

PATNA JESUIT

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE PATNA PROVINCE OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

APRIL 2021

Dear Friends,

Greetings from the Patna Province, as it heads into the conclusion of its Centenary year.

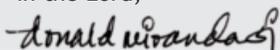
The celebration of the Centenary of the Patna Jesuit Mission on March 3, 2021 was a joyful experience. In the midst of so many local, national and global tragedies, the Centenary has reminded me to be always grateful for “the great things God has done for us during these one hundred years.” I take this opportunity to express our gratitude, as a province, to all who have been part of this pilgrimage. **THANK YOU!**

When the first five Jesuits from the Missouri Province, USA, arrived in India, in 1921, they perhaps, would not have foreseen these first one hundred years. We stand on the shoulders of giants. They have built this Mission into what it is today. The Patna Jesuit Mission was started by five Jesuits and in one hundred years it has grown 60-fold. As we look forward for the next one hundred years, I believe that enthusiasm for the mission, love for the people and Church we serve, rising above our own self-will, self-love and self-interest, will be the hallmark of Patna Jesuits. Despite a constant decline in vocations, we need to support “bold apostolic initiatives” to meet newer challenges.

This Centenary offers us the realization that while we take “wings” to fly into this digital era, we need to be firmly “rooted and grounded” in our spiritual traditions to be relevant as “men of God” and “men of the Church.” As Blessed Pedro Arrupe, SJ, our former Superior General, reminds us that “Falling in Love with Christ”, will determine all our plans and visions for the future: whether awake or asleep, celebrating or grieving, conversing or in silence. This, I believe, will be the benchmark for Patna Jesuits for the next one hundred years. I am sure; all of you will continue to be co-travellers with us on this pilgrimage.

God bless you all!

In the Lord,



Fr. Donald Miranda, SJ
Provincial



Archbishop of Patna, Most. Rev. Sebastian Kallupura, releasing the Centenary Souvenir, ‘Winged Colours of Hope,’ in the company of Rev. Fr. Donald Miranda, SJ, Archbishop Emeritus Most. Rev. William D’Souza, SJ, (Extreme left), Rev. Sr. Joesetta, Mother General of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, and other dignitaries.

Centenary Smiles

By Fr. Joseph Pulickal, SJ

The year 2021 is a milestone in the history of Patna Jesuits as it was on March, 16, 1921 that the first five Jesuits from Missouri Province landed in Patna. At first, the Jesuits took residence with the Irish Christian Brothers at St. Michael’s School, Kurji, Patna, to acclimatize themselves and started to look around for new possibilities. Slowly they spread out to various railway settlements where there already were small English-speaking Christian communities. In most of these places there already were some mission centers established and cared for by Franciscan Capuchins.

Three years before the first Jesuits arrived, Gandhi had returned from South Africa and wanted to be part of the freedom struggle in India which was in its infancy. If America had race, India had caste. Gandhi had to fight on two fronts – for the independence of the country from the British rule, and for the fulfillment of the aspirations of the marginalized groups called “untouchables,” for whom Gandhi used the euphemism, “Harijans,” meaning, ‘Children of God.’ Not surprisingly, it was to these most marginalized people, that those first Jesuits went looking for opportunities to bring the message of freedom. Today, looking back, we cannot help but admire the wisdom of those first Jesuits!

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Baby Steps

First, an attempt was made to settle the semi-nomadic outcastes called ‘Doms’ in a place called Gahiri in North Bihar. Along with the mission to Doms, the Jesuits had moved to the Santhal tribal areas of South East Bihar. In 1938, the Santal mission was handed over to the Third Order of Religious missionaries from America. Jesuits were asked to move back to work among the depressed classes around Patna.

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Rev. Fr. Donald Miranda, SJ, welcoming the guests during the Centenary Celebrations

Celebration of Centenary

By Fr. Benny Moolan, SJ

Amidst the pandemic restrictions, the celebrations of the Centenary of Patna Jesuit Mission was concluded on March 3, 2021, at XTTI, Patna.

