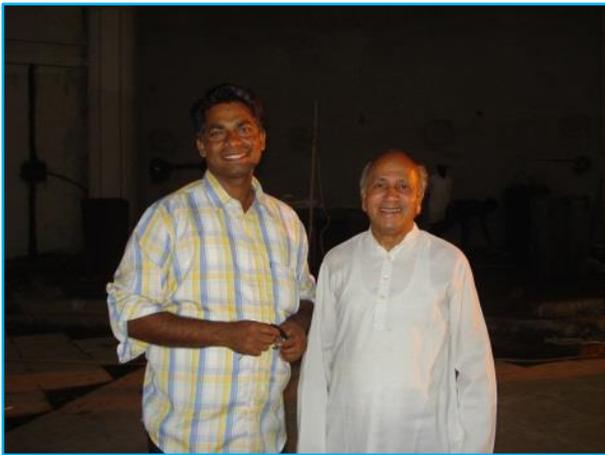


May 2013 Newsletter

Dear friends,

There's great news and sad news to share with you, plus updates on both schools, and some new thoughts.



The sad news is that Father Eric, seen here in the photo with Father Maxim, will soon be leaving Manvi. It is unusual for a young Jesuit to work in one place for so long; he is extremely sad about leaving. Since 2002 he has befriended many Dalit families who have all given him so much love in return. These people are the poorest of the poor; they have witnessed firsthand Father Eric's love for them in action - for the first time in their lives they have been taken notice of, and their children educated. With dear Father Maxim as his mentor (who has just turned 80), the newly ordained

Father Eric vowed to do all he could to eradicate the despair and hopelessness he found was all too prevalent within impoverished Dalit communities. They listened to the people's stories of hardship and pain, and over the years have empowered these helpless men and women, and given them hope for the future. And then they invited groups such as ours to come alongside the Dalit people too, to enable more and more children to come to their schools. More recently we have been asked to help fund practical projects that have benefitted whole villages, such as the drinking water project.

Father Eric's special gift is taking individuals, families and groups, to meet the Dalit people in their villages and in their homes. Eyes meet through the clasping of hands and the villagers' insistence of sharing the little food they have. Although poles apart through culture and continent, visitors' hearts are warmed irrevocably and the journey of wanting to help begins.

At this stage, Father Eric doesn't know where his next placement will be. In the short term he will take a 6 month sabbatical to rest and consider his future. There's a chance he may visit the UK in the autumn. Naturally, he will keep a keen interest in both schools and the other projects we support which will carry on as before, in the very good hands of Father Rohan, Father Vijay, Father Maxim and Sister Ida, I have no doubt about that. The fact that he is leaving hasn't stopped Father Eric organizing another project that will benefit the Dalit youth. Another practical, sensible and affordable idea that will help many teenagers.

Please write if you would like to wish him well, his email address is ericmathiassi@gmail.com. He may not have time to reply individually especially as his lap top has just crashed and been sent away for repair!

Xavier School, Manvi

Great news! The 10th Std students have achieved 100% success in their public exams, the equivalent of our GCSE's. Their success is the 4th consecutive year for the school and a testimony to the excellent teaching and dedication of the teachers, and of course, the hard work of every individual pupil there.

Father Rohan can be seen in the second row in his cassock, he too is a great man and a superb leader of Xavier School. This entire year group, bar one boy called Nobelraj, is going on to sixth form.



Nobelraj was one of the first pupils enrolled at Xavier School. He was grazing the cows aged 8 and at that stage, was only able to dream about an education. Father Eric spotted him one day and asked him if he would like to go to school. His father was reluctant to allow him to go, what good would it do him he thought? We remember this boy from our first visit to Pannur. Every year since then we have visited his family, the photo on the left was

taken in 2009. Nobelraj has always stood apart from the other boys in his year, possessing great depth and an unusual thoughtfulness for his young years. He told me in January that he wants to build schools and help the poor in the same way he and his sister have been helped. He has been so inspired by Father Eric that he wants to find out more about becoming a Jesuit himself.



All the children at Xavier School are now on their Summer holidays and return on 1st June. The temperature in Manvi is currently 44 degrees!

Kapepaladi School, Pannur



The exciting news to report is that building work started in March for the new school that will eventually be big enough to hold 1000 children, the same as Xavier School. The foundations are being dug and the ground floor will soon begin to take shape. A lot more funding is needed for this project as unfortunately a lot of the money raised to date is being spent on the foundations and necessary structural elements for building a two-story school. There will be 6 classrooms on the ground floor. Our target is to find a group to sponsor each

classroom, with the name of the sponsor or 'in memory of a loved one', put on a plaque outside each classroom, as has been done in the past which I think is a lovely idea. The approximate cost to build and equip each classroom is £14,500. So we are busy with fundraising plans and applying for grants as far as possible, to try to achieve this target.

The school is being built in Pannur, the same village as the recently inaugurated drinking water plant, and will serve children living in remote villages up to 20 kms away. We have travelled many times to these backward villages by jeep, the roads are so potholed and several are cut off seasonally by monsoon rains. If I am honest, with the deprivation we have seen and lack of water for drinking or irrigating crops, it is a miracle that there is any life there at all. 60 of so children from the most distant villages will stay in a hostel close to the school site. Until the ground floor and



the first 6 classrooms are finished, the 270 children already enrolled are studying in a temporary school building, with shack-like classrooms being added as and when necessary. It's a very happy and jolly school with an excellent Headmistress called Sister Ida. Sponsorships are needed for children at this growing school as only one in four currently has a sponsor parent.

Pannur's new drinking water plant



From previously walking 6 kms to fetch clean water and having to dig down into a river bed, to clean drinking water now being on tap! The new drinking water plant was opened a month ago and has made life so much easier for the Dalit families, especially considering how hot it has been there lately. What a wonderful project to have been a part of!

Father Eric reports, "this is a great help for our people. I have seen already the great impact and relief experienced by these people. Their health is definitely improving. The Sisters (at the health centre) tell me the number of patients is diminishing steadily." Father Eric wonders whether in time, we might be able to help another village called Ganna Dinni to have the same luxury of safe water to drink, I hope that one day we can!

Driving course for the Dalit youth

I would like to support another project that makes so much sense to me, to help the Dalit youth take a driving and mechanics course, in order to get a driving licence and some basic car maintenance skills. The course takes just 2 months to complete and costs £50 per person. Father Eric has already sent two young men, Jeevan and Anthony for training. They both passed the course and are now employed earning 6,000 rupees (£75) per month, which is more than double the amount they could earn in the fields as coolie workers. This project will especially benefit young Dalit men and women, who haven't had the luxury of an education, and teach them to become responsible citizens.

Library Books

Hot off the press, Xavier School wants to re-stock their library and buy more books. The books range in price from £1 each to £54 for a set of 108 books! Many of the titles are recognizable, such as Oliver Twist, and they could be bought here but are cheaper in India. Our problem is that shipping costs end up making sending anything heavy to India very expensive. If you would like to help with buying a book or a set of books, please let me know. 'Donated By' labels, with the name of who has bought the book can be stuck in the front.

And lastly, we are in the process of organizing our annual fundraising event which will be in Hertfordshire on Friday 4th October. I know it is months away but please pencil it in the diary.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

With very best wishes
Dinah



Pannur's new drinking water plant is inaugurated