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## **EDITORIAL**

In the United States we seem to finally be emerging from the COVID-19 tunnel. Things are opening up across the country. As I write this, we at the Mission Center are enjoying our first week in more than a year of being able to walk the hallways without masks. It is a pleasure to see co-workers' smiles again!

Yet even though the picture may be brightening in our country, this was from the start a global crisis. Much of the world still faces the darkness of COVID. Many countries, particularly the developing nations where Divine Word Missionaries serve, are just beginning to ramp up their vaccination programs. Some have yet to start. These countries remain at risk of another outbreak.

Nowhere is this truer than India, which experienced a second COVID wave this spring far deadlier than their first wave last fall. This national health emergency peaked in mid-April, with nearly 400,000 new cases and 4,000 deaths reported daily.

In this issue of Mission Update, Holy Spirit Missionary Sister Anjela Bhabor SSpS files a report from India detailing how this second wave has been especially hard on the country's poor. You may recall that last summer Sister Anjela filed an article from Ecuador when the situation there was also dire.

More than 600 Divine Word Missionaries serve in India, and we have heard from several of them in recent weeks. Father Petrus Kullu SVD, the provincial superior of the India-Eastern Province, bluntly said, "Today, the country is deep within a severe tragedy."

Yet he also left us with words of hope: "This pandemic has enormously taught us to take care of ourselves and others. Like any other disaster, this will pass away because everything that begins must end. It is just a matter of time. The most important part for us during all this is to stay alive, stay healthy and stay safe. Let us be united with one another in our prayers and in our moral support. God bless us all!"

Yours in the Divine Word,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bro. Daniel J. Holman SVD". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the "SVD" part being more distinct.

Bro. Daniel Holman SVD  
Mission Director

Contact me any time, my email address is:  
[director@svdmissions.org](mailto:director@svdmissions.org)

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# St. Francis Assisi parish

## GARDEN PROJECT

Kanté, Togo

*Phase one SUCCESS! Despite some setbacks.*

*by Stephen Agbenorxevi SVD*



**Hot peppers, tomatoes, cabbages, cucumbers, carrots and lettuce.** Thankfully, most of the crops produced well. However, we found that some of the seeds we purchased were not well preserved and did not germinate as we had planned.







## Harvest challenges

Harvesting time coincided with the rainy season. So much rain fell, that the gardens flooded causing the crops to rot. Flooding also cut off the road to the garden. Because the flooding also made it difficult for people to get to the marketplace, crops that we were able to harvest went unsold.

Despite the setbacks in trying to sell the produce, we did succeed in helping our own local community get fresh, healthy vegetables. One of the goals of this project is to improve the diet of the local people through consumption of vegetables. Another goal is to train our youth and encourage them to garden. Growing our own vegetables will also help maintain a healthy diet during the dry season.



So far this season, things are moving on well. We have planted new crops, including sweet peppers. However, one major challenge continues to be water, either too much or too little. The stream we have been using to water the crops has now run dry. We need to improve our irrigation system.

## The next growing season

We are already planning for the next growing season. We are looking into a new irrigation system for watering the garden. **We also need transportation in the form of a large tricycle.** With the tricycle we can collect fertilizer from the nearby villages and also transport the harvested produce to sell at the market. ♦

Give a gift to help buy a tricycle!  
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# Different strokes

## Inspired by traditional Chinese art, missionary painter brings new look to Bible stories

Brother Hu Chen SVD was born in the northwest of China in 1982. He has been passionate about Chinese traditional painting since his early childhood. He joined Divine Word Missionaries in 2007 and began to study Chinese traditional painting academically.

During his study he discovered that contemporary Chinese Christian art is still dominated by Western oil paintings and that Chinese traditional painting is rarely used to express Christian faith. He gradually became interested in how Christian art is expressed in many cultures.





Following his passion, he decided to become a religious Brother to serve the Church and focus on religious art. By 2017 he had established the Department of Religious Art at Jilin Catholic Seminary in China and initiated art education for seminarians studying in China.

