



MISSIONS TODAY

Vol. 72, No. 3

Summer 2014



Church building in India

Pilgrimage in Papua New Guinea: "In the footsteps of the missionaries"

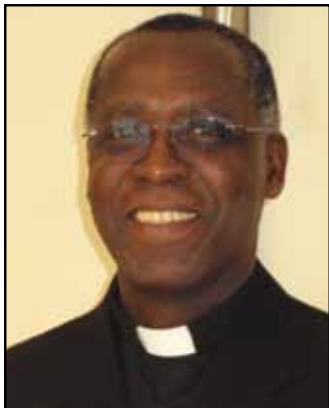
Christians in the Holy Land: An update

And more...

The Society for the Propagation of the Faith

National Director's Message

Mission Today Message Summer 2014



For most of us, winter has passed and spring is in the air. The weather is changing, plants and flower are blooming. It is that in between time of year. Perhaps, like me, you are working on your new year's goals while anticipating goals to achieve prior to Summer arriving. Maybe you too are beginning to plan summer activities

and vacations. Spring brings a sense of renewal and change.

Looking at the fearful state of the world, we ask: who will bring back the memory of life to the people whose hope has been shattered? As Christians, hope is our virtue. The risen Christ on whom our hope is based comes that we may have life in abundance. That life is more than a memory. It is a reality to which with God's grace our actions bear witness, for we are Christians and our love for Christ is seen in the love we have for our brothers and sisters, especially the poorest. That is why Alleluia is our song, and the Gospel of Jesus is our Good News. It helps to look at all the corners of the world, not just our own little backyard. While faith may seem to be shrinking in one area, it burst forth in another. Life goes on in a cycle.

Pope Francis, on the day of the canonization of our two great men, said in his homily, "the wounds of Jesus are a scandal, a stumbling block for faith, yet they are the test of faith." Breaking it to our understanding, the Holy Father said "that is why on the body of the risen Christ the wounds never pass away: they remain, for those wounds are the enduring sign of God's love for us. They are

essential for believing in God. Not for believing that God exist, but for believing that God is love, merciful and faithful." (Vatican City April 27, 2014-Zenit.org)

We know how real the suffering of so many people of faith is, yet this very suffering underlines the radiant hope of the Risen Lord. Our Pontifical Mission Societies deal with these same realities. You, in your prayers and support for the works of the Societies are truly bearers of Good News. As we head into the summer months, let us remember to keep the work of evangelization in our prayers and in our actions too.

God bless you.

**Father Alex
Osei CSSp.**



Clip art by Hermano Leon

Missionary Prayer Intentions

JUNE: That Europe may rediscover its Christian roots through the witness of believers.

JULY: That the Holy Spirit may support the work of the laity who proclaim the Gospel in the poorest countries.

August: That Christians in Oceania may joyfully announce the faith to all the people of that region.

Remembering the Missions in your Will

Help the missionaries of the future through

- a specific bequest **amount**
- **securities** bequest
- all or part of the **residue** of your estate
- **real property** (e.g. a building) bequest

In your Will use our legal name:

**The Society for the Propagation of the
Faith for Canada, English Sector**

Registered Charity BN 12888 2883 RR0001

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Photo: morguefile.com



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Letters from Abroad

HOLY SPIRIT CHURCH, PALDA

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December 05, 2013

To: Director
The Society for the Propagation of the Faith
2219 Kennedy Road
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M1T 3G5

Project No. 109/11 Construction of Parish Church at Palda, Indore

Dear Father,

Loving greetings of peace and love from Holy Spirit Church, Palda.

It is with deep sense of gratitude that I write these few lines acknowledging the great contribution you have done for the construction of our church at Palda. We have received Rs. 1,200,000 (1.2 million rupees) from you through the Diocese of Indore.

We are happy to inform you that the construction of the church is progressing well as planned. The civil work is almost getting over. It will take a few more months to complete all the works. The size of the building is 145 feet long and 52 feet wide inclusive of sacristy and front portico.

We have 105 Catholic families but most of the Catholic families are tribal families settled here for domestic work earning less than ten thousand rupees per month. (Ed. Note. That amounts to a little over \$181.00 per month). About 35% of the families have no house of their own. But it is praiseworthy that they have deep faith and are regular to the church and are willing to contribute from the little they have. Most of the parishners (sic) have only just 20 to 25 years of Catholic tradition.

