



Pastor's Corner

As the Costa Concordia cruise ship went down off the West Coast of Italy on Jan. 13, 2012, Nicole Servel's husband, Francis, gave her the only life jacket they had, the Huff Post reports. "I owe my life to my husband it's obvious he saved me." According to the Daily Mail she managed to swim for shore, while Mr. Servel was swept underwater and drowned. Speaking from her home near Toulouse, South West France, Mrs. Servel recounted the terror as passengers were left in utter panic in the pitch dark, with little or no assistance from the crew. Mrs. Servel said: "He shouted: 'Jump, jump, jump.' I can't swim so he gave me his life jacket. I froze and couldn't jump, but he jumped off the ship and shouted upwards 'Come on, don't worry.'" She continued: "I jumped off and the last thing I heard him say was that I would be fine. Then I never saw him again." "The water was only eight degrees. When I was alone in the water I thought of my children, my grandchildren. The thought of them kept me afloat. It kept me living. I do not know how I did it." "I swam for several minutes. I am unable to say exactly how long. And then I found myself on a rock. Villagers came to pick us up. They led us to a church. I was very cold, frozen. In the sacristy we found a cassock. I took it. It made

me warm," she added. A sad tale, indeed, one that reminds us we owe our lives to people that come into it; it's even sadder because the Servel story is a real-life story that happened less than a month ago. Today as I celebrate my 60th Birthday, it is life I think about and thank God for. I thank God for the many graces he has filled my life with. I thank the numerous wonderful people that

The Gift of Life

have entered my life and enriched me with their love and sacrifice.



The 59 years of life I have completed, of which 31 I spent as priest and 16 as 'shepherd' of the Diocese, have been grace-filled and love-filled! What more can

I ask for! Thank you.

I certainly endorse what Larry Lorenzoni said, "Birthdays are good for you. Statistics show that the people who have the most live the longest." Ha, ha, ha!!! God bless.

+Lumen, CSC



Editorial

The contrasting perceptions regarding last month's visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina to Tripura is indicative of the highly polarized population that Tripura has. While the Government and the majority population of the State hailed the visit as a 'historic' one, and basked in the euphoria of emotional and cultural affinity with the country of the visiting dignitary, the indigenous people of the State gave indications of resentment at such reckless flaunting of a slice of history which turned them to paupers and *upajati* in their homeland. There is no denying it, on official standpoints, the people are neatly polarized along party lines but at the gut level polarization always seems to be

Posturing no more!

along ethnic lines. As an emerging third party player of some strength, the Church would also, over a period of time, slip into a position or other, consciously or unconsciously. However, the effectiveness and acceptability of the Church will depend to an extent on its ability to address specific needs of specific communities and yet not allow these specifics to cause divisions in the community. It is not about becoming accommodative in a facile kind of way, but about clarifying stands and strengthening positions, based on the wherewithal that Church draws its strength from. The challenge has a frightening set of implications. It requires we risk getting enmeshed in unimportant local problems that simply consume time and even affect well-guarded reputation.

J. Pulinthanath, sdb



LINK wishes our dear Bishop Lumen, the shepherd of the Diocese, a Very Happy Birthday and God's Blessings.



CONGRATULATIONS to India's 11th Cardinal

The Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI named 22 new Cardinals including Major Archbishop George Alencherry, from India. The new Cardinal-designate said his appointment was a recognition for the country and the Syro Malabar Church and said he would follow the examples of his Syrian rite predecessors, Cardinals Joseph Parecattil, Antony Padiyara and Varkey Vithayathil. Late Cardinal Valerian Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay, was the first Indian to become a Cardinal in 1953. The investiture ceremony will take place in Rome on February 18.