Bro. Hu has been committed to the promotion, teaching and creation of Christian art over these years. He has created a series of religious-themed ink wash paintings depicting Bible stories. His paintings have been exhibited in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xi'an, Taiwan, Italy and Ireland. ♦



**We are pleased to present a selection of Bro. Hu's paintings accompanied by his commentary.**

### ***The Birth of Moses***

According to Exodus 2:1-10

At the time Moses was born, many Hebrew infants were killed in Egypt by order of the pharaoh. It's natural to also think of the story of the Massacre of the Innocents that occurred when Jesus was born, and the similarities between the Old and New Testaments are striking. It follows that Jesus had a close relationship with the prophets and with the Old Testament as a whole.

Though tyranny destroyed many innocent lives in Egypt, there was one thing that could not be destroyed: love—the love of Moses's parents for their children and the compassionate love of an Egyptian princess. This love saved Moses' life.

The painting is full of poetry, not a bloody scene. Yet behind the beautiful scenery is a brutal storm. Moses' fate is undoubtedly the luckiest of his age. God did not intend to abandon the people of Israel. He wanted to strengthen Moses to carry out his plan.





## Jesus in China

Completed in 781 AD, the Nestorian Stele is a monument that tells the story of Christianity's earliest history in China. According to the stele, Alopen, the first Christian missionary to China, entered the capital of Changan (now Xi'an) in 635 AD and began to preach.

The background of the painting is the Nestorian Stele, which is still well preserved at the Beilin Museum in Xi'an. The building under Jesus' feet is an ancient building called the drum tower in Xi'an, which is a representative building of Xi'an and bears witness to the historical changes of this ancient city. Xi'an is the historical witness of the Gospel of Jesus entering China for the first time.

To view more of  
Bro. Hu's paintings  
go to:  
[www.svdmissions.org/hu](http://www.svdmissions.org/hu)





## ***The Annunciation***

According to the Gospel of Luke 1:26-38

The Annunciation has fascinated painters for centuries. Unlike common depictions of the Annunciation, this picture is painted in a circular form.

The angel in this painting is no longer a man with wings, but uses the Flying Apsaras image of Dunhuang murals to re-create and reinterpret. The Dunhuang murals were painted on cave walls by Buddhists in the fifth century. In Chinese art, Flying Apsaras—flowing ribbons or cloth to indicate flight—signify celestial beings or gods. These images generally appear in tomb murals to express the ascent to heaven. In the Annunciation the angel has descended from heaven to send a message.

Mary's image comes from the image of a lady in ancient China. This image stands for nobility. Mary in the picture is reading. The angel holds a representative holy lily. The two magpies flying with the angel mean double happiness: one to predict Mary's pregnancy and Christ's birth and the other to report that her cousin Elizabeth is pregnant.



## ***Jesus and Matthew***

According to the Gospel of Matthew 9:9-13

To his fellow Jews, Matthew would have been considered a traitor, a sinner who oppressed his fellow citizens on behalf of the Roman government. Such a man should have been despised and cursed, but Jesus chose him to be a preacher and a witness of the Gospel.

Matthew's situation represented an awkward class: On the one hand, he was a slave to the Roman government, despised by the Romans. On the other hand, as a tax collector he was reviled by his own countrymen. Such an identity is despised by both social classes at the same time.

In the painting, Matthew works in a Spartan environment. A table and some books and some coppers show the life of a tax collector. A leafless tree is a sign that Matthew's life is dull and lifeless. In the lower right corner, Jesus stands at a table in contrast with the tree. A plaque hanging from a tree gives both the location and the character's identity.



