



PASTOR'S CORONER

MINISTRY OF LONELINESS

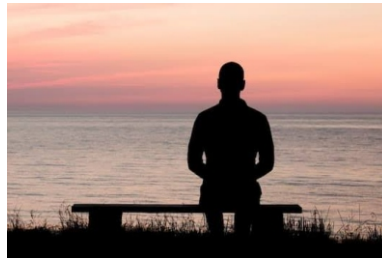
The recent issue of the *Hindustan Times* reported that Japan's Prime Minister

Yoshihide Suga, announced a Minister of Loneliness to his cabinet last month, closely following a similar announcement in January 2018 by the United Kingdom. Loneliness is rarely acknowledged, deeply misunderstood, and alongside anxiety and depression, presents a massive opportunity for rectification as India copes with Covid-19 and beyond.

India has a real opportunity to showcase solutions to a global audience towards using the best of tech and expertise in reducing loneliness. While a dedicated ministry for loneliness may just be the impetus, all we need is to look for are basic ways and means to help people who are on the brink of feeling lonely. Considered a taboo subject, with most adults too scared to admit that they are lonely, the UK itself has close to 33% and the United States close to 50% of its people who accept they are lonely. In India, as per the recently released Longitudinal Ageing Study of India, approximately 23% of elderly stay alone, without children.

While loneliness can have an impact across ages and be relevant irrespective whether you stay alone or in a full house, it is most common among

those above 60 and affects almost everyone at some point in time. The impact of loneliness on our physical and mental health is acute, with resultant challenges in blood pressure, increased likelihood of dementia and depression. Yet, as a result perhaps of our childhood socialization, no one likes to admit that they are lonely. We are trained to grow up trying to show a false sense of connectivity and a false sense of happiness and independence.



Never has this become so evident than in the first weeks of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic turned physical human contact into a potentially mortal threat. Almost overnight, it seemed, getting close enough to another person became synonymous with danger. The public health imperative was clear: to save lives, we needed to radically increase the space between us. We are still in the middle of this pandemic and with new variants emerging, the corona virus is spiking by the day. Governments have mandated 'social distancing', closed schools and businesses, and ordered everyone to stay home. As the pandemic continues, it becomes ever clearer that *social* distancing is a misnomer. To be sure, we must practice '*physical* distancing' to stop the spread of COVID-19. But socially, we may emerge from this crisis feeling closer to friends and family members more than ever before. By strengthening our social connections we can fortify our communities, protect each other, and combat loneliness. **+Lumen, CSC**



EDITORIAL

Family Concerns

We are almost a quarter into the year of St. Joseph that commenced on 8th December 2020. And by declaring the start of a Year of the Family on 19th March 2021, the Pope further clarified the intent behind dedicating a year to the foster-father of Jesus and the head of the Holy family. Quite evidently it is the unmistakable focus on family that links these two and also lends them a rare relevance and urgency.



The Jubilee fever is also round the corner. Having come through a three-year-period of preparation and now poised on the threshold of twin Silver Jubilee celebrations, we certainly feel the excitement of something important coming.

Looking back at the preparations, among other things, the recently concluded spiritual Retreats surely stand out. Despite the limited time and some inevitable language matters, the Retreat did offer wonderful opportunities for conversion and renewal to those who managed to find time and attend.

As we prepare to enter into the celebrations, our families could perhaps benefit much from a little extra attention, the kind which the

Year of the Family is inviting us to give. They call our **Contd. On page 2**



LINK wishes its Readers a very Happy Easter. May the Risen Lord bless you with Joy and Peace.

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attention to the compelling figure of the 'father' of the family and his irreplaceable role. At the helm of most of our families is a father who, thanks to the economic slump we are in, perhaps finds it hard to make both ends meet; a father who agonizes over the destructive path his teenage son or daughter has embarked upon and over his helplessness to do anything about it. Fathers who spent anxious days and sleepless nights over a hundred issues, whose burden often his broad shoulders alone must bear. It is not uncommon for everyone in the family to pin all their hopes on the father. It is he who ought to turn all their dreams into reality.

The Carpenter Saint of Nazareth has a rare relevance indeed for our families of today. It is an undeniable truth that not too many of our fathers of families consider themselves equipped and empowered enough. They feel diffident to be or to become all that his family members, the Church and the society expect him. We come across parents who even feel tempted to surrender their parental authority and privileges to the vagaries of their obstinate, ill-mannered, English-speaking brat of a son.