Mariamnagar Parish

Canonical Erection of Bethany Convent at Kheyarpur

"When we dare to dream, many marvels can be accomplished.. The trouble is, most people never start dreaming their impossible dream," says Glenn Van Ekeren. This saying seems to be true for Bethany Sisters as their long cherished dream to have an establishment at Kheyarpur got actualized on 9th January 2012. It was a most memorable day in the history of our Congregation. On this day a new Bethany community was canonically erected during the Holy Eucharist officiated by his Excellency Rt. Rev. Bishop Lumen Monteiro, Bishop of Agartala and the Decree was read by Sr. Noeline, the Provincial Superior of North East Province. Sr. Noeline Inaugurated the New House by cutting the ribbon and it was blessed by Bishop Lumen. The Convent is in the precincts of Mariamnagar Parish. This is the fifth Bethany Community in the Diocese of Agartala and 30th house in the North East Province. Bishop Lumen appreciated Bethany Sisters and said that "Bethany Sisters were the first ones to come to Tripura Missions and have worked hard selecting difficult places. In the beginning it was a challenge but gradually, Sisters were able to put up with the inconveniences of the place and carry on the mission." Sr. Noeline, the Provincial Superior thanked Bishop Lumen for his support and encouragement. Sr. Eva who would be shouldering the responsibility as a Superior was wished well. An Anonymous proverb says, "Tomorrow belongs to those who have a vision today." May our vision of accomplishing the great things through this Mission come true.

Sr. Caron, B.S



CONGRATULATION S to Guwahati's new Archbishop

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI has accepted the resignation of Most Rev. Thomas

Menampambal, SDB, from the pastoral governance of the Archdiocese of Guwahati and has appointed Most Rev. John Moolachira, the Coadjutor Bishop, as new Archbishop of Guwahati.

Khumlung Parish

MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS ON THE WHEELS...WITH THE ROCKS...

St. Alphonsa Parish, Khumlung decided to share the message of Christmas creatively this year. Carol singing and crib making competition at every house already began at the end of 2nd week of December.



About 45 youth shared the message of Christmas to a poor Kaipeng village by conducting carol singing and Bible quiz. On 22nd of December, the enthusiastic parishioners organized vehicle rally to share the message of Christmas with the people of other faith. There were about 35 motor bikes and 15 four wheelers engaged in the rally. Well decorated vehicle carried baby Jesus, Joseph, Mary, angles and Santa Claus on the busy roads singing and playing drums. The Christmas messages were given at three markets - Khumlung, Bidibazar and Jampuijala. The rally began at 11am and ended at 5pm. Christmas cultural nite was another attraction. Youth of the Parish greeted people with rock music concert. It was proud moment for the parishioners to share the message of Christ's birth-the message of GOD'S LOVE.

Ambassa Parish

25 Years of Faith Celebration in N.G. Para

On 15th January 2012, the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the arrival of faith at Neitungulpara (N.G. Para), Ambassa finally came to an end with much pomp and gaiety. N.G. Para Mondoli Jubilee celebration began on 15th December 2011 with the unfurling of the jubilee flag. During this month long celebration many faith formation programs were conducted to strengthen the faith of the people. Some of the animation programs: Teaching of the Church by Fr. Hormis CSC, Seminar by Fr. Cyprian Pinto SVD, Charismatic Prayer by Fr. Joshy and Youth Seminar by Fr. Ivan D'Silva SVD.

The culmination of the Jubilee was on



NEWS FROM THE PARISHES

HEAD OF THE DIOCESE ON THE TOP



Hello... I am on the hill top, on my way to a village called Lungkam...replies Bishop Lumen Monteiro to a phone call. It is a Kaipeng Village (one of the most poor & backward tribes of

Tripura) resting on a high mountain. There are about 40 families in all. Illiteracy and lack of resources have made them depend on *jhum* cultivation and forest products. But their faith is as strong as their determination to face the struggles and difficulties of life. People are quite receptive to the faith though the Catholic faith has recently made inroads in these mountain areas. With their own interest, contribution and with our little help they constructed a beautiful tin roofed village church. Bishop was delighted to bless the new village church and administer the Sacrament of Confirmation. We are grateful to Bishop Lumen and Fr. Cyprian Pinto SVD for taking trouble to cross the hills to encourage and strengthen the faith of these simple people. We hope our constant visits and mission work will bear abundant fruits in these hillocks.

Fr. Arun Minj, SVD

14th and 15th January 2012. On 14th there was a candle light Marian procession and inauguration of the jubilee memorial grotto by Most Rev. Lumen Monteiro, CSC. After the inauguration of the grotto there was an hour of Eucharistic Adoration and a short cultural program organized by the village people. On 15th a Thanksgiving

Mass was officiated by Bishop Lumen Monteiro CSC. After the Mass all the Fathers and Sisters were welcomed and felicitated with traditional *Halam risha*. At the end of the program the jubilee flag was lowered by Bishop Lumen to mark the conclusion of Jubilee celebrations.

