

Editorial

J. Pulinthanath, SDB



Lent: A Season like No Other

Uppermost in our mind and prayers these days is the ailing Pontiff, Pope Francis. At the moment, when this editorial is being written, the news from the Vatican is that there has been 'slight improvement', although his condition continues to be critical and prognosis therefore, guarded. The Diocese of Agartala joins the whole world to pray for the recovery and good health of Pope Francis.

Once again as we usher in the holy season of Lent, we realize how special a time it is. It is surely the most 'felt' season in the liturgical calendar because Lent lends itself to our 'senses' like no other. By engaging our senses, we are reminded that our faith is not just something abstract—it is something deeply rooted in our daily lives, in the way we experience the world around us. Each sense—sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell—becomes a doorway through which we can encounter God more deeply.

Sight: During Lent, our eyes are often drawn to the image of the cross. Cross-centred devotions like the way of the cross and the Good Friday Liturgy are powerful reminders of Jesus' suffering, sacrifice, and love for us. The vestments used in Lenten liturgy help us visualize pain, contrition and penance through colours of violet, rose, red and finally the glorious white of Easter!

Hearing: we listen—to God's voice, to Scripture, and to the prayers of the Church. We listen to the quiet of Lent and in that silence hear God's still small voice in our hearts, urging us to rend our hearts, not garments, until the Halleluiahs of Easter morn pierce our ears in joyful strain.

Touch: It's a season in which we reach out and touch others in giving, sharing – food, clothing, money. On Ash Wednesday the minister reaches out and smears dust on us. On Maundy Thursday, in imitation of Christ, he not only touches our feet but washes it.

Taste: We impose a discipline on our taste in Lent. Having only simple food reminds us of spiritual nourishment that only God can provide and also helps us appreciate the abundance we often take for granted.

Smell: We relish not just the fragrance of incense and candles whose smells and sights symbolize our prayers rising to God, but also the aroma of the holy oils, the Sacred Chrism and the Sacraments they are used for.

It's a season that asks us to involve, along with our minds or hearts, our whole selves in the process of repentance, reflection, and renewal. As if in response, throughout this holy season, our village mothas and mondolis reverberate with heartfelt strains of contrition and yearning for God.

J. Pulinthanath, SDB

Pastor's Corner

POPE FRANCIS



We have been praying for our Holy Father Pope Francis, joining the whole world with our prayers. As this issue of LINK is being written, the Holy See Press Office provided

the following update on Pope Francis' health: *The Holy Father's clinical condition, despite its severity, has shown a slight improvement. No episodes of asthma-like respiratory distress occurred today, and some laboratory tests have shown improvement. The monitoring of his mild kidney insufficiency has not raised any concerns. Oxygen therapy continues, although with slightly reduced flow and oxygen levels. Given the complexity of the clinical picture, the doctors are prudently maintaining their cautious prognosis. In the morning, the Pope received the Eucharist, while in the afternoon, he resumed his work. In the evening, he called the parish priest of Gaza to express his paternal closeness. He even released his Message for Lent 2025, announced some new saints, and made some appointments of new Bishops. Pope Francis thanks the entire People of God, who in these days have gathered to pray for his health. Dear Holy Father we are praying for your good health and speedy recovery. Let us continue to storm heaven for our Holy Father.*

International Women's Day 2025

International Women's Day, celebrated annually on March 8, is a global movement advocating for gender equality, women's empowerment, and social justice. Each year, different organizations introduce themes that shape the narrative of IWD campaigns worldwide. The theme for this year is Accelerate Action for gender equality. Focusing on the need to Accelerate Action emphasizes the importance of taking swift and decisive steps to achieve gender equality. It calls for increased momentum and urgency in addressing the systemic barriers and biases that women face, both in personal and professional spheres. It is a call to stereotypes, challenge discrimination, question bias, celebrate women's success, and so much more. 82 women participated in the Synod on Synodality – and in an historical first, 54 of them voted. The increased involvement of women in the synod gathering and the questions related to broadening women's participation in the Church signals that the role of women was a central theme at the Oct. 4-29 Vatican gathering. In the General Audience last year Pope Francis thanked and praised women saying, "On International Women's Day, I think of all women: I thank them for their commitment to building a more humane society, through their ability to grasp reality with a creative eye and a tender heart." He ended his Wednesday audience with these words, "A special blessing for all the women in the square. And a round of applause for women! They deserve it!" We will do well to celebrate Women's Day and give them the rightful place and dignity in society. I wish all our women a Happy Women's Day.