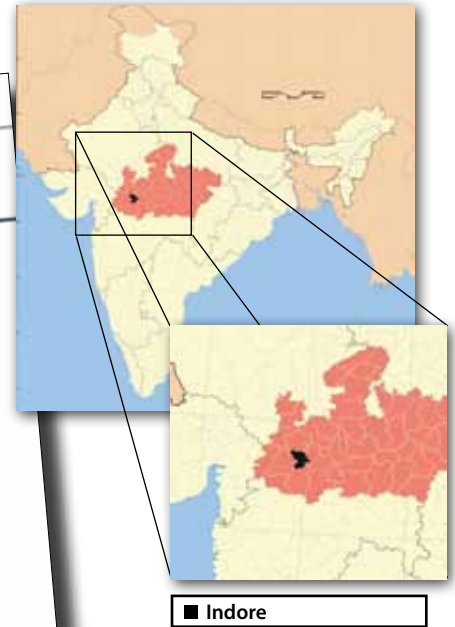
A church of its own will definitely help the people of this place to have their own identity and a place of worship.

Once again I sincerely thank you for the help you have extended and I promise that the whole amount will be exclusively used for the purpose for which it is given.

Yours in the Divine Word

Fr. Jomon James svd
Fr. Jomon James svd
Parish Priest,
Holy Spirit Church Palda

HOLY SPIRIT CHURCH
CATHOLIC ASHRAM, PALDA,
BOX-103
INDORE-452 001. (M.P.)



Society of Saint Peter the Apostle

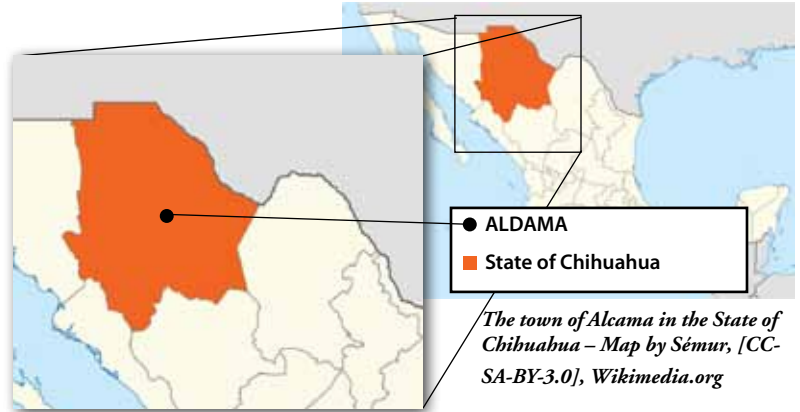
Twenty one year old Samuel Gustavo Gómez Veleta must have felt blessed to be studying for the priesthood in Mexico. He, and his parents, probably worked hard for him to gain a high school diploma in a country where education is erratic and difficult. In the heat and poverty of Mexico, parents work themselves to exhaustion in order to pay for their children's school supplies. They toil in fields, labour in shops, and sell goods on the street. They spend long hours in factories and walk miles to work and back again in order to support their children and ensure their success. With his eyes on the goal of becoming a priest Samuel Gustavo made it to the seminary and began his years of training and formation.

In April, he travelled from his seminary to begin his appointed time of pastoral activity in the parishes of Chihuahua, Mexico. You can imagine his excitement. After studying philosophy and theology he was on his way to doing what he loved best – ministering to God's people in a parish. This Holy Week would be a time when he could have a taste of the future. He would celebrate with the people and live his dream. He could think about what it would be like when he was a priest and pastor. What a glorious Easter this would be!

Samuel was kidnapped on Holy Tuesday; his mutilated body was found the next day.....

In April, we also rejoiced in the canonization of two great priests in our Church. They lived lives of dedication and spoke words of God's love for us. They moved our hearts and encouraged us in our own Christian lives. I watched the ceremony on TV and felt that surge of joy which comes when hundreds and hundreds of people are joined together in faith. As we watched, we were carried along in the rhythm of prayer, song and celebration where we all could acclaim St. John XXIII and St. John Paul II as great men of God. We saw world dignitaries, cardinals, bishops, priests, and people eager to pay homage to these saintly priests. Their pictures were everywhere, books were written, statues were made, and medals cast so that we would never forget them. The cries from the crowd rose up over and over again "St. John XXIII, pray for us!" "St. John Paul II, pray for us!"