As the Jubilee approaches we hear its clarion call for a renewal of our families, the miniature church, where one first encounters and experiences faith and love. Well into the Year of Joseph, the trustworthy servant "whom the Lord made master of his own household," there's little doubt we are enviously positioned. We pray for that extra grace needed to delve beneath the din and bustle.

J. Pulinthanath, SDB

GANDACHERRA PARISH

Silver Jubilee Celebration at Gandacherra Mission

On 27th February 2021, Gandacherra Mission had the privilege of celebrating the Silver Jubilee of Episcopal Ordination of Most Rev. Lumen Monteiro, CSC - our



beloved Bishop both in the school and in the Parish as well. School children ceremoniously welcomed him to the school and presented an enchanting cultural program. During the felicitation ceremony Fr. Prasad Rao, our Principal highlighted the great works that our Bishop has done in shaping the Diocese. Mr. Joseph Darlong one of the teachers in his speech mentioned the great virtues that Bishop possesses and how he has become a perfect model in leading the Diocese onward. Bishop in his speech



thanked everyone for organizing such a beautiful event and recalled initial difficulties he had faced in establishing the Gandacherra Mission. The program came to an end with cutting the Jubilee cake

and wishing a Jubilee song. On 28th February 2021 people from all our *mothas* gathered in the parish to felicitate the Silver Jubilee of our Beloved Bishop. Entire Parish Community thanked God through the Thanksgiving Eucharist presided over by our Bishop Lumen. After the Eucharistic celebration each

village has presented a cultural program and also felicitated him in their own traditional way. *Bro. Bala Showry*

TUIKARMAW PARISH

Renewal Retreat

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom. 12:2). The Zonal Retreat on the occasion of the Diocesan Jubilee celebration was held at St. Mary's Parish Tuikarmaw



on 26th, 27th and 28th of February. The faithful felt that the blessings had been beyond all measure. We are immensely grateful to Fr. George VC and his Team for his willingness to conduct the Retreat making it a real experience of renewal. Members from Depaacherra, Tuikarmaw and Sindupathar Parishes participated in the 3-days event with utmost devotion and prayerfulness. The Retreat began with the Holy Eucharist presided over by Bishop Lumen Monteiro, CSC.

Fr. Sojan Augustine CSC

AMBASSA PARISH

Self-Reliance Training Program

Ambassa: 14 March, 2021: OishoBani Society in collaboration with the Catholic Church Ambassa, organized a half-day training program for the 58 beneficiaries. Ambassa Parish had started Self-Reliance



(*AtmaNirbhar*) program in 2019 with Rs.5,000/- given to 24 beneficiaries to rear livestock (piggery, goatery, poultry, fishery, horticulture) and after one year the amount was to be returned to the revolving fund. It

worked well and was a successful attempt to begin with. In 2020 during the pandemic period when migrant workers from different States returned back and when daily laborers lost their daily wages, the OishoBani Society in collaboration with the Church announced the program of rearing livestock and the beneficiaries increased to 58. The selected village leaders recommend the applications of the beneficiaries and are responsible to oversee the work undertaken by the recipient. After a year the beneficiary returns the money which is used for others to buy the livestock. The Resource Person Dr. Asok Debbarma, an Ayurvedic physician, said, "Self-reliance programme doesn't start with the money but it begins with one's own will power to develop creatively, which is supported by finance and ideas". When the central government has declared '*AtmaNirbhar*' programme this year, the Catholic Church in collaboration with the OishoBani Society (an NGO) has already implemented this programme.

Ivan D'Silva, SVD

Lenten Retreat



Holy Spirit Catholic Church Ambassa organized a one-day Retreat for the parishioners. More than two hundred people participated in this renewal program. Fr. George Arakal VC from West Bengal and Fr. Philip VC from Agartala animated the Retreat. Preacher Fr. Arakal spoke elaborately on Good and Evil, quoting verses from

the Bible. He also dealt on the importance of family prayer to remain faithful to the family. Fr. Philip assisted the main preacher through singing devotional hymns with the music system. During one and a half-hour Adoration through Praise and Worship many people experienced the healing touch of God. *Ivan D'Silva, SVD*

DEPACHERRA PARISH

Renewal Retreat

Depacherra Parish: The Lenten and Jubilee Retreat was conducted in Depacherra Parish from 12th to 14th March. The Theme of the Retreat was "Repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mk. 1:15). Fr. Abraham VC animated the people with his inspirational Talks. Along with Depacherra Parish many people from Amarpur and Karbook Parishes participated. Those who came from the other Parishes and other villages were accommodated in the Parish. During the Retreat many were touched by the Word of God and got healed from their sicknesses and other physical ailments. It was notable that Retreatants were spontaneous to go for the Sacrament of Reconciliation to experience the love and mercy of God. The Retreatants resolved to change their old way of life and begin anew. This was a good resolution for the Jubilee Year.