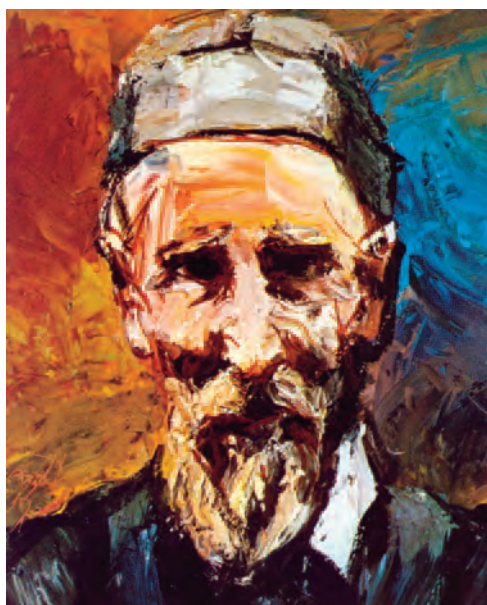


# Living the Message

## How St. Joseph Freinademetz presaged *Fratelli tutti*

By Jürgen Ommerborn SVD

*Pope Francis issued his third encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*, on Oct. 4, 2020—the feast of St. Francis of Assisi. The encyclical calls for Christians to see themselves as part of a worldwide human family. Father Jürgen Ommerborn SVD, the director of the Arnold Janssen Secretariat in Steyl, Holland, explains how St. Joseph Freinademetz SVD lived out the ideals promoted by Pope Francis more than 120 years before his encyclical’s publication.*



When St. Arnold Janssen founded Divine Word Missionaries, St. Joseph Freinademetz became the kind of missionary Father Janssen had in mind.

Although Father Janssen and Father Freinademetz spent only a short time together in the first mission house in Steyl, both were beatified and then canonized together.

God called Father Arnold Janssen to found the Society of the Divine Word. God called Father Joseph Freinademetz to be the ideal missionary of the Society of the Divine Word.

—St. Joseph Freinademetz, the missionary  
By Father Stanley Plutz SVD

For the title and opening of his third encyclical, Pope Francis chose the words St. Francis of Assisi used to address his followers, *Fratelli tutti*—“all brothers and sisters.” Pope Francis wanted his encyclical to breathe the spirit of St. Francis, “the saint of fraternal love, simplicity and joy.”

The pope made his own Franciscan call “for a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance, and declares blessed all those who love their brother as much when he is far away from him as when he is with him” (FT 1).

This is a call understood by St. Joseph Freinademetz SVD, one of the original Divine Word Missionaries to leave Europe to serve abroad. He was sent to China, where he would become known for the love of the Chinese people. Through his life and example, St. Joseph personified the spirit of universal brotherhood Pope Francis calls for in *Fratelli tutti*.

‘A CRY FOR HELP’  
St. Francis of Assisi would have

praised St. Joseph for a practice sermon he gave in the major seminary in Brixen, located in Italy’s South Tyrol province. St. Joseph said:

“In my heart, I hear a cry for help that can never be put in words, a cry for help from me and through me also from you. A voice never before listened to cries out for help thousands of miles away from us, in the far north, in the heart of Africa, in Asia and America. On behalf of these poor brothers of ours ... I wish to speak a word today.”

St. Joseph was so filled with St. Francis’ spirit of love for all of humanity that he became a member of the Third Order of St. Francis. With his heart full of this spirit of love, St. Joseph went to China and began his missionary work in Hong Kong together with Father John Baptist Anzer SVD.

In Hong Kong St. Joseph’s love was tested very much, and he would have agreed with Pope Francis’ words: “There is no worse form of alienation than to feel uprooted, belonging to no one” (FT 53).



*“for a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance, and declares blessed all those who love their brother as much when he is far away from him as when he is with him” -Fratelli tutti 2020*



St. Joseph realized very soon that nobody had been waiting for him. He ate like the Chinese, dressed like the Chinese, yet he did not feel accepted by them. He felt like a homeless foreigner without friends. One of the reasons for this, he realized, was that he didn't understand the language enough.

#### LEARNING TO LISTEN

Everything changed once he was in the mission area of South Shantung. There St. Joseph fulfilled Pope Francis' words: "The ability to sit down and listen to others, typical of interpersonal encounters, is paradigmatic of the welcoming attitude shown by those who accept others, caring for them and welcoming them into their lives" (FT 48).

