge’ by which they admitted the possibility of different religions. The theory appeared as early in the 4th century AD, and it was called “Sydvada”. In the 2nd century AD, the famous teacher Pantaenus, from the Alexandrian School of Religion, came to Kalyana (India Felix) in northwest India to take part in a dialogue with Brahmins (Hindus) and Sramanas (Buddhists). He came here at the request of the Christians in Kalyana.

In the modern age Christians take serious steps in this direction of dialogue. There is the “World Fellowship of Inter Religious Council” in Kerala. There is a Commission of the Kerala Bishops’ Council for this purpose. These are some agents working to maintain co-existence and good relationships with other religions.

3. Witnessing

The Christian faith lives by witnessing to Christian ideals or values of mutual love, universal charity, mercy, truthfulness and justice. Christians are in the forefront in giving education and doing charitable works. Through institutions such as schools, colleges, technical institutes, hospitals, asylums and homes for the aged, Christians give witness to living the Christian faith in almost all parts of India.

4. Building the Nation

The Christian faith and Christian values have played a considerable part in the building up of the nation. Christian ideals and the efforts of Christians have influenced every field of modern India. The Constitution itself is influenced by the Christian faith. India's calendar is Christian.

Christianity has been able to abolish inhuman customs of the people. It has tried to uplift the poor and the low-caste people. Christian contribution to modern Indian culture is enormous and is admitted and admired by all people of good will. It can be said that the Christian faith lives through modern Indian society.

5. Evangelisation

At present, as mentioned above, direct evangelisation is almost impossible in India. Fanaticism is growing. Missionaries are being murdered. Still, elite Hindus always esteem the social and charitable works of Christian missionaries. There are groups that do not oppose Christianity. The nation as a whole believes in the religious freedom assured by the Constitution, though some states passed laws against conversion.

In a country with a Hindu majority, there is some possibility for evangelisation, while in an Islamic country there is no possibility of missionary work, just as in a communist country. This possibility gives Christians a ray of hope of protecting and diffusing the Christian faith for a few more centuries.

6. Special Witness by Consecrated Christians

What has been said above concerning Christianity in general applies also to the members of the Voluntas Dei Institute. It must be said that they give special witness to the Christian faith in pluralistic India. The Constitutions of the Voluntas Dei Institute proposes its noble project, **“Through consecration in the midst of the world, the**

kingdom of God comes about in themselves – in their milieu and wherever Christ has his rights” (I.1). It proposes its charism: **“to be instruments of Christ to carry out the Father's will in the present moment”** (I.2). And it indicates its apostolic objective **“to create peace and brotherhood in Jesus Christ”** (III.2). Hence anybody can see how Voluntas Dei members witness to the Christian faith in the world.

The members of the Institute provide an example of peace and brotherhood in a world of quarrels and hatred. They give witness to unity and team spirit in a country with a caste system.

By their vows or commitments, they witness to Christian values in a special way, to a higher degree. By the spirit of poverty they give witness to a simple and peaceful life in a world of consumerism and greed. By obedience they propagate the idea of real, true freedom in a world of individualism, where duties are neglected and rights are over-emphasized. By chastity they give an example of good moral living in a world of sexual immorality which leads to the destruction of family life.

Their team spirit teaches the world the notability of co-operation among people.

The followers of other religions appreciate the great ideals inspired by the Christian faith; they are apt means for keeping cordial relationships with other religions.

Conclusion

The Christian community in India gives witness to Christian religious and moral values in different ways. Its benevolent presence is felt everywhere and is appreciated by people of good will. Its life and activities give expression to the Christian faith. The community tries to keep good relationships with other religions. ❀