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Spring 2019 Newsletter

Dear friends,

I hope you are all well and enjoying the Springtime so far.

Since writing to you in January, life in both Manvi and Pannur has been busy. March is particularly full on as it is exam time for all students. It is also the hottest month of the school year, reaching temperatures of up to 40 degrees. At the end of March the schools break up for their Summer holidays.

Some good news

I mentioned in my last Newsletter that I was going to ask Father Arun if it was possible to keep the parents' share of the Kapepaladi school fees the same for the new academic year, beginning June 1st 2019. The relentless drought has continued throughout 2018 resulting in a terrible harvest these past 12 months, therefore any fee increase would be difficult for parents. Fr Arun agreed to meet with his Jesuit community to discuss this matter further. He came back to say that not only did the Fathers agree to keep the fees the same, but also that Sister Philomena can give concessions to the poorest students on the understanding that they work to their very best ability and achieve good results. She can also now give concessions to children with siblings at the school, which has not been the case these past 2 years. It was very encouraging to hear this news.

Bursary Fund

At the same time as requesting a stay on school fees, I asked Fr Arun if it would be helpful to set up a Bursary Fund. This fund would be to specifically to help the poorest parents with school fees, for situations such as a bereavement in the family, or an illness that incurs medical costs that far outweigh earnings from the fields.

From time to time we receive a donation out of the blue that is for general funds. For example, in January we received a generous legacy from a lady, also called Dinah. She had been a teacher before retiring and had great concern for the welfare of Dalit children in India. I thought that Dinah's legacy could be used to start this Bursary fund, which can then be contributed to in future by anybody else who wishes to.

Rosemary's Visit

Some of you will know that Rosemary Illingworth, a friend, teacher and fellow sponsor-parent, visited Manvi and Pannur in November last year. She has very kindly written an account of her stay.

"I landed at Hyderabad at 5.30 am on the 5th of November and was met by Fr Royston and Deacon Wilfred, who the children call "Wellfried". They find difficulty in saying Wilfred. We got to Manvi at 11 am, although it seemed later in the day to me having begun my journey the preceding day.



It was so nice to meet the Fathers I knew and the children, who ran up to me to renew my acquaintance.

As we approached Manvi I was aware of the drought conditions. The crops are stunted where there is little water and most probably won't come to fruition. Where there is access to water from the canal and "water ponds" these crops are faring much better.

The cotton harvest here will be almost non-existent. Many farmers have planted

a maize like crop instead that will be ground for flour, predominantly for making roti. On the whole, this is faring better. There was a cyclone forecast due on the 18th November bringing rain but it bypassed the Manvi area, so no rain.

Whilst I was there the Hindu festival of "Deepavalli" (Diwali) was in full swing. This was memorable. I had been to Pannur during the day, and on the way back at almost dusk I noticed many cars and lorries had changed their headlights to coloured ones, purple, orange, blue etc. It was a very strange experience.

I arrived back at Manvi for a 6.30 pm Open Air Mass. The altar had tea lights arranged around its perimeter on three sides. In front was a tiered stand with more tealights on it. It was a dark starlit night. The impact of the altar and the stars, (these provided the only light), was a wonderful spiritual experience.

After Mass we all had sparklers and fireworks, which caused great hilarity. After this some girls danced and persuaded me to join in!!! They wanted to know about dancing in the West so I got a partner, and attempted a waltz, which they thought was hilarious. This was followed by supper at the hostel, the Fathers and I sat with the children.

In the ensuing days, I taught, worked in the library, assessed teachers and helped Fr Royston in the garden. One task was picking worms out of a small bag of compost for transference into the big compost container.

The garden he made is lovely, some of the trees are bearing fruit and he has many varieties of hibiscus and bougainvillea in flower.

Some students from Bangalore were in Pannur. They were Master of Commerce Degree students. They had stayed with families and experienced the deprivations of rural life - few shops, no doctor, no sanitation as we know it. Some of the villagers have outside toilets, but these are for storage, not for the purpose which they were meant. I was asked by the students' tutor and Father Anil to address them, which I did for three quarters of an hour. This involved 'thinking on my feet', as their questions were varied, one being about Brexit!!



I went to the "tailoring school". This is flourishing with eighteen students.

Last Wednesday 14th November was Children's Day. This is a Fun Day for the children. Fr Maxim and I performed a funny song which the children found hilarious, we definitely lowered the tone of the morning! The day followed on with races, a tug of war and in the afternoon a singing competition.

Lunch was cooked outside in cauldrons over wood fires so the children enjoyed a hot rice and curry lunch.

On Friday, some teachers visited from St Joseph's College, Bangalore to see the Mission. In the evening we met for supper when Fr Maxim spoke about its beginnings.

2 a.m. on Saturday 17th came too soon, so with a heavy, sad heart I began my journey home. I am now looking forward to my next visit."

Republic Day – 26th January 2019

Republic Day has been celebrated every year since 26th January 1950, when India officially became a republic and was no longer under British rule. It is one of 3 National holidays and is widely celebrated both in schools and throughout India. Republic Day begins with hoisting the National Flag at 9 a.m., followed by



honouring Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, a Dalit to become a national icon, born in 1891.

Dr Ambedkar became a politician and pioneer of social reform throughout India, with particular emphasis on human rights for Dalits. He was also extremely influential in the writing of the new Indian Constitution that came into effect on 26th January 1950, following Independence in 1947. The

picture shown in the photo is of Dr Ambedkar, with the Fathers jointly garlanding him in honour of his incredible contribution to the Indian constitution and to human rights in particular.



On Republic Day, children perform dances and amazing feats of balance, showing off their talents to friends, teachers and parents.

London Marathon April 25th 2019

You may remember that 18 months' ago, we applied to the Virgin London Marathon Charity Ballot, for a guaranteed London Marathon entry, known as a Silver Bond, to be used once in the next 5 years. Our application was accepted and we are delighted to report that a young man called Luke Constable is the recipient of our Silver Bond for this year's London Marathon. He is running for Supporting Dalit Children and has a Virgin Money Giving page for anyone who would

like to support him! I really take my hat off to Luke for wanting to run the Marathon on our behalf and raise money for the Dalit children.

All that remains for me to say for now, is to wish you a very Happy Easter, and thank you for all your invaluable support which is making such a massive difference to the students at both Manvi and Pannur schools, the undergraduates at Manvi College, and the tailoring students.

With best wishes,
Dinah and Peter

p.s. here is a photo of the boys at Kapepaladi school completing one of their Rangoli salt-art masterpieces as part of the Diwali celebrations