During his first visit to the people in Ishui, St. Joseph stayed with each family for one or two days. He sat down with them, listened to them and shared their life. The result was a tremendous change in his attitude to the Chinese.

He wrote: "The Chinese [man] knows how to put up with his poverty since he is used to it from youth. By nature, he has gotten a fair amount of contentment, which prevents him from worrying too much about the future. If he has to eat today, tomorrow he will find ways of getting something."

St. Joseph was amazed by the hospitality these people showed in spite of their poverty. He described how one family used their last scrap of tinder to start a fire to cook a meal for him.

#### A UNITING LOVE

The people had welcomed St. Joseph into their lives, and he had received them into his life. He experienced what Pope Francis describes in these words: "Love shatters the chains that keep us isolated and separate; ... it builds bridges. Love enables us to create one great family, where all of us can feel at home. Love exudes compassion and dignity" (FT 62).

It is this love that St. Joseph had in mind when he instructed newly arrived missionaries just beginning to learn the Chinese language. He said "The [Chinese] will be converted only through God's grace, and let us add it through our love. Love is the only foreign language that [they] understand. Therefore, do not let any dislike for the Chinese people and their Chinese way of life arise in you. The Chinese feel immediately if a missionary treats them with respect and love."

St. Joseph and his fellow Divine Word Missionaries must have succeeded based on how the people in South Shantung responded to their work. The number of baptized Christians that had grown from 158 when St. Joseph arrived in South Shantung to 45,000 by the time he died.

The spirit of love he felt for the Chinese prompted St. Joseph's famous declaration: "Even in heaven I want to be a Chinese." This sentiment exemplifies Fratelli tutti's call that we all see ourselves as part of the larger human family. ♦



# Living in a hermitage in North Rhine Westphalia, Germany

*An interview with  
Father Norbert Cuypers SVD  
by Ms. Renate Breuer, St. Augustin*



## **What made you decide to move away from the community in Berlin and into a hermitage?**

It is important for me to emphasize that my decision to move to the hermitage was not a decision against Berlin, where I have lived and worked with pleasure for a total of six and a half years—albeit with an interruption of three years. Rather, for years it was a wish I had longed for, to seek a life with more silence. Twice I had made an attempt to do this and then postponed it in favor of other tasks that leadership had entrusted to me. Now, for the third time, it has finally worked out and I am deeply grateful to the provincial leadership for supporting me in this request.

## **What were the first experiences?**

The decision to move into a hermitage was not something I made on the spur of the moment. Over the years I did many personal reflections. I also had conversations with experienced people, I allowed the decision to mature in me. In the end, however, there is the notorious “jump into the deep end,” with all the concerns and worries that go along with that kind of leap. One highlight of my decision was from the people of the surrounding area who expressed their happiness that the hermitage was again inhabited after almost two years of vacancy. To this day, people continue to show their joy in word and deed. Their happiness makes me feel good!

**“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”**

— Mt. 16:24-25



## **How have you “arrived”? What makes the difference in living as a hermit in silence?**

The move from the vibrant city of Berlin and our very lively parish, to the edge of a forest in the Sauerland region came with challenges and certain adjustments. With this in mind one should not forget that I have lived in community for the past 40 years: first as an apprentice in Steyl for three years, then as a confrere in various communities. Now I must rely on myself for everything in my everyday life: I cook for myself, do my laundry alone, and clean the house myself. However, this grounds my spiritual life, for which there is now nevertheless much more time.