But as the waves of prayer rose up, my heart was drawn to an unknown road in Mexico where a terrified young man refused to deny God and was tortured and killed for his faith. I thought



of his family and those who loved him; I tried to imagine how deeply his fellow seminarians must have been frightened by his deathand I whispered, "Saint' Samuel Gustavo, pray for us, and all our seminarians throughout the world".

In *Missions Today* we write of the difficult situations in which our seminarians, priests, sisters, brothers and faithful Christians live, but it is sometimes easy to gloss over the reports of persecution, assault, stigmatization or even death. In our lives, there are so many news broadcasts, so many videos, and so many tweets. We read the reports and are briefly saddened, but then

we are distracted by the next story and move on. But it is not so easy to forget Samuel Gustavo. We feel his faith; we share his hope for the future; we admire his dream to serve as a priest, and we mourn his death.

Thank you for supporting St. Peter the Apostle Society. We will continue to encourage and support the many "Samuels" in faraway lands. As Canadian Catholics we will let them know that they do matter, that we are proud of them and that we wish them joy in their service to the Lord and all of God's people. Yes, "All you Saints of God pray for us!"



Clip art by Hermano Leon

Editor's Note: Every year the archdiocesan Seminary of Chihuahua, on the occasion of the celebrations of Holy Week, sends seminarians as missionaries in different rural communities. It is a major educational and spiritual experience, which serves to strengthen our students' vocation to priesthood".

Samuel Gustavo Gómez Veleta, 21, a native of the city of Chihuahua, grew up in the Parish of Divine Providence; he attended the first year of philosophy at the archdiocesan Seminary. On April 15, Holy Tuesday, he was found dead after being kidnapped the day before. (source: Agenzia Fides 04/28/2014)



Departing Goglime, Simbu province

Following in the Steps of the Missionaries

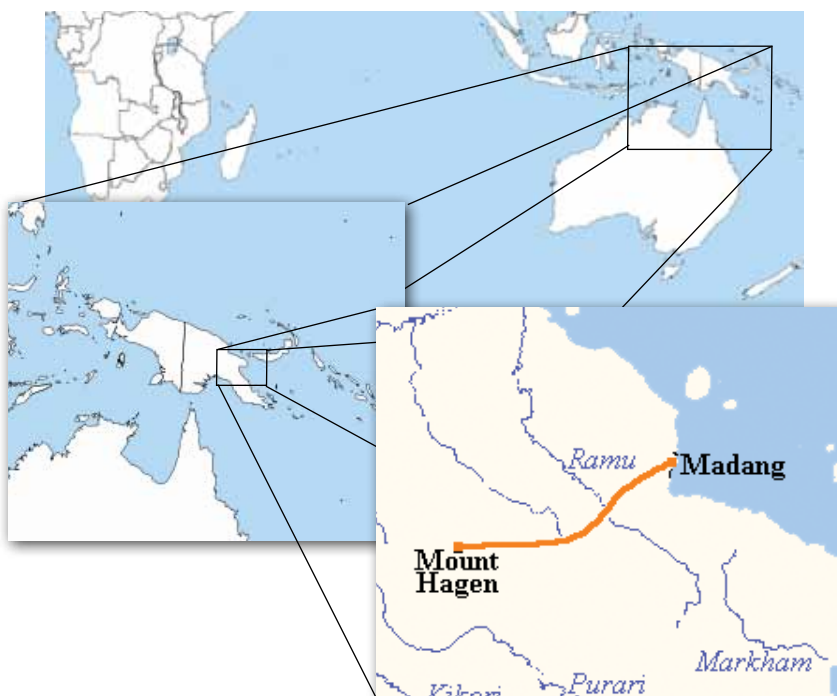
Sources for this article: “Papuan make two-week pilgrimage in missionaries’ steps”, for CAN/EWTN News by Antonio Anup Gonsalves 04/22/2014, and Paul Petrus, who wrote the original report for Agência Fides

Catholics in Papua New Guinea honored the evangelization, 80 years ago, of the remote interior of the nation’s main island by making a pilgrimage in the steps of its first missionaries.

“After 80 years, the Catholic faithful in the Archdiocese of Mount Hagen felt it is time to say thank you and to acknowledge all the blessings from God through the missionaries,” said Paul Petrus, a social researcher and a layman of Papua New Guinea, in an April 21 interview with CNA.

Some 500 Catholics, including three priests and nine seminarians, trekked through the mountainous highlands of New Guinea from March 28 until April 13, Palm Sunday.