Fr. BhubanSarkar

KATHALCHERRA PARISH

Renewal Retreat

Good Shepherd Parish, Kathalcherra organized a one-day parish level Retreat on the occasion of Silver Jubilee of Agartala Diocese. It held on 6th March 2021 at Parish Church and the day started with praise and worship by Fr. Philip. Fr. George animated the main sessions of the retreat.



He encouraged everyone to be rooted in the word of God in order to reflect God's love and His mercy in everyday of life. The Retreat has helped the faithful to fall more deeply in love with God and to have desire in listening and understanding the word of God. There was adoration cum reconciliation ceremony. It was wonderful opportunity for the people to renew themselves in faith in the year of jubilee. The retreat came to an end with Holy Eucharist.

Fr. C. Abraham, CSC

MOHARPARA PARISH

Annual Parish Sabha

The Annual Parish Sabha (Moharpara) was held from 12th to 14th March, with the Theme "The Family is the Foundation of Vocation and Leadership" - "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few" Mt 9:37. Fr. Jeevan SVD was the main Resource Person who spoke on various topics concerning Sacraments, Role of St. Joseph in the church, being faithful witnesses, and to live a happy Christian life. Bishop Lumen Monteiro, CSC, graced the occasion with his presence and participation. The Annual Reports -- Parish Priest, Financial status, Commission reports and Village-wise reports were also presented. Bishop Lumen spoke on the seven aspects of St. Joseph. Candlelight Marian Rosary procession was also held. The concluding Holy Eucharist was celebrated by Bishop Lumen CSC, Fr. Simon CSC the Provincial Superior, and the Parish Fathers. The parish Sabha ended with the community meal together. *Fr. Alfred, CSC*



KAMARANGA PARISH

Catching them Young

Assessing the deteriorating faith among children and youth,

the Parish Council decided to focus on catechism and faith formation in the Parish. Now there is regular Catechism Class after the Mass every Sunday in the Parish, taught by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy. Leaders of village sub-stations too are encouraged to conduct catechism classes for the children.



Catechism Quiz will be conducted at completion of every course. *Fr. ArunMinjSVD*

SCC in action at Kamaranga Parish



SCC Units are being formed in every sub-station of the Parish. Some of the Units are very inspiring and active with their generous group actions to help the community in which they live. Besides giving help in cash and kind, they also care for the sick and the old by washing their clothes and giving a bath on a regular basis. *Fr. ArunMinjSVD*

KUMARGHAT PARISH

SCC Leaders Training Program

On 28th February, Kumarghat Parish conducted one-day training program on 'Small Christian Community' for the SCC leaders. Fr. Lancy, CSC was the Resource Person. 108 Leaders from 20 villages attended the program. Fr. Lancy dealt with the topics such as: What is SCC, Why SCC,



How it starts, What are the seven steps sharing, How to venerate Bible, How to take Bible in procession, and How the program spreads. Through the PPT as well as flag cards he explained in detail about SCC, and to make the Leader's faith strong. The selected Leaders from each village in return enable people to come together and reflect the word of God. Village wise Groups were made and asked to practice the seven steps. At the end of the program Evaluation was done. All were happy and expressed that such kind of training should be conducted frequently. The Vote of thanks was proposed by Mr. Roitua Darlong. The program ended at 4pm.

