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Autumn 2016 Newsletter

Dear Friends,

It is a pleasure to write once again with news from us and also from Manvi and Pannur.

Fundraising



The past 6 months have been very busy as always. Our 'Open Gardens and Edwardian Cream Teas' was very well supported. After 2 weeks of almost continuous rain leading up to Sunday 17th April, the clouds miraculously cleared and the sun shone brightly. I can't remember how many scones and cakes were baked and served by a team of willing volunteers, but almost 300 people visited the 4 gardens and all enjoyed a cream tea or two! Our thanks go especially to Margaret, seen here on the left, for offering her home and garden, to Brenda on the right whose cakes and scones were absolutely delicious, and to all the team of helpers for this event where over £1300 was raised in just over 4 hours.

Also in April, we were thrilled to hear we had been successful with our application to a charitable Trust for a grant for 24 sewing machines and the building materials for 3 community halls. These halls will be built in Dalit villages and will serve as multi-purpose tailoring schools, children's tuition centres and women's educational centres. This is a very exciting project that will benefit hundreds of children, teenagers and women giving them skills and empowerment that will enrich their lives considerably. In a similar project that we supported in 2014, a small group of women used to meet in one of their homes or under the shade of a tree. Now they have their own purpose-built, bigger hall, another women's group has started and women from both groups meet regularly.



In July and August, volunteers Sarah and Hannah Holmes aged 18 and 17 went to Pannur to help teach at Kapepaladi school, looking after all 300 children on their own one morning whilst the teachers had meetings! They raised over £1000 for the school and have also made a short video that will soon be put on our website, so please look out for this.

Another inspiring piece of news is about 18-year old Harry Jenkinson who visited Pannur with Oundle school in December 2014. In May this year, just before leaving Oundle, he gave a heart-warming talk to pupils and parents about his experience in

Pannur, and how it had stayed with him. Proceeds from this evening raised a further £1600 for Kapepaladi school. We are sure you will agree that these are fantastic efforts from these young people, thank you so much.

Some awful news

There are, quite often sadly, horrific accounts of atrocities against Dalits reported in our national newspapers that make me shudder each time I read them. The latest was in July. A young Dalit couple were murdered by an upper caste grocer when asked to pay for 3 packets of biscuits they had bought for their children a few days earlier. They didn't have the 15 rupees (20 pence) they owed and the grocer then hacked them both to death. These stories of impoverished and weak human beings killed simply because they are Dalits shows how little Dalits are valued in society. Their lowly status is incomprehensible to me and defies all sense of humanity and loving thy neighbour.

Needless to say my shock at horrific news like this quickly turns to determination to work harder for the children of the Pannur Manvi Mission. Every child matters, regardless of race, religion or where they happen to be born, and every child enrolled at one of the two schools we support is another child saved in my eyes. Education is the only long lasting way to slowly change the mindset of discrimination in India. It will take



generations, but each Dalit child deserves the opportunity and plenty of help. In whatever way you support whether through sponsorship, one off donations, buying merchandise, prayer or physically helping out at events, please let me say once again a very big thank you for all you do as we are in this fight together. The rewards, that outweigh all our work a hundred fold, are that each time we go to Manvi we are blessed with a sea of smiling faces wherever we turn, joyful and innocent children so happy to be at school. The memories of these happy children are eternal.

Each year, hundreds of Dalit children begin their journey, against all odds for the vast majority of them, of becoming educated, cared for, empowered and filled with zeal for a brighter future they are now part of. Of course not every student makes it. A small percentage, usually girls, have parents who neither understand the importance of education nor trust in the Jesuit Fathers' vision for their child, and because of this they remove their child from school. Reasons for girls being taken out of school include having to look after the home or care for an elderly relative or newborn child. More simply a parent wishes to keep to their family tradition of child marriage, thereby sentencing their daughter to a life of working in the fields. I have seen this with my own eyes; girls as young as 8 looking after grandparents, girls aged 12 promised in marriage and whose future now lies in joining the battered army of coolie women who work like slaves for very little pay. I feel incredibly sad when a student is occasionally taken out of school and their great opportunity is now slashed because of their powerlessness to argue with their parents. Even repeated personal visits by the Fathers cannot convince some parents to allow these girls to finish their education.

Inspiration from Navya and Divya who have both recently graduated

On a brighter note there are also stories of Dalit girls' great personal achievements, and parents who have completely trusted in the Fathers' love and vision for their children. Here is one such story about Navya and Divya, 2 sisters whose house we visited 3 years ago.

Navya is 22, her sister Divya is 20. Both girls were in the first group of students that Fr. Eric and Fr. Maxim enrolled at their newly founded Loyola School in 2004. Their story begins with tragedy and turmoil which is far too common for Dalit families. Navya and Divya's father committed suicide when they were 8 and 6 years old because he was financially cheated by his landlord. He felt so desperate that he poisoned himself on a

train. Shocked and desperate, Navya, Divya and their mother went to live with their grandmother in a village with a small school with just one room and one teacher. Father Eric and Father Maxim, founders of the Pannur Manvi Mission, visited this village and instantly noticed how bright both girls were. They subsequently invited them to join their school and soon afterwards, Navya and Divya's education in English-medium began. Fr. Maxim is an excellent English teacher and Navya can now speak English 'boldly, without fear'.