They began near the city of Madang, on the northern coast,



and ended their trek at the Mount Hagen chancery, where they were greeted by Archbishop Douglas Young, who told them, “The pilgrimage was sign of a family walking together and sharing the Gospel, as a Church alive in Christ.”

The Wahgi Valley, in which Mount Hagen is located, was unknown to Westerners until aerial reconnaissance discovered it

in 1933. The following year, Divine Word Missionaries traveled to the Highlands to evangelize its native inhabitants. They were commissioned by the vicar apostolic of Eastern New Guinea, who was himself a member of the Society of the Divine Word.

Divine Word Missionaries from America and Germany – Fr. Wilhelm Ross, Fr. Wilhelm Tropper, Br. Eugene Frank, Fr. Alphonse Schafer, and Fr. Henry Auefnanger – set out from Wilya together with 72 indigenous helpers to evangelize New Guinea’s Highlands, eventually branching out and founding different missions.

“The first missionaries’ sole purpose was to evangelize the people, but services such as education and health seemed necessary in order to evangelize meaningfully,” Petrus reflected. “Thus, schools and health services were established, and since then it has contributed much to the development of the region; and today about 40 percent of the health and education services in the Highlands is provided by the Catholic Church.”



Madang – Photo by Guide Travel, [CC-SA-BY-2.0], wikimedia.org

Petrus recounted the walking pilgrimage, saying the first week was a “test of faith and of physical strength”. He described the pilgrims’ suffering in walking through the tropical rainforest and steep terrain of the New Guinea Highlands, crossing valleys to highways, some of them without proper footwear.



On the road in Waghi province

Despite aching bodies and blistered feet, the pilgrims found “spiritual strength which motivated them to continue”, Petrus said. “Some of the pilgrims are descendants of the helpers who assisted the first missionaries.”

They followed a stretch of the Chimbu River for a time, crossing the ridges of the Bismarck range – the highest peak of which, Mount Wilhelm, rises to more than 14,700 feet.



A weary pilgrim takes a prayerful break



Highlands of Papua New Guinea – Photo by wikimedia.org

The pilgrims visited the memorials of Br. Eugene Frank at Anganere and Fr. Carl Morschheuser at Womatne. Both were martyred by indigenous Papuans, in 1934 and 1935.

The second week of the pilgrimage, from Mingende to Mount Hagen, a distance of more than 50 miles, continued on the old highway, a route that Fr. Ross and Br. Eugene had used. During the second week the pilgrims moved from Mount Hagen and visited other churches and missions in the territory of the highlands, renewing the spirit of faith, hope and charity of the first preachers of the Gospel. Petrus described the arrival at Mount Hagen as filled with “tears of joy” for many of the pilgrims.



One week on the road: blistered and aching feet but the journey continues



Pilgrims cross a damaged bridge in Jiwaki province



Landsat image of Mt. Hagen, Photo by NASA, [wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Satellite_image_of_Mt_Hagen.jpg)

“It was a perfect spiritual exercise to strengthen their Catholic faith during the Lenten season,” he said of his fellow pilgrims, “and it was a good experience to feel a pain and suffering similar to that of the first missionaries who 80 years ago entered the Highlands region.

The Religious of the Divine Word are also involved in schools and health services that have developed since then: today 40% of health and education services in the highlands are provided by the Catholic Church. For more information on this missionary order please visit their website at: www.svdmissions.org Missions Today magazine extends a grateful thank you to Paul Petrus and Father Phillip Gibbs SVD, for providing background information and the photographs for this story.



In the lead party carrying the statues of the Archangel Michael, Our Lady, and Our Lord of Divine Mercy

Across the Globe



BRAZIL - Brazil and Spain in celebration for the canonization of "the Apostle of Brazil"

Brasília - San José de Anchieta (1534-1597) was declared "Patron of the catechists" by the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB). This is the Bishops' joyful message, expressed in the note sent to Fides Agency and Pope Francis is expected to canonize Blessed Jesuit Father José de Anchieta, known as the "Apostle of Brazil". Throughout Brazil, the news was greeted with great celebration: the first request for his canonization was made 417 years ago.

The Archbishop of Aparecida and Chairman of the CNBB, Cardinal Raymundo Damasceno Assis, in a statement points out the importance of San José de Anchieta's life and mission. "(He) has taught us that in order for the Gospel to be announced, it must be acculturated, taking into account the culture of the people to whom it is intended".