+ Lumen, CSC

Gondatwisa Parish

Marriage Classes



The marriage classes held at St. Arnold Parish, Gondatwisa, on the 8th and 9th of February were a significant and enriching experience for the 17 couples who participated. The sessions were thoughtfully organized and led by a team of knowledgeable and inspiring facilitators, including Mr. Ashim Uchoi, Fr. Sebin, Sr. Susheela SSpS, and Mr. Somenjoy Reang. Together, they covered a range of essential topics designed to prepare couples for the sacred journey of marriage.

The first day of the program began with an exploration of the purpose of marriage. Mr. Ashim Uchoi and Fr. Sebin emphasized that marriage is not just a social contract but a divine covenant rooted in love, mutual respect, and lifelong commitment. They highlighted the importance of understanding marriage as a vocation, where couples are called to support each other spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

On the second day, the focus shifted to the duties of parents. Sr. Susheela SSpS and Mr. Somenjoy Reang led this session, discussing the responsibilities that come with raising a family. They stressed the importance of creating a nurturing environment for children, instilling values, and being role models of faith and love. The facilitators also addressed the challenges modern families face and offered practical advice on balancing work, family life, and spiritual growth.

A particularly moving session was on family prayer. Fr. Sebin and Sr. Susheela guided the couples on the significance of prayer in strengthening marital bonds and fostering a Christ-centered home. They encouraged the participants to make prayer a daily habit, emphasizing that a family that prays together stays together. They provided the couples with the tools and insights needed to build strong, faith-filled marriages.

May the participating couples carry the lessons learned into their married lives, becoming witnesses of God's love in their families and communities.

Fr. Amalraj

Kumarghat Parish

Parish Sabha 2025



St. Paul Parish organized a three-day annual Parish Sabha at Sunaimuri village. 298 faithful participated in it. All the logistics, stay and food arrangements were done by the villagers. On 24th Jan at 4pm we all gathered at the venue and hosted the Parish flag and inaugurated Parish Sabha which was followed by an inaugural talk by Fr. Leenus VC. The theme of the Parish Sabha was "Pilgrims of Hope." He explained to the participants the true and the Biblical meaning of Jubilee year. Just before supper, the Rosary was recited by the faithful, and after supper, they had Kirtan and Zaikhowm. The 2nd day began with prayer and breakfast and at 08.30 AM 1st session began with Fr. Leenus VC, he continued with the main topic and explained well how we need to celebrate the Jubilee year with Penance, Holiness, Liberation, and Authority. There was an hour-long praise and worship, the sacrament of reconciliation, and the Holy Eucharist. After Lunch reports from various villages and other associations. Candle-lit rosary procession was organized and it was a beautiful experience for all those who participated in it. After supper cultural program and various competitions were organized by the organizing team. 26th Jan was a Republic Day of the country, the Parish Priest hosted the National flag and gave the message. At 8.45 AM number of faithful welcomed two bishops His excellence Arch Bp. Peter Machado Arch Bishop of Bangalore and our dear Bp. Lumen Monteiro with traditional Risha and Halam dance.

Fr. Lancy D'Souza, CSC



Chailengta Parish

Parish Sabha cum Installation of the new PP

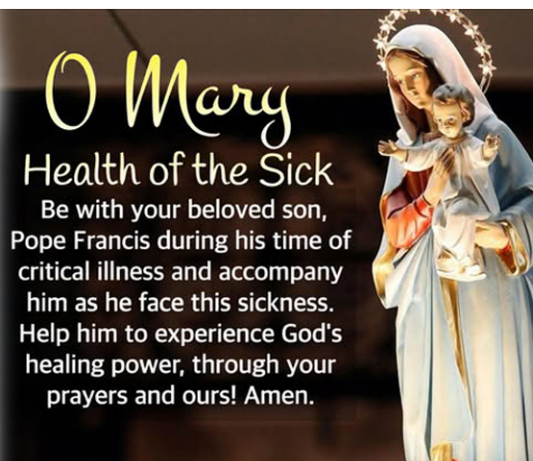


The faithful of St. Joseph Parish, Chailengta, gathered in great joy and gratitude for a two-day celebration on February 15-16, marking the installation of their new Parish Priest, Fr. Packya Jayaseelan, and bidding farewell to the outgoing Parish Priest, Fr. Harry D'Silva, who had served the parish devotedly for three years. The installation ceremony was presided over by His Excellency Bishop Lumen Monteiro. The event coincided with the Parish Sabha, bringing together nearly 150 parishioners from all 10 centers. The Sabha began on February 15 with an inspiring Talk on the theme "Pilgrims of Hope" by Fr. Ivan SVD, followed by a time of Adoration, deepening the spiritual experience of the faithful. The SRA Sisters, actively contributed to the program.