## **Are there difficulties to living by yourself?**

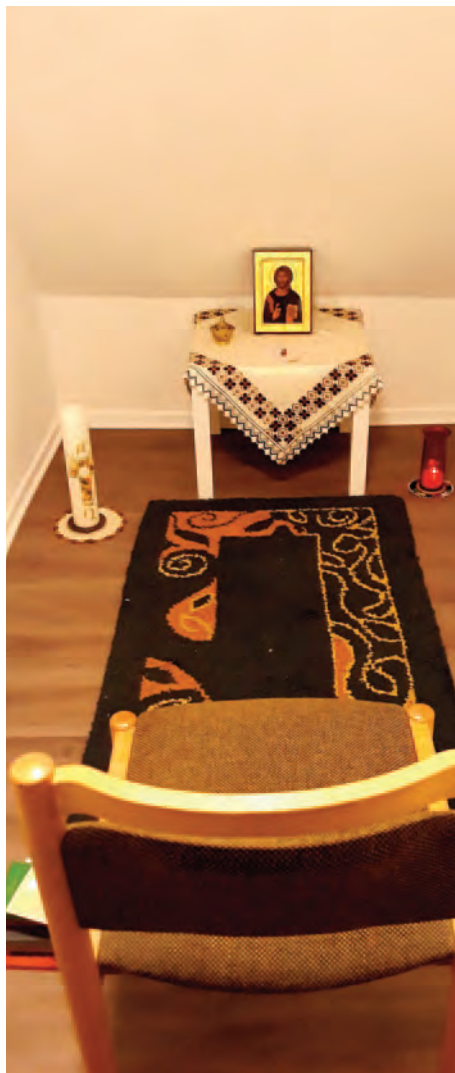
It is indeed the case that when you seek external silence, it can become very noisy within yourself. Living in a hermitage throws you back on yourself, as it were. When you live alone, you can't blame anyone else, for example, if you're in a bad mood or if the food isn't ready on the table on time. But I see in it a very great opportunity to grow and mature as a person and a religious.

## **What activities interrupt the silence of the hermitage?**

The mornings in particular are sacred to me. During this time, my phone is turned off and my laptop is shut down. The hours in the morning are basically reserved for meditation, prayer and spiritual reading. Journal writing is also very important to me. After the







“enlightenment of morning” comes the housework in the afternoon, such as ironing shirts or cleaning the toilet. I also do counseling for people who call on me, the preparation of liturgies, the writing of articles, the preparations for the next radio program in the afternoon. However, I do not experience these activities as interruptions, because even in them I can remain inwardly calm and collected. The evening is then mainly reserved again for silence in my small prayer room, before the silence of the night lures me to bed.

**More and more people have psychological problems due to the coronavirus. What would you say to them? Are there any tips for the people who are having problems?**

The difference between me and the people whose activities have been slowed down by the pandemic and whose social contacts have been restricted by the coronavirus is that I have chosen the more secluded life voluntarily. But if people could accept the restrictions imposed on them as an invitation to consciously slow down and decelerate their lives, they might be able to deal more easily with the current situation and recognize the positive opportunities it offers. People around here, for example, keep telling me how this is a time when they can enjoy the beauty of nature around them for the first time in a long time. In fact, I am currently also struck by the many young people who take time here in the nearby chapel for a few moments of silence and prayer. That touches me very much.



**“If (one) resolutely submits to the carrying of his cross, if he decidedly wants to find and endure trial in all things for God, he will discover in all of them great relief and sweetness.”**

— St. John of the Cross

**What is your missionary approach as a hermit?  
Does it exist?  
How does the hermit life affect your missionary life?**

Recently I read the following statement, which perhaps gives an answer: “The missionary must be ‘active-contemplative.’ If he is not contemplative, he cannot credibly proclaim Christ!” I can find myself in this statement. After all, I did not go to the hermitage because I am in a vocational crisis or because I no longer see myself as a missionary. Quite the opposite. The people who pass by here know for the most part that I belong to a religious community. My missionary service consists essentially of two elements that have become very precious in our day and age. First, I now have time to listen to people. This is very important and should not be underestimated. Many people really do not know what to do with their spiritual distress. Second, now the local people who come to the chapel to write their prayer requests know that a person lives here on site to pray for them and their special intentions. And then there is the silent witness of my lifestyle, which for many people seems somewhat “exotic.” But this prayerful silence could also become a part of their own lives. ♦

Spring 2021

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# Bangladesh

## My Beginnings in Bangladesh

*By Mariusz Pacula SVD*

**The first step in a new missionary journey is to deepen your knowledge of similarities and to understand the differences between the teachings of the Catholic Church and those of other cultures and religions.**

## December, 2018

Praise be Jesus Christ. After eight months of waiting for a visa to Bangladesh, the door to new missionary activity opened. As excited as I am, a trip to a new mission area always raises many questions, uncertainties and anxiety about what awaits there.