There is joy also in Spain. The Bishop of Tenerife, His Exc. Mgr. Bernardo Álvarez, welcomed the canonization with "emotion" and thanked Pope Francis. José de Anchieta was born in La Laguna in March 1534. He studied in Portugal, where he developed a religious vocation. He moved to Brazil in 1553, where he remained for 44 years.

The Church in Brazil has highlighted his missionary apostolate and this is why he was considered the "Apostle of Brazil". He also had a great devotion to Mary and dedicated all of his efforts to defend the rights of the indigenous. *An edited version, taken from Agenzia Fides 04/04/2014.*

INDIA - Street children who live in train stations rescued by Catholic priest

Lucknow - More than fifty poor children of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, and other young victims of drug abuse, have been rescued by an Indian priest who contacts children in search of food and shelter in trains and railway stations. Fr. Abhi, along with Sister Manju, founded the organization Drug Abuse Resistance Education. The young ones receive education and other supports with the goal of reuniting them with their respective families. Fr. Abhi said there are hundreds of children living in railway stations in the city of Varanasi. "If one goes to these stations at dawn," says the priest, "you will meet many children collecting plastic which they sell for 40 rupees per kilo. Currently, there are a total of 26 children who live in the family home of the program. So far 53 children have been rehabilitated and returned to their home". In India only 2% of the population is Christian and in some states of the country there are laws that prohibit conversion to Christianity. *An edited version, taken from Agenzia Fides 03/27/2014.*

INDIA: Dalai Lama lauds work of Christian Missionaries

Shillong: Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama on Wednesday lauded the work of Christian missionaries promoting education and improving health care in remotest corners of the world and slammed conflicts in the name of religion.

"I think Christian missionaries make the greatest contribution in education and improving healthcare in remote corners of the

world,” the Dalai Lama told an inter-faith meeting in Shillong.

“I have travelled to different parts of the world and I have also been to (the) remotest tribal area in Orissa where there are Christian missionaries,” he said. Stating that the missionary’s nuns sacrificed their comfortable life serving people and providing education in remote areas, he said even a Buddhist monk lacked the kind of service they render at times.

The Tibetan spiritual leader, on a three-day visit, his first to Meghalaya, said different religions may have different philosophies but their ultimate goal is love. *An edited version, taken from zeenews.india.com 02/05/2014*

■ SOUTH KOREA - Vocations bloom: ordination of bishops, priests and deacons ordained in Seoul

Seoul – South Korea continues to see growth in the number of religious ordinations. In February, Pope Francis appointed Fr. Timothy Yu Gyoung-chon and Fr. Peter Chung Soon-taek, auxiliary Bishops of the archdiocese.

The ordination of 38 priests, all diocesan, was celebrated on February 7. In addition, 26 deacons were ordained in the same week. The new deacons will devote themselves to the service of the faithful in parishes doing both liturgical and charity work. (PA) *(Agenzia Fides 04/02/2014)*

■ JORDAN - 1,400 children to receive first communion at Pope-led mass at the Amman Stadium

Amman– About 1400 boys and girls from all over Jordan will receive the sacrament of communion for the first time during the Mass that Pope Francis will celebrate on Saturday, May 24 at the Amman International Stadium. This was confirmed by Father Rifat Bader, director of the Catholic Center for Studies and Media and official spokesman for the papal visit. “Preparations for this rite include both the children and their parents, and started four months ago, adding that hour-long classes are held every Friday where religion teachers and nuns help the children understand and appreciate the sacrament of the Eucharist. The children will stay in their places, and bishops, clerics, priests, deacons and nuns will approach the children and give them the communion” says Fr. Bader. 50 thousand tickets for the Mass with the Pope have been distributed through the parishes of the Hashemite Kingdom. About 500 young volunteers will be working as ushers at the ceremony. *An edited version, taken from, Agenzia Fides 05/19/2014.*

■ SYRIA - Christians pray and reflect on the meaning of martyrdom following the assassination of Father Van der Lugt

Aleppo - Armenian Catholic priest Joseph Bazuzu, responsible for the monthly meetings of priests and pastoral workers in the

battered Syrian metropolis offers this reflection on the death of Father Van der Lugt. “In Aleppo ... we are experiencing every day what it means to go through times of suffering. Now Father Frans Van der Lugt will help us with his example; he who testified his love for Christ and the Syrian people.... For more than a year we have suggested that the ordinary pastoral should be orientated on the words and thoughts that can support the people of God in the condition in which we live. We started from the words of Jesus in the Gospel. To help us live these days, during homilies and catechesis meetings, we focus our reflection on some passages of the New Testament that describe this condition, in which only the help of Christ can sustain us”.