Fr. Nabin Roshan Lakra, SVD

Prison Ministry at Dharmanagar Sub Jail

'He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives' says Jesus. (Lk 4: 18) We Bethany Sisters of Holy Cross Convent were happy to partake in this ministry of Jesus by celebrating the Prison Ministry Day and Christmas program at Dharmanagar Sub Jail. Under the guidance of Sr. Isabella, BS the Coordinator for PMI Silchar unit the following programs were organized for the first time in Darmanagar Sub Jail. We were indeed glad to have the esteemed presence of Mr. Ratan Biswas, SDM of Dharmanagar.

Prison Ministry Day: The program commenced at 12.00 noon with the lighting of the *diya* as a sign of light



dispelling darkness within and it was followed by cultural programs presented by students of Holy Cross Hostel. Few competitions like drawing, memory test, filling the bottles and breaking the pot were conducted for the prisoners. The winners

won attractive prizes. The SDM in his address appreciated the Bethany Sisters for their service to the downtrodden of the society. Sr. Rosia BS welcomed the all the gathering and Sr. Isabella BS was the master of ceremony and proposed vote of thanks. The program ended with distribution of snacks.

Christmas celebration: December 10th was indeed a unique day for us the Bethany Holy Cross community.

The Bethany Sisters under the leadership of Sr. Isabella BS together with the few Hostel girls marched towards the prison. The Christmas joy, peace and love could be sensed all around. The short program commenced at 11.15 am.

The Jailer was the Chief Guest. Christmas skit, angels dance, shepherd dance, Christmas dance, carols singing etc. was performed by the students. Christmas joy was shared with them by distributing mats, buckets and play articles for the common use. The prisoners were happy and grateful. At the end all were given snacks and vacated the place happily with the message, render your generous service with love to the lost and least people of the society.

Sr. Anita Lydia, BS

New SABS Convent at Bodhjunnagar

Corpus Christi Province of SABS Congregation (Sisters of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament) started their 2nd House in Agartala Diocese at Bodhjunnagar. Bishop Lumen blessed the new Convent which was inaugurated by Sr. Annie SABS, the Provincial Superior from Dimapur on 14th January 2012. Little Flower Adoration Convent is located at St. Andre Parish Centre, Bodhjunnagar. Sr. Annie Kurichiyel SABS, the Provincial Superior of Corpus Christi Province Dimapur in her introductory message

highlighted the humble origin of SABS Congregation in the Syro-Malabar Church in Kerala on 8th December 1908 with five members in an abandoned cattle shed. It has its origin from the deep Eucharistic experience of the Servant of God Thomas Kurialacherry, an ardent devotee of the Holy Eucharist.

Corpus Christi Province Dimapur is the 16th Province of SABS. This Province covers the North East Region. Today our Province has 30



Convents working in 8 Dioceses of North East India.

It must be noted that just a year ago the SABS had opened their first ever house in the Diocese of Agartala at St. Mary Parish Centre,

Tuikawmaw. "We are grateful for your presence and ministry," said Fr. Emmanuel CSC, the Provincial Superior of the Holy Cross Fathers who was present for the Mass and inaugural function along with a host of parishioners, priests and sisters.

Link News Service

Visit to the Central Jail at Agartala on Christmas Day 2011

On Sunday, 25th December 2011, Fr. Ronald SDB and a Team of five from Shantir Rani Parish, Mariamnagar visited the Central Jail at Agartala and spent about three hours to celebrate the Christmas Day with the prison inmates.

The Jailer, Shri Banikanto Debbarma (who is a catholic) welcomed and escorted us into "Anando Bhavan" auditorium within the prison. There was a long line of prison inmates dressed in their white uniforms, from the main entrance of the prison to the auditorium.

We had a soul stirring experience as we shook their hands, looked into their faces filled with varied expressions and exchanged Christmas Greetings. There are 460 inmates including women. Out of these about 150 gathered together in the auditorium for a celebration of prayer, Christmas carol singing, sharing of Christmas messages and wishes. 35% of the participants were Christians.

The function in the auditorium began with lighting of candles, followed by a

string of Christmas carols, prayer songs and popular songs in various languages, interspersed with speeches by the Superintendent, Jailer No.2, Fr. Ronald SDB and Shri Banikanto Debbarma. We offered all the inmates small packets of chocolates at the end

of the programme, whereas the inmates entertained us and the Prison Officers with sumptuous servings of superb *biryani* that the inmates themselves had prepared in their kitchen.