I landed in the capital city of Dhaka. In the local language “Dhaka” means “Hidden City.” After two days in Dhaka, I continued my journey to Chittagong. This city is the second largest after Dhaka, with more than 4 million inhabitants (the population of Bangladesh is approximately 164 million).

Chittagong means “Little Village” in the local language. The local bishop, Moses Costa of the Congregation of the Holy Cross greeted me. (Sadly, Bishop Costa died in 2020 after a battle with COVID-19.) The diocese has approximately 38,000 Catholics. The bishop entrusted Divine Word Missionaries with the parish of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady in Chittagong, which locals call Jamal Khan Church for the road it is located on.

With the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I was introduced to my parishioners. In true feast fashion, at the end of the Mass I received a traditional bouquet of flowers, we took photos and later shared dinner with the bishop and the Sisters who work at the parish and run a primary school.

Bangladesh is inhabited by various ethnic groups that have their own language, but the main language spoken here is Bengali. Only 10 percent of the population speaks English, so my most important task is to learn the language. I’m told this won’t be easy. When looking at the Bengali alphabet, one missionary described the Bengali script as looking like someone had hung the clothes on barbed wire after washing.



***When looking at the Bengali alphabet, one missionary described the Bengali script as looking like someone had hung the clothes on barbed wire after washing.***

After my first two months, I gathered my courage and made an attempt to celebrate Mass in my newly learned language. As Mass ended I told the people in English, “Hope you didn’t suffer much because of my pronunciation.” As I looked out over the congregation, I saw only a few smiles. Later, however, I received many words of support to continue my studies, everyone assured me it is only through practice that will I achieve the perfect pronunciation of their language.

My previous mission was to Ghana. Ghanaians have a totally different culture. They welcome you with a smile and invited you for refreshments, always wanting to spend time and talk for a while. I know it will take me time to ingratiate myself into this new Bangladeshi community. As I look at the faces of people passing by, I wonder if anyone is paying attention. But I have much to learn in this new mission land. I continue to study hard to get better with the language—hopefully then conversation will come easy!

Bangladesh has a Muslim working week. Friday and Saturday are days off, and Sunday is the first working day of the week. Therefore, Sunday Masses are celebrated Saturday and on Sunday evening so that people can attend after work.

As the Christmas holidays came around, parish groups intensified their efforts to prepare for the celebration. The holidays were a good opportunity to meet more parishioners. The day before Christmas Eve, the parish priest asked me to celebrate Mass in English and to give a homily. I was told that for security reasons, 15 armed police officers would be present to secure the Christmas celebrations, and their watch would continue for the following week. I tried not to be alarmed and took this message in stride.





As I entered the church an hour before the ceremony began, the first thing I saw was the 15 armed guards sitting in pews. Then looking at the church's festive decorations, I quietly asked myself, "Oh my God, where am I?"

Gathering my strength, I went over to say hello. I greeted them in English. There were five female guards sitting together in the police group. I made my way over to say hello to them as well. As I offered my hand towards them in greeting, I saw the women automatically take a step back, a slight surprise on their faces at the handshake gesture. Eventually some of them acknowledged me and said hello, while the others merely nodded. Later someone gently reminded me that in Muslim culture you don't shake hands with women. For the first time in my missionary life, I felt separated from the world in which I was living. I fought back the storm of negative thoughts, feelings and anxieties passed through my head. I told myself that learning the ways of a culture that dates back to the seventh century is going to take some time.