The brutal assassination of Father Van der Lugt has shaken not only Christians. The 72 year-old Dutch Jesuit who spent the past forty years in Syria, had valuable channels of communication with Muslims thanks to his work as a psychotherapist. He chose to remain in Homs, struggling with the daily bombings and the lack of food in the neighborhood of Bustan al-Diwan under rebel control. He had decided to remain in his residence after the evacuation of the civilian population which took place in Homs under the aegis of the UN, with the consent of the warring parties.

It is not known at this time who committed the crime, but the State media attributes the killing to unspecified “terrorists”, a term by which the Syrian government defines all forms of the opposition. *An edited version, taken from Agenzia Fides 04/08/2014.*

■ SYRIA - A Jesuit Killed in Homs

Damascus - The murder of Dutch Jesuit Fr. Frans van der Lugt, who lived in the troubled city of Homs, was confirmed in a statement by Fr. Alex Basili, Provincial of the Jesuits in the Middle East and the Maghreb. The note reports: “We have just been informed that on Monday April 7 around 8 am, Father Frans van der Lugt was abducted by armed men who beat and then killed him in front of the residence of the Jesuits in Homs. May the Lord help our brothers of the Society of Jesus, who are totally dedicated to the service of all victims of violence”.

Father van der Lugt had lived in Syria since 1966, after a brief period spent in Lebanon. He was also a psychotherapist and very involved in interreligious dialogue. In the 1980s he was involved in developing the project Al Ard (“the land”) a spirituality centre built just outside the city of Homs,. The center housed about 40 children with mental disabilities from nearby villages.

In the last three years of war, the Dutch religious lived in a monastery that is situated in the old city, where civilians were besieged for many months by the regular army. The clergyman had often complained of the lack of medicines, food and aid for the beleaguered civilians, stating the urgency of reaching an agreement to intervene on behalf of sick, exhausted, hungry civilians. *An edited version, taken from Agenzia Fides 04/07/2014.*

What Remains of the Christians of the East

In the Arab countries they are fewer and fewer, driven to exodus by growing hostility. An up-to-date map of how many and who they are, three months before the pope's voyage to the Holy Land

by Sandro Magister

This article originally appeared in www.chiesa.espressonline.it. Missions Today is grateful to Sandro Magister for granting us permission to re-print it. Parts have been edited for length. Given the present state of affairs in the Middle East, we feel it is especially relevant for our readers.

ROME, February 11, 2014 – Behind the scenes preparations are in full swing for the voyage of Pope Francis to the Holy Land, scheduled for May 24-26.

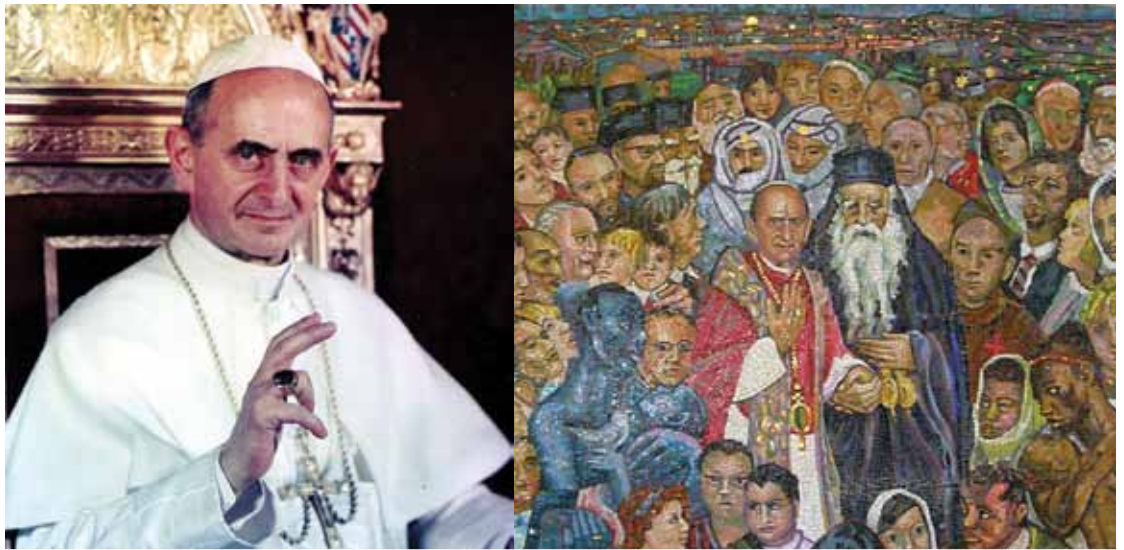
When Pope VI visited Jerusalem fifty years ago he was the first pope in history to do so. At that time almost all of the holy places of the city were within the boundaries of the kingdom of Jordan, as was much of Judea and the valley of the Jordan. There were many Christians there, and in some places, like Bethlehem, they were in a clear majority. In the minds of many Catholics in the West there was great hope that a messianic peace was near at hand that would make brothers of Christians, Jews, and Arabs. Against this background and in this climate, the journey of Paul VI was an event of great resonance. In the old city of Jerusalem the Arab crowd clasped the pope in a strenuous embrace, at times lifting him from the ground. Upon his return to Rome large crowds flanked the pope, greeting him as he entered the Vatican.