The day began with a short prayer service at the Jesuit cemetery, where all our Jesuit pioneers are laid to rest. As a symbolic expression of our appreciation and gratitude to all our pioneers and benefactors, a plaque was unveiled at the cemetery by the Archbishop of Patna, Most. Rev. Sebastian Kallupura. It was an emotional moment of reconnecting with our Jesuit companions. A flame was lit from the embers at the cemetery and carried to the venue of the Holy Eucharist and the ceremonial lamp was lit with the same flame praying that we, the present members of the province, may be flamed by the same spirit of our pioneers.

The prayer was followed by Holy Eucharist presided over by four bishops and joined by ten Jesuit provincials, more than a hundred priests, and others.

A felicitation program followed the Holy Eucharist. During the program, we were ignited by the video messages of Rev. Fr. Arturo Sosa, SJ, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Brian Paulson, SJ, the provincial of the USA Midwest Province, and Fr. Theodore Bowling, SJ, the oldest member of the Patna Province. All the dignitaries were felicitated to express our gratitude. Rev. Fr. Stanislaus D'Souza, SJ, the president of the Jesuit Conference of South Asia, in his presidential message appreciated the contribution of the Patna Jesuits in the mission of the Church and of the Society of Jesus. The program ended with a dance-drama depicting the historical 100 year journey of the Patna Jesuit Mission.

Patna and USA Midwest Province Collaborative Link



Fr. Thomas Chillikulam, SJ, serves as Chaplain at Loyola University Chicago and can be reached at: Gonzaga Jesuit Community, 6235 N Kenmore Avenue, Chicago, IL 60660, USA. Phone: 203-706-9601; e-mail: chillikulam@gmail.com

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An Earthquake, Drought, and Floods

The Church has always come forward to provide relief to victims of such natural calamities. In 1934, a large earthquake struck North Bihar causing havoc to lives and property. Bihar has also had its share of drought and floods. The Church of Patna was fully in action feeding hundreds of thousands every day. Bihar Relief Committee was set up by the federal government under the Chairmanship of Fr. Francis Loesch, SJ.

New Momentum

Year after year, several small batches of American Jesuits kept arriving. But the number was not enough for the vast work awaiting them. Bettiah, in North Bihar, already had an old Christian community, providing vocations to priesthood and religious life, but the numbers were small. Bishop Bernard Sullivan, SJ, soon after his consecration, made a few journeys to the South of the country to the old Christian centers of Mangalore and Kerala, looking for recruits for Patna Mission.

The first group of oppressed classes who accepted Christianity has been the flag bearers for the growth of Church in Patna. Starting with just one family from among the oppressed classes, who accepted Christianity in 1935, today the four dioceses have a total of 87 parishes and mission stations, 142 diocesan priests, 105 Jesuit priests, and several hundred women religious.

In order to free the poor from enslavement, the missionaries built schools and hostels at all centers. In order to facilitate work in villages among the poorest, we needed the support of the rich and powerful. Keeping this in mind, the Jesuits opened schools and colleges in urban centers.

Growth and Expansion

After Bishop Louis Van Hoeck, SJ, Fr. Bernard Sullivan, SJ, became the Bishop of Patna in 1929 and Fr. Augustine Wildermuth, SJ, in 1947. In 1980, Bishop Benedict Osta, SJ, was appointed the Bishop of Patna, during whose time Patna became an Archdiocese with Muzaffarpur, Bettiah, Bhagalpur, and Purnea as suffragans. In the same year, Bishop John Baptist Thakur, SJ, was

consecrated as the Bishop of Muzaffarpur. In 2008, Patna was again bifurcated to form Buxar Diocese with another Jesuit, Fr. William D'Souza, SJ, as its first bishop.