As I shared the Word of God in the homily, I watched the police guards sitting in the pew, guns at their sides. Their faces were expressionless, indifferent. I tried to concentrate on the positive "And in such a world, too, Christ is born again," I thought to myself. My heart slowly began to fill with peace.

When Muslims come to the parish saying they want to be Christians and they want to be baptized, it is difficult to really know if it's a provocation or a sincere desire to believe. It is hard not to be skeptical towards Muslims who say they want to embrace Christianity. I try to fill my heart with peace and keep an open mind. However, we have been warned that if we were to baptize a Muslim, we risk a reaction from radical Islamists who might incite the local community against the Church. This warning comes directly from our bishop.

# Bangladesh



The diocesan pastoral approach to Muslims is this: If you want to be a Christian, go to church, pray, read the Bible, get to know Jesus, etc. The Muslim community does not stand in the way of talking about Christ and the Church. Those seeking Christ are free to buy the Bible, the rosary, visit churches, read religious texts, etc. Muslim women come to the grotto of the Blessed Virgin Mary to pray. Unfortunately, as it stands today, the Sacrament of Baptism is not an option.

Muslims who want to become a Christian and be baptized often don't understand the difficulties involved. When we meet those who want to accept our faith—in order to keep peace—we are forced to be the obstacle between them and holy Baptism. These situations continue to break our heart.

The religious demography in Bangladesh has changed considerably in recent decades, mostly as a result of migration. Most salient is the declining number of Hindus in the country. At the time of Bangladesh's independence in 1971, the Hindu population amounted to approximately 23 percent of the country's entire population. Current estimates see the Hindus near 8 percent. In Chittagong the religious landscape has always differed from that of the rest of Bangladesh. Demographic changes are even more pronounced as a result of government-induced population transfers in the past.

Last year, the Diocese of Chittagong celebrated the 500th anniversary of Christianity in the Bay of Bengal. Here Christians live among the Muslim community, and the Holy Spirit continues to sustain their faith and adherence to the Church. Glory be to God for 500 years of faith in this corner of the world.

## November, 2020

*Fr. Pacula returned to his home country of Poland in November 2020 to renew his temporary visa. Once travel reopens Fr. Pacula looks forward to returning to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady parish in Chittagong. ♦*



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A woman wearing a pink sari and a pink headscarf is crouching on the ground in a rural setting. She is holding a metal plate in her left hand and tending to a fire in a traditional clay stove with her right hand. The fire is burning brightly, and a pot is placed on top of the stove. In the background, there are simple buildings with tiled roofs and some household items scattered around. The overall scene depicts a daily life activity in a rural area.

# Is poverty the real pandemic?

*By Anjela Bhabor SSpS*

Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, at the Service of God's Mission.

"In response to the call of the Holy Spirit and the needs of peoples, Saint Arnold Janssen, together with Blessed Maria, Helena Stollenwerk, and Blessed Josepha, Hendrina Stenmans, founded our congregation as a religious-missionary community dedicated to the life-giving Spirit. Christ has called us to this congregation. In the power of the Holy Spirit we follow him, praising the Father and bringing the fullness of life to others".

**I am a Holy Spirit Missionary Sister who has worked in Ecuador for the last four years. Currently I am in India on my home leave. I arrived April 13 in the midst of India's second wave of COVID-19, which has created havoc in the country.**

As I landed at the New Delhi airport after 45 hours of travel, instead of feeling great joy at stepping onto my home soil I was saddened to once again see so many people having to wear masks and even more sad to see the poor quality of the masks they were wearing. While I was in the taxi I asked the driver about the situation in India. He said, "Ma'am, we have been suffering for the last one and half years. We can't afford to be in quarantine or lockdown. We have to work to feed our children."

After a 13-hour train journey from New Delhi, I arrived in my village located in Madhya Pradesh, a state in central India. I quarantined for about 25 days with my parents and brother. It felt like an eternity!