That climate no longer exists. The geopolitics of the Middle East has changed completely. There is no peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Lebanon has been ravaged by a civil war. Syria is on the point of collapse. Iraq is devastated. Egypt is exploding. Millions of refugees are fleeing from one region to another.

And Christians are feeling the bite most. Their exodus from Middle Eastern countries is incessant, their numbers not com-

pensated for by the precarious immigration into rich countries of the Gulf by manual laborers coming from Asia.

Vatican secretary of state Pietro Parolin stated in this regard during his first wide-ranging interview after his appointment, in "Avvenire" of February 9:



(L) Pope Paul VI Source: Vatican City, wikimedia.org (R) Mosaic depicting Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I from the sacristy of the chapel Dominus Flevit in Jerusalem. Source: wikimedia.org

"The situation of Christians in the Middle East is one of the great preoccupations of the Holy See ... because peaceful coexistence in that region and in the whole world is at stake." ('Avvenire', 02/09/2014)

And he added, referring to the presence in the Middle East of Christians belonging to different confessions and implicitly to the meeting that Pope Francis will hold in Jerusalem with the ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, half a century after the embrace between Paul VI and the Patriarch Athenagoras:

"This is indeed an area of particular significance at the ecumenical level, since Christians are able to seek and find common ways to help their brothers in the faith who suffer in various parts of the world."

But how many Christians live in the Holy Land and the surrounding region, and who are they?

Overall they are between 10 and 13 million today, according to the estimates, out of a population of 550 million inhabitants making up 2% of the overall population.

The following is an up-to-date summary, taken from issue No. 22, 2013, of the magazine “Il Regno” of the Sacred Heart Fathers of Bologna, written by an expert in the field.

ANCIENT AND FRAGILE CHURCHES

by Giorgio Bernardelli

How many Christians are there in the Middle East? To how many Churches do they belong, and what are they like?

THE COPTS



Coptic altar, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem. Photo by Deror avi, [CC-SA-BY-3.0], wikimedia.org

The Coptic Orthodox Church, led by Pope Tawadros II, makes up more than 90 percent of the Christians in Egypt. The Copts are the most numerous Christian communities in the Middle East. But how many are there? The Coptic Orthodox Church maintains that Christians represent 10 percent of the country's population, or between 8 and 9 million people.

However, the official government statistics state that there are far fewer: in 2012 the government agency said that there were no more than 5,130,000 Christians. An independent source like the Pew Research Center in the United States estimates that there are only 4,290,000 Christians in Egypt, equal to 5.3 percent of the population. Why are the numbers so different? One must take into account the fact that in Egypt census numbers are highly dubious.

It must be added that the number of Egyptian Christians also includes the Coptic Catholic Church, which is Coptic in rite but in communion with Rome and numbers about 160,000 faithful. And then there are the Egyptian Christians of evangelical origin, who are estimated at around 250,000. Large numbers of Egyptian Christians have left the country in recent years to escape the increased levels of violence and religious prejudice directed towards them. One estimate speaks of 100,000 Christians having fled from Egypt after the fall of Mubarak. (Source: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy)

THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH



METOXION - Gethsemane" on the Parvis of the Holy Sepulcher Church. Photo by Mattes, wikimedia.org

The Greek Orthodox in the Middle East find themselves under the jurisdiction of two distinct patriarchates: that of Jerusalem which numbers approximately 500,000 faithful and is the most numerous Christian community in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan; and the Greek Orthodox patriarchate of Antioch, which has its see in Damascus. It is estimated that this patriarchate is numbers 2 million faithful.