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In these past one hundred years, we have tried our best to be agents of Christ's liberative redemption.

Women religious were an integral part of the growth and development of Patna Mission. Without their solid commitment, it is difficult to imagine

how our numerous rural schools and hostels for the poor children would have functioned. We warm-heartedly salute their heroism, commitment, sacrifice and sisterly love.



Empowering the least and the last: Education brought smiles to the faces of village children.

Smiles for the Miles Ahead

I am writing these lines from a place called 'Manthan', which in Hindi means 'Churning.' This word explains the purpose of this organization, which serves the poorest of the poor of Bihar. Manthan and other social centers were established to liberate them through education. Such intervention has brought smiles on their faces and those smiles are affirmation that from the very start of our mission in Patna, we have worked for and stood with the poorest and the weakest of this land as Jesus would have done. This very thought brings a gentle smile to our own faces, too.

In these past one hundred years, we have tried our best to be agents of Christ's liberative redemption, especially the weakest and the most neglected of our land have seen the salvation promised by God in Christ. The labor of love started one hundred years ago by those pioneers will, in God's own time, establish many more milestones.

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 Fr. Joseph Pulickal, SJ, is a prolific writer and master of Hindi language. He is part of the XTTI community and assigned at Xavier Institute of Social Research, Patna.



A Bloomed Bud in Sanctity

By Fr. Rajesh Somepalli, SJ

I am Rajesh, son of Mr. Somepalli Vincent Paul and Ms. Nirmala, from Andhra Pradesh. My parents, though they were not Christians, made sure that we were given life values and simple faith experiences. Since I was from a converted family, the desire to join religious life never occurred even in my distant thoughts. Maybe, God was doing it without my knowledge! Being the youngest in the family, I was given so much freedom and opportunities to be what I wished in my life. I was given so much freedom to learn new skills and learn different things. I had the full support of my parents to choose any career. My brother and I spent school days in a hostel run by the Jesuits and schooling in a Jesuit school. My father, being a farmer as well as a business man, was very simple and hardworking with a heart filled with love for the needy.



Fr. Rajesh Somepalli, SJ, offering his first Mass, after ordination, at St. Xavier's School, Patna

When I joined Loyola College in Vijayawada, I came in touch with Jesuits a little more and in particular, a wonderful Jesuit, Fr. Dr. Pothireddy Anthony, SJ, who became my inspiration. It was during the time of a tsunami, I happened to witness the true life of a Jesuit and I was part of collecting for a tsunami relief fund and engaged in other activities in the company of Jesuits. It was during this time, a tsunami-like stirring took place in my heart, to do something radical for the people. My priorities began to shift, and my focus was changed.

My first desire to join the Society of Jesus was when I attended a vocation talk. I enrolled my name to join the Darjeeling and Jamshedpur provinces. However, the Lord had his way and I

landed up joining the Patna Province. Although, there were lots of objections from my family and other well wishers, I convinced my father about my vocation. It was Fr. Joyson, SJ, who came to my home and won the confidence of my parents that really helped me to follow my dream to be a Patna Jesuit.

My novitiate life was a decisive moment in my life. I was slowly understanding the depth of my vocation. The experience of novitiate was so wonderful and touching that it sparked within me the vibrations and happiness of the Lord. This experience was such that I had no choice but follow Him wherever he led me.

The road was not easy and rough at times, but I could experience the constant guidance and helping hand of God through my formators and Jesuit companions. Through close encounters with senior Jesuits in XTTI, Patna, I started to love religious life all the more. As I grew in age and in my vocation in the Society, I was so touched by the freedom that the Lord offered in and through the Society to grow in responsibility. I felt it all along my formation.

During the time of Theology, I could see and experience the Incarnate Lord in the people who lived in the slums of Delhi, and it was there that I was surrounded by faith experiences and to be restless for the people of God. A blooming experience in sanctity, indeed!