While the pandemic affects all segments of people, it is the poor who are suffering the most. Practically every family in my village has one or more members severely affected by the virus.

Due to a lack of proper medical facilities—which is far worse in villages compared with big cities like New Delhi or Mumbai—many people have lost their lives. I, too, have lost some relatives. One of my companions, Sister Preeti from India's northeast, had to face a terrible personal tragedy. She lost both of her parents to coronavirus on the same day.

In my short time here, I have personally witnessed the miserable situation the poor are facing. They don't have work to earn wages and are compelled to remain in the house due to the fast-spreading

virus. The government provides very little help in terms of rations: 44 pounds of wheat and 11 pounds of rice for three months to feed an entire family. Often that quota does not even reach the family. I see people in my village deprived of healthy food—which is necessary to build immunity to fight the virus.

The government promises life-saving measures but fails to implement them. People are dying not only of COVID-19, but also of poverty. The experience of living in poverty for short periods is harsh enough. Now families who were already poor have been pushed further into acute poverty.

In villages such as mine, those who have lost a family member to the virus are discriminated against. There are no hospitals nearby. People have no money to call for an ambulance. They are forced to stay at home and take care of themselves with what little they have. Those who have some savings and would like to buy medicines find those medicines have disappeared from the pharmacies. Black marketers are having a field day. All this is causing greater distress for poverty-stricken people in rural villages.

As I said the pandemic affects everyone. In May the diocese's bishop, Basil Bhuriya SVD, became a victim of COVID-19. He spent nearly five weeks in the hospital in Indore. Despite the best possible medical facilities, he could not be saved.







Making the loss of life more traumatic, some people are so poverty-stricken they can't even buy firewood to cremate deceased family members. Last week, 19 people in a neighboring village died because of COVID-19. The families were pleading with the government officials to cremate the bodies. In many parts of India, the number of people dying from the pandemic is so huge there is not enough room in graveyards to bury them or there is no place to cremate them. Some families out of desperation are burning the remains of their dear ones on the roadside without any religious rituals.

India has had the second-highest tally of COVID-19 infections in the world after the United States, with 29.51 million cases and 374,305 deaths, according to ministry data.

Today I can barely come out of the house without being troubled by the pitiful scenes all around. I see the misery of the poor who are laborers and migrants. I am shocked to see the pathetic condition of corona patients lying in wait in the hallways of hospitals and along the roadside without any immediate medical care. Although the government claims it has taken necessary steps to safeguard all its citizens, the reality on the ground tells a completely different story. ♦



#### **Bishop Basil Bhuriya obituary**

*Bishop Basil Bhuriya SVD of the diocese of Jhabua in the state of Madhya Pradesh died on May 6 from cardiac arrest at St. Francis Hospital in Indore. He had been hospitalized after testing positive for COVID-19 on April 3. When his condition deteriorated and he had difficulty breathing, he suffered a heart attack and died.*

*The prelate hailed from the local Bhil tribal community, and he always wanted to promote tribal culture and lifestyle. He tried to encourage local vocations to the priesthood. "He was a kind shepherd and will be greatly missed. ... We commend his soul to our merciful Father and offer our condolences to the people of Jhabua, who lost their compassionate shepherd," said Bishop Chacko Thottumarickal SVD of Indore, speaking to AsiaNews.*

*Bishop Basil considered social service to be a service to God. He had done exemplary work to uplift the Jhabua diocese. Whoever came to him for help, he was ready to help them in every way possible. As bishop he did his best to promote local culture. He was ordained a priest on May 2, 1986, and became bishop of Jhabua diocese on Oct 10, 2015.*

*Bishop Thottumarickal, Archbishop Leo Cornelio SVD of Bhopal and Provincial Superior Joemon James Alackal SVD of the India - Central Province led the funeral service in the presence of 20 people—including five family members—in compliance with COVID-19 protocols. Bishop Bhuriya was laid to rest at Meghnagar Cemetery.*

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