Fr. Ronald, SDB



- ◆ Sr. Ventura FS, Regional Superior from Rangia
- ◆ Fr. Fernando D'Costa from Pune
- ◆ Fr. Denis Joseph from Pune
- ◆ Fr. Benny CSC, from Manila
- ◆ CSC Fathers from Meghalaya and Mizoram
- ◆ Sr. John Baptist RNDM, from Meghalaya

Christians by numbers around the world

Christians account for almost a third of the world's population. This was one of the findings in a report published Monday by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. The data from the



2010 survey of more than 200 countries found that worldwide, there are 2.18 billion Christians, nearly a third of the estimated global population of 6.9 billion. Muslims, according to previous studies by the Pew group, account for a bit under a quarter of the world's population.

In spite of so many being in a small number of countries, Christians are still a majority of the population in 158 countries and territories, about two-thirds of all the countries and territories in the world.

There are 1.1 billion Catholics worldwide, according to the report. This means they account for half of the global Christian population.

Brazil is the country with the largest number of Catholics, at 134 million. This means there are more Catholics in Brazil than in Italy, France and Spain combined. (*Fides*)

New Secretary for Congregation for Bishops

Archbishop Lorenzo Baldisseri (India's former Nuncio) has been named the new Secretary of the Congregation for Bishops. He had been serving as the apostolic nuncio in Brazil. The new Vatican official hails from Italy. After studying at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy he entered the Holy See's diplomatic service. On Jan. 12, 1992, John Paul II named him Nuncio to Haiti and he was ordained a bishop on March 7 and elevated to the rank of archbishop. After being nuncio in Paraguay starting in 1995 he moved to India and Nepal in 1999 and then in 2002 was named Nuncio in Brazil. (*Zenit News*)



Papal Audience crosses 2.5million

The Prefecture of the Pontifical Household announced that during the course of 2011, some 2,553,800 faithful participated in various meetings with Benedict XVI. This number includes general audiences (400,000), private audiences (101,800), liturgical celebrations (846,000), Angelus and Regina Coeli gatherings (1,206,000). These statistics, which show an increase with respect to the last three years, refer only to meetings that took place in the Vatican or Castel Gandolfo, and do not include the many thousands of faithful who came to see the Holy Father on his journeys in Italy or abroad. The Prefecture of the Pontifical Household also said the single event which brought together the largest number of faithful was the beatification of John Paul II on May 1. (*Zenit News*)



26 Missionaries Killed in 2011

The Fides news agency has published a list of pastoral workers who were killed during the last year. Not all of them were martyrs in the strict sense, as Fides lists all those who lost their lives in a violent manner. In 2011, 26 pastoral care workers were killed: one more than the previous year: 18 priests, four religious sisters and four laypeople... Many of them were killed in the course of attempted robbery or kidnapping. Others, the Fides report said, "were killed in the name of Christ by those opposing love with hatred, hope with despair, dialogue with violent opposition." (*Fides*)



Chairman of a Catholic TV and

magazine Benny Punnathara has been bestowed chevalierhood by Pope Benedict XVI. The Kerala Catholic Bishops Council chairperson Archbishop Andrew Thazath of Trichur announced this in a meeting in Kochi. Punnathara runs a 24-hour Catholic television Shalom TV without any advertisement. He also publishes a spiritual magazine Shalom. Over 200 youth now work with him to spread the gospel across the globe. He is also planning an English channel in the US by next year. (*Fides*)



LINK MAIL BOX

Thank you very much for sending the LINK of January. May God bless you and your diocese for the coming year. *Edward, Jaipur*

Thanks for the wonderful ministry you are doing in Agartala, and your faithfulness in keeping people 'linked' in faith. *Tony Krisak, USA*

Thanks a lot for your Christmas cum New Year Greetings and Prayers together with January Link. It was a big bonus to us. Thanks a lot for your Touching Story at the Pastor's Corner and all the best for the Year of the Mission. *Mariaraj, CSC, Pune*

BISHOP'S PROGRAM FOR FEBRUARY 2012

- 01-08: CBCI Plenary Assembly, Bangalore
- 09: Meeting with Architect
- 10: Inaugural of School and AC Convent, Gokulnagar
- 11-12: Parish Sabah, Kathalcherra
- 15-17: Caritas Golden Jubilee Celebrations, Guwahati
- 18-19: Garo Sabah, Machli, Kumarghat Parish
- 21: St. Xavier's School, Pathaliaghat
- 22: Ash Wednesday
- 25-26: Baijalbari & Bodomaidan Confirmations
- 27-28: Caritas Golden Jubilee Celebrations, Agartala