Sr. Bastian, FS

Jubilee Year Retreat 2021

To mark the Jubilee Year of the Diocese and our Bishop, Kumarghat Parish organized one day charismatic Retreat for all the *mondolis* at Kumarghat on 7th March 2021. The preachers were Fr. George Arackal and Fr. Philip VC. Over 400 people from different villages attended the Retreat. People took active part in the Retreat by singing, dancing and praising God. While preaching and reading the word of God many people received healing. Fr. George also stressed on sin and how to get away from it through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Participants were anointed with Holy oil and Fathers prayed over them. Those who received healing touch gave witnesses before the people. All participants were happy that they received spiritual food as well as innumerable blessings from the Lord. Fr. Lancy proposed the vote of thanks. *Sr. Bastian, FS*



Training Program on Family Counseling for Couples

On 13th March 2021 under Holy Cross Family Ministry, one day training program on Counselling for Couples was conducted at Kumarghat Parish. The Resource Persons were Fr. Lancy, Fr. James and Sr. Bastian. 21 people from



eight villages participated in the program. Fr. Lancy dealt with topics related to the family and how to safeguard the families. He also spoke on marriage and family life. Sr. Bastian provided them with tips on core Counseling skills, characteristics of an effective Counselor, Verbal and non-verbal supportive communication

techniques, Verbal and non-verbal undesirable communication skills, etc. Fr. James divided the participants into five Groups and each Group was given different topics to discuss and find out solutions to solve their problems. After the Group work each Group presented their answers. An Evaluation was done and Vote of thanks was proposed by Sr. Bastian D'silva. **Sr. Bastian, FS**

JUST NEWS BRIEFS

Farmers cum SHG Day celebrated at JUST Agartala

Jana Unnayan Samiti Tripura (JUST) organized Farmer's cum SHG Day on 16th February 2021 at JUST Hall, Agartala. In total 145 Farmers and SHG Members from Khowai, West, South, Gomati and Dhalai Districts of Tripura participated in the program.



Bishop Lumen Monteiro and Fr. Lathees the Director of JUST were the Guests for the program. They encouraged the participants for their contribution towards the growth and development of the society and families through IGA and other programs. The participants also shared about their experiences and success stories through which SHG and Farmer play a role of inspiration and motivation in their society. The program also acknowledged and awarded to best Farmer's and SHG Members for their excellent performance in the year 2020 with prizes and Certificates.

JUST celebrates International Women's Day

On 8th March 2021 JUST celebrated International Women's Day with the theme "Women in Leadership: Achieving equal future in a COVID-19 World". Mrs. Barnali Goswami the Chairperson, Commission for Women in Tripura, was the Chief



Guest. Most Rev. Lumen Monteiro, CSC, was the Guest of Honor and the special Guest was Fr. George S. In their addresses they encouraged the Women to take lead roles in the society and in the family for their growth and development. They spoke on Women's Rights and how to bring up their children and assure them a better future. They also gave inspiring examples of Doctors, Nurses and Health Workers, especially Women, who played an important role during the COVID-19 lockdown. Sr. Susheela Sps spoke on Women Leadership in the family. 198 Women from different Districts of Tripura attended the program and they also presented a short Report of their year's activity. The participants also shared their enriching and prayerful experiences of the year 2020. Effective brainstorming games and Quiz competitions were organized for the Women. After the prize distribution Sr. Jolly F.S Secretary, Commission for Women in the Diocese of Agartala, proposed the Vote of thanks and encouraged the Women to continue their good works for the family and people of their locality, especially for the needy and the sick.

Mr. Cyril Darlong

News Briefs from all over

Churmosquagogue

In the heart of Berlin, a new sacred building is coming up with the aim of bringing Christians, Jews and Muslims to a single place of worship. The foundation stone will be laid on May 27 by people of these faiths. Called the House of One or, colloquially, *Churmosquagogue*, it incorporates a church, a mosque and a synagogue. A meeting space at the center of the building will be open to people of other faiths and world views as well as the secular urban society. "This house will be home to equality, peace, and reconciliation," says Rev Gregor Hohberg, a minister working on the House of One. The *Churmosquagogue* has been 10 years in the planning and construction is estimated to take four years. The €47m financing is almost completed. The federal government and the state of Berlin have donated €30m for the monument and fundraisers have collected €9m. (Courtesy *Church Citizens' Voice*.)



Hounded by Vigilante Groups

Editorial by Dr. Suresh Mathew

The latest incident at Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh, where Catholic nuns and postulants were forced out of the train they were travelling in, should open the eyes of those who are in deep slumber. With confirmed tickets, two nuns and two postulants were going from Delhi to Odisha when suddenly all hell broke

loose.... The nuns were accused of taking the postulants for conversion. Though the postulants vowed that they were born in Christian families, yet the goons would have none of it. The nuns and the postulants were forcibly taken to a police station. Their agony ended only after Church authorities and other officials in Jhansi and Delhi intervened.