Today, I stand before the Lord as his humble servant, filled with gratitude, for the gift of ministerial priesthood offered to me even in the midst of the pandemic. Though, my parents and siblings could not make it to my ordination due to the lockdown, I was blessed to have my Jesuit brothers to bless me and to pray for me. My emptiness was filled with their presence. Thus God fulfilling His promise "Whatever you sacrifice in my name for the Kingdom of God, you'll have a hundredfold."

Fr. Rajesh Somepalli, SJ, is the sole newly ordained priest for Patna province this year. He is assigned at Queen of the Apostle Church, Kurji, for his pastoral ministry.



WORDS OF GRATITUDE

On the occasion of the commemoration of the 100 years of the pilgrim journey of the Patna Jesuit Mission, we, the Patna Jesuits, express our sincere gratitude to all the pioneers, benefactors, friends, and well-wishers for being part of this journey.

My tribute to those Angels

By Fr. Ignatius Arun Abraham, SJ

It's quite nostalgic to tread down memory lane once you acquire a good bit of grey on top!

Here is a short story about my family and a glimpse of the goodwill of those angels who virtually descended from the heavens and made difference, squarely! I come from Bettiah, a small town in the Northwest of the State of Bihar of the Union of India. My granny would often recall stories of Frs. Stoy, Farrell, Meyer, et al. My father began his schooling in Chuhari, a neighboring village under the care of Fr. Forster, Br. Pais and others. Then he moved to Khrist Raja High School, Bettiah. In his stories he would talk about Frs. Sontag, Bohn, Bonnet, O'Connor, Ugarte, Welfle, Conway, Pettit, et al. However, he dropped out after Grade VIII. The Catholic Printing Press, a Jesuit enterprise then, trained him into an all-round hand there, in the thirties. In 1942, his Jesuit pastor sent him to Fr. Charles McAleese, at Danapur military cantonment in Patna, who got my father fixed in the British army as a sapper in the Unit of Royal Indian Engineers. My mother was a trained teacher but worked as a philatelist in an establishment overseen by the Jesuits.

Three out of four of us brothers are named after Jesuits: Francis Xavier, Ignatius, and Aloysius. Jesuit influence could be felt all around us while we were growing up. Frs. Mc Glinchy, Roserfelder, John Kenny, Cabin Angelo, all cared for grooming us into what we are today. A year after graduating from KR in 1966, I began as a Medical Secretary at Holy Family Hospital, a fabulous gift of the Jesuits to Patna through Frank Loesch and company. The fifteen long years there helped me, but the seed planted during my schooling finally made me succumb! In 1982, I stepped into the Jesuit Novitiate at XTTI. A late vocation! I was ordained in 1992.

The Jesuits taught us how we must also give ourselves to others. No lacking, no looking back once a family spares its dear ones in the service of God! It is literally true! The Jesuits have made a great difference in our lives. There are many more families in ours and in the neighboring Dioceses with similar stories. These are stories of the efforts of Jesuit pioneers in reaching out towards community and nation building.

Fr. Ignatius Arun Abraham, SJ, is a member of St. Michael's community and serves as the moderator of the school of music and dance at St. Michael's School, Patna.



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Editor: Fr. Benny Moolan, SJ

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Jesuit International Missions - Patna
1010 N. Hooker Street
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Ann Greene – Advancement
agreene@jesuits.org

GLIMPSES OF CENTENARY CELEBRATION - MARCH 3, 2021



Online link to the Centenary Celebrations
<http://jesuitsmidwest.org/Patna100>



IN REMEMBRANCE



Fr. Dionysius Rasquinha, SJ
Died on September 24, 2020 in Patna. He was a teacher of theology, specialized in liberation and Dalit theology. He was a prolific writer and musician too.



Fr. S.P. Lourdusamy, SJ
Died on November 22, 2020 in Kolkata. He was a loving pastor, an understanding spiritual guide, and learned teacher of theology, specialized in moral theology.