A special meeting was convened with the presidents and secretaries of the 10 centers, fostering collaboration and unity among the parishioners as well as reports of the subcenters were enlightening. Representing the Provincial Administration, Fr. Kanikai CSC expressed heartfelt gratitude to Fr. Harry for his dedicated pastoral service to the parish. Fr. Marbilus CSC, the Assistant Parish Priest, played a key role in organizing the liturgy, with the altar servers assisting in the solemn celebration.

The highlight on February 16 was the installation ceremony, where Fr. Packya Jayaseelan officially took charge as the new pastor of the parish. The atmosphere was filled with joy, gratitude, and a renewed commitment to the faith. The entire event was a testimony to the vibrant spirit of St. Joseph Parish, strengthened by the grace of God and the dedication of its leaders and faithful.

Fr. Jayaseelan, csc



Empowering Farmers through Sustainable Practices: A Collaborative Program by JUST and KVK, Paharpur, Gomati District



A special awareness and training program was successfully conducted at Paharpur in collaboration with Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Gomati District, under the FARM North East project. The event brought together local farmers and beneficiaries to enhance their knowledge of sustainable and high-yield farming practices. The resource person from

on the selection and identification of good seeds, emphasizing the need to shift towards high-yielding varieties for better productivity. Discussions also focused on organic farming practices, highlighting the benefits of natural soil conservation and retention methods to improve long-term agricultural sustainability. Mr. Robert Lushai, Coordinator of JUST, motivated the women farmers to take an active role in farming and encouraged them to explore climate-resilient seeds and crops. He stressed the importance of adopting sustainable agricultural techniques to ensure food security and environmental protection. The program concluded with the distribution of PUSA seed packets containing a variety of seeds to the farmers, equipping them with essential resources to implement their learning's. The event ended on a warm note with refreshments, fostering a spirit of community and shared growth. Such initiatives play a crucial role in strengthening rural agriculture, empowering farmers with knowledge, and promoting environmentally friendly farming methods for a sustainable future.

Networking Meeting strengthens bonds among Youth Organizations



A Networking Meeting for NGOs, CSOs, and like-minded individuals was successfully held, bringing together youth organizations from various communities, including Halam, Molsom, Kaipeng, Darlong, and Debbarma. Mr. G. Vanneiliana Darlong, State Consultant, Peace Project, welcomed the participants and emphasized the importance of networking. He highlighted how local youth and human resources played a crucial role in tackling the aftermath of the August 2024 floods, showcasing the power of community collaboration. Fr. Lathees S, Director of JUST, led an interactive session on team building, inter-community dialogue, and organizational strength assessment through engaging activities. The session fostered a spirit of unity and cooperation. The meeting concluded with a friendly volleyball match among youth organizations, followed by a prize distribution, a vote of thanks by Fr. Lathees, and lunch at the JUST mess—making the event both insightful and enjoyable.

Robert Lushai

News Bytes from the Diocese

Two Churches Declared as Pilgrimage Centres for the Jubilee Year



Ceremonial Launch on March 19, 2025

The official launching ceremony of these Jubilee Churches will take place on March 19, 2025, the Feast of St. Joseph, a day dedicated to the humble and faithful protector of the Holy Family. The grand celebration will include:

Holy Mass – A solemn Eucharistic celebration will be held in both churches, seeking God's blessings for this special year of grace.

Flag Hoisting – A symbolic gesture to mark the opening of the Jubilee Year in the diocese.

Blessing of the Jubilee Cross – The Jubilee Cross will be blessed and venerated, signifying the journey of faith and renewal that pilgrims will undertake.

These events will be held simultaneously at Kumarghat and Nandanagar, bringing the entire diocesan community together in a spirit of unity, prayer, and gratitude.