The Syrian civil war has led to large numbers of Christian refugees. In the spring of 2011 it was estimated that there were more than 500,000 Greek Orthodox in Syria, but today this number can only be vastly reduced. The Melkite patriarch Gregory III Laham, states that out of 1.5 million Syrian Christians at least 450,000 have had to leave their homes because of the war.

THE MELKITES



Our Lady of Dormition Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarchal Cathedral, Damascus. Photo by: Jan Smith, [CC-SA-BY-2.0], wikimedia.org

Like the Coptic Catholics, the Melkites are an Eastern-rite Catholic Church. According to the statistics of the Annuario Pontificio, they now number about 1.6 million faithful. Only 750,000 of these, however, still live in the Middle East, and it is striking to note that a number almost as large currently resides in Latin America.

In the Middle East the Melkites are present in different countries: in Syria there were about 235,000 (but as for their current number the same discussion applies as for the Syrian Greek Orthodox), in Lebanon almost 400,000, and smaller communities in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. The Melkite patriarch also has his see in Damascus.

THE SYRIANS



Saint Mark's Chapel, Jerusalem. The caption beside the door reads: It is the site of the home of St Mark's mother, Mary, where Peter went after he was released from prison by an angel. The Virgin Mary is claimed to have been baptised here, and according to their tradition this, not the Cenacle on Mt Zion, is where the Last Supper was eaten. Photo by: Momo, [CC-SA-BY-3.0], wikimedia.org

The Syriac Orthodox Church grew out of the schism surrounding the Council of Chalcedon*. Close to a million members live in either the Middle East or in Diasporas with an additional 5 million Syriac Orthodox who live in India. This surprising number speaks to the effective missionary work carried out by the disciples in the early centuries of the first millennium. Another significant characteristic is the fact that this Church has kept as its liturgical language Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus.



Women in Bombay Syrian Orthodox Church on Palm Sunday – Photo by: Masalai, [CC-SA-BY-3.0], wikimedia.org

There also exists a Syriac Catholic Church with a history parallel to that of the Melkites, even if their communion with Rome dates back a century earlier. There are currently 140,000 Syriac Catholics in the Middle East, most of them living in Syria and Iraq.

THE MARONITES

Also in the line of the Syriac tradition are the Maronites, the Eastern-rite Catholic Church with the greatest number of faithful. The Maronites are the majority Christian group in Lebanon. They are heirs of Syriac-rite communities that adhered to the council of Chalcedon in 451. In Lebanon, according to the data of the Annuario Pontificio, they represent 1.6 million people in a country of 4 million inhabitants. As a result, Lebanon is the Middle Eastern country with the highest percentage of Christians, around 36 percent. Here as well, however, it must be recalled that emigration hit hard, especially during the years of civil war. Today about half of the 3.5 million Maronites live far from the Middle East, with the most substantial group, more than 1.3 million, in Latin America.



Altar sanctuary in the Church of Saint Louis, Haifa, Israel. Photo by: Deror Avi, [CC-SA-BY-3.0], wikimedia.org

THE CHALDEANS



Chaldean Catholic Cathedral of Saint Joseph, Aleppo. Photo by: Preacher Lad, [CC-SA-BY-3.0], wikimedia.org

Another thread of Syriac Christianity is that of the Assyrian Church, which today numbers 400,000 faithful between Iraq and the Diaspora and is based in Chicago, where its patriarch, Mar Dinkha IV, also lives. From it come the Chaldeans, the majority group among Iraqi Christians.

The Chaldean is also an Eastern-rite Catholic Church, in communion with Rome since 1553. And it is the community that has suffered through the whole drama of the period following Saddam Hussein. Before the war there were at least a million

Chaldeans in Iraq, but now there are only 300-400 thousand, mostly concentrated in the area of Iraqi Kurdistan. A frightening exodus that threatens to resume after in recent weeks - partly because of the combination of sectarian clashes in Baghdad and the war in Iraq - the number of attacks on Christians in the country is again on the rise.

THE ARMENIANS