Their daily schedule at school was very tough, so tough that the Navya would sometimes fall asleep in class and Fr. Maxim would ask her to go and wash her face! 'We would end the class with discussions about politics; the teachers liked our batch (year group)', Navya recalls. Navya's Sixth Form ended with disappointment however. She regularly worked until 1 a.m. but sometimes exams were postponed because the papers were late arriving at the College. Navya wanted to become a doctor but her results at the end of PU II (Upper Sixth) were second class instead of first class, so this option was no longer available to her. She then decided to do Engineering and apply for a government loan for the fees. Only one government loan could be offered to this family based on the value of the piece of land the family owns. Navya knew that Divya had always wanted to read Civil Engineering and for this she would need a government loan, so she decided to sacrifice her own ambition and let Divya take the loan and the seat at Hassan University. Divya is an exceptionally gifted girl, she was the brightest student at University and also a first class cricketer! In fact, last year she won all her University's awards and can be seen here with her various medals.



Navya decided to stay on at Loyola College and read Science. This is the most challenging subject as it is taught in English rather than the local language that other Degree courses are taken in. Throughout her Degree Navya would regularly achieve over 75% in class tests and external exams. When she had graduated, Navya decided to take a year out and teach at Loyola school. With all the financial and moral support she had received since she was 10 years old at Loyola school and College, she wanted to give something back to the school. She especially enjoyed becoming a colleague to her teachers after many years of being taught by them.



Navya is now being supported to do a Master's Degree in Food and Technology at a University in Mangalore. She has totally selfless ambitions, the first is to establish a food industry in Manvi and employ local people as there are currently no food industries there. Her second dream is more humbling, 'I have another dream that I want to have my own orphanage so I will have to adopt some of the children. I want to make them not just good in studies, but good in sports and good in cultural activities.' I have no doubt that Navya will achieve both her ambitions, she is a determined and courageous young person who has put others first all her life. She is an inspiration to those who meet her.

Navya has also given us an interesting insight into marriage from a student's perspective. She explains, 'every mother has a dream to choose a guy for her daughter so I will have an arranged marriage. I will explain all the conditions to show what he needs to do. I will take him to an orphanage. Everything will be said in detail without any hiding, so if he agrees to do what I want, I'll marry him! Otherwise I will say I cannot marry you because you are not completely free to my future. And I'll say the same conditions to my mum. We should not depend on him; we should stand on our own two feet. He should give support but we should not depend on him. After marriage I will look after my mother and my grandparents, he can help his parents. So if he agrees to that I will marry him.'

[New Superior for the Pannur Manvi Mission](#)

Father Francis was transferred at the end of May to the Indian Social Institute in Bangalore. Father Arun Luis SJ has been appointed the new Superior. Fr. Arun has spent many years at the oldest Mission in Karnataka called Mundgod Mission where he was in charge of social work and the school before being made Superior for 3 years. He has worked in prisons in Delhi as well as with the elderly. He also has experience working in slums with school drop outs, and construction workers. We are very much looking forward to meeting him in November when we are going back to Manvi for a week with some of our sponsor parents.

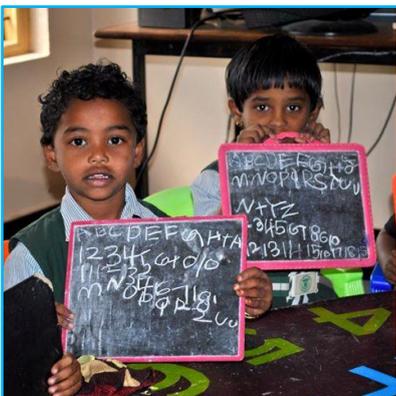
I asked Father Arun to share a few thoughts about the Mission having spent three months now in Manvi. Continuous drought has plagued North Karnataka for 2 years now. Such extremes in the weather can never be foreseen and they create devastation for rural communities who rely on the land for sustenance and work. As you know, all of our students' parents are asked to pay a small amount towards their children's school fees as this gives them self-respect and a feeling of partnership, rather than charity. For the past 2 years it has been impossible for parents to contribute anything at all, and on top of this, desperate parents are asking for more children to be cared for in the 2 boarding hostels because they cannot afford to feed them at home. Both hostels are essential as many of the students' villages are too far away from either school for the children to take the school bus. The hostels also give extra tuition both before and after school, so this gives students a definite boost with their education. Fr. Arun also wishes to replace 2 school buses which are now 11 years old and which are costing far too much in repairs and diesel. If you could see some of the roads the children need to travel on, I am surprised these buses have lasted more than a few years. Still, we will do what we can to support this essential part of the school network.

We have enclosed our Christmas and Gift card brochure and Order Form which I hope you get a chance to have a look through at some stage. We also have beautiful porcelain Elephant Mugs designed by local artist Jane Abbott (Francis) which make lovely presents, as well as jewelry and notebooks for sale. If you would like an Order Form for mugs, notebooks or jewellery, please give me a ring or email, or you can order online on www.supportingdalitchildren.com

Thank you again for your support for the Mission and the amazing love and security it is providing for such vulnerable and yet brilliant children. Each time we visit India I feel so inspired by the Fathers for their dedication and sacrifice, the teachers for their efforts especially prior to exams, and by the children and their mothers who give us so much more than we could ever give to them.

With very best wishes
Dinah

p.s. I will write again after my visit to India in November



p.p.s. These photos are of children at Kapepaladi school in Pannur, showing their work to sponsor parent Chris Carter on her 4th annual visit to India. Chris puts the vast majority of photos onto our Facebook Page so please 'like' the page if you would like to see regular updates.