Spiritual Significance of Jubilee Churches

The Holy Year 2025, proclaimed by Pope Francis, carries the theme "Pilgrims of Hope." It is a time of renewal, reconciliation, and rediscovery of the faith. As part of this special celebration, pilgrims who visit the Jubilee Churches will have the opportunity to receive a Plenary Indulgence under the usual conditions:

A Call to the Faithful

Bishop Lumen encourages all parishioners to embrace this pilgrimage with an open heart. Families, youth, and different parish groups are invited to organize pilgrimages to these churches, making this a journey of faith and renewal. As we prepare to embark on this Jubilee Year, may Don Bosco Church, Nandanagar, and St. Paul's Church, Kumarghat, become true centers of grace, where every pilgrim encounters the love, mercy, and peace of Christ.

Let us take this opportunity to renew our faith, strengthen our communities, and walk together as pilgrims of hope.

Fr. S. George

Catholic nun scripts history as Kerala's first medical officer



Sr Jean Rose
Sisters of the Destitute

Marayoor, Feb 15, 2025: Sister Jean Rose, a member of the Sisters of the Destitute, has made history as the first nun to be appointed as a medical officer in a Kerala government hospital. According to the "Voice of Nuns," an initiative of the Kerala Conference of Major Superiors and the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council Jagratha Commission, Sister Rose is the first Catholic nun to serve as a medical officer in a government hospital in the southern Indian state.

Sister Rose, also known as Rosamma Thomas, did her MBBS and post-graduate studies in anaesthesia at St John's Medical College in Bengaluru. She served for more than 10 years at a Church-managed hospital in Marayoor, a remote village home to several tribal communities. She has successfully passed the Kerala Public Service Commission examination. Two years ago, she received her first appointment at the Kattappana Taluk Hospital. She later sought a transfer to the Marayoor Family Health Centre, as she had worked in the region during her MBBS and National Health Mission service. "While pursuing my MBBS and PG, and during my service with the National Health Mission, I worked in Marayoor," she explained her decision to return.

The Facebook page of the "Voice of Nuns" stated that she specifically requested the opportunity to serve tribal and underprivileged communities in the Marayoor region. "As part of a community that works for the destitute, I prefer to serve the poor and underprivileged," she told Press Trust of India news agency. After completing her schooling in Chettuthodu, near Pala in Kottayam district, she participated in charitable services.

Matters India

Arunachal Pradesh – Anti conversion law is set to be enforced in 2025

Recent developments in Arunachal Pradesh, one of India's most diverse and remote regions, have raised serious concerns among human rights advocates and religious organizations alike. The government's decision to enforce a dormant anti-conversion law from 1978 and ongoing calls to strip Christian converts of their Scheduled Tribe status reflect a broader strategy to curtail the growth of Christianity among tribal populations. Anti-Conversion Law: A Long-Dormant Threat Revived Arunachal Pradesh, home to 26 major tribes and over 100 sub-tribes, is a melting pot of religious and cultural diversity. However, the state's anti-conversion law, dormant for decades, is set to be enforced in 2025. Originally enacted to curb religious conversions "by force, inducement, or fraudulent means," the law has resurfaced in a context where Christians make up over 30% of the state's population, closely followed by Hindus and adherents of indigenous faiths. Critics argue that such laws, though framed in neutral language, are weaponized to target Christians and Muslims. The legislation requires anyone converting to another religion to report the act to local authorities, opening the door to potential harassment. Pastors and evangelists could face severe penalties, including up to ten years in prison, for facilitating conversions - a chilling deterrent for religious freedom in the region.

Matters India



Our Distinguished Guests

- Sr. Avita, SRA Provincial Superior from Mumbai
- Sr. Loretto, SRA former Provincial from Mumbai

Bishop's Program for March 2025

- 01-02: Silver Jubilee & Cathedral blessing @ Bongaigaon
- 04: Clergy Meet, Agartala
- 05: Ash Wednesday
Meet SJA Provincial
- 06: Meet SD Superior General
- 08: Women's Day celebration @ Agartala
- 09: Molsombari Chapel Blessing, under Tuikarmaw Parish
- 11: St. John's Bengaluru, Board Meeting
- 12-13: National Health Convention, SJMC Bengaluru
- 15-16: Chakmaghat Chapel Blessing, under Moharpara Parish
- 19: Launching of Pilgrimage Churches – Nandannagar
- 20: Appointment with Bishop Pauly
- 22-23: Tuikarmaw Parish Sabha
- 25: Confirmations @ Don Bosco Herma
- 26: Lokilunga Chapel Blessing under Cathedral Parish
- 29-30: Episcopal Ordination, Shillong
- 31: JUST Governing Board Meeting @ Damdaia