This is not an isolated incident as many in the BJP and the Sangh Parivar would want us to believe. There had been incidents of assaults on priests, nuns, seminarians and laity at different places in various states... Unfortunately, most of these atrocities are brushed under the carpet and the culprits go scot-free. In some cases, instead of filing cases against the marauders, FIRs are registered against the victims... The spurt in attacks against minorities should be seen in the background of the new anti-conversion laws enacted in the BJP-ruled States. They give more teeth to the authorities and new energy to the Hindutva elements to subject minorities to torture...

The Christian missionaries are at the forefront of providing succour to the Dalits, Tribals and other marginalized sections of society. The oft-repeated 'conversion bogey' raised by the Sangh Parivar has failed to click as hardly anyone has been convicted under the Freedom of Religion Acts existing in several States. The Church should not be mesmerized and enthralled by the sweet talk of the government and assurances like 'the guilty would be punished'. These are vain promises made to be broken. Let not the Church wait for the crumbs that fall from the tables of the ruling party. Eternal vigilance is the price for liberty. Or else the vigilante groups will continue to hound the minorities. (Courtesy *Indian Currents*)

OUR DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Sr. Lisa, MSMHC Provincial from Guwahati

Sr. Escociana, MSMHC Vice Provincial from Guwahati

Mission 'Leading us onward'

As the Diocese of Agartala celebrates its silver years, I congratulate His Lordship Lumen Monteiro CSC DD its first bishop for having completed successfully 25 years and for leading the Diocese onward. It's indeed an emotional moment for me to pen a few lines on this solemn and joyous occasion. Time has flown but memories of 1996-1998 as the first office assistant for the newly established Diocese of Agartala has not faded away. Having worked in active education ministry, it was not an easy task for me to engage in a ministry of office administration. It was a very exciting and a challenging ministry of two years. I arrived in Agartala, soon after the Episcopal Ordination, looking for a huge edifice of a 'Bishop's House'. The concept of a Bishop's House, from what I have seen in the past was contrary and mind blowing. I was welcomed to my new place of work, to the new Bishop's House, the 'Andre cottage' situated adjacent to Holy Cross School!

The humble cottage where Bishop Lumen and his Vicar General, Fr. Hormis John resembled more of a lower middle-class family trying to live their life most happily and meaningfully. It might surprise you that even in that smallness, the Bishop and the Vicar General had their own separate spaces and with my entry, a common office space as well! In the initial days I always remembered Luke 9/58 "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." My new office space in the cottage also accommodated Bishop's House visitors as its parlour!

As our ministry progressed, my experience was that success and enthusiasm in building the Local Church does not depend on the great facilities though it might contribute. The leadership of Bishop Lumen with his adventurous and daring spirit, dynamic personality, keen intellectual acumen, enthusiasm, humour, friendly nature, simple life style with a clear vision and goal was

always visible even in the smallness of facilities for the newly established Diocese.



By the end of 1996, the Bishop's House was upgraded to 'another cottage' in the present location. It had a little more breathing space and it created a clear identity for the Diocese. The new location enhanced a great enthusiasm for the diocese among the clergy, religious and the faithful. I have

experienced a wonderful spirit, cordiality and common vision for the growth and development of the Diocese. As a result, one experienced the emergence of new centers, parishes and institutions even in remote areas. Programs like clergy meetings, commission meetings, etc. became more systematic and regularized inspite of the challenges of the severe insurgency that the state of Tripura faced at that time.

Working with Bishop Lumen and with meager resources for the diocese I learned to be as economical as one could be; not even wasting a single piece of paper if it's one side is empty!



Those years were also wonderful opportunity for me to meet with many priests, religious and the faithful of the Diocese. Their missionary spirit and their adventurous living due to the

insurgency were very compelling. The foundation for the Diocese was laid on their wonderful spirit and no wonder that at this time of the Silver Jubilee of the Diocese we see its enormous growth not just in its numerical strength of the institutions and the faithful but their deep commitment to the Local Church. It is indeed a Mission 'Leading us onward'.

I am grateful to the Lord and for my superiors for providing me an opportunity to serve the new Diocese at its frugal times. I feel blessed for having Bishop Lumen to Lead the Diocese onward with its clergy, religious and the faithful. I pray that the Silver turn into gold for the greater glory of the Lord.

Sr. Severine Pinto, BS

Former office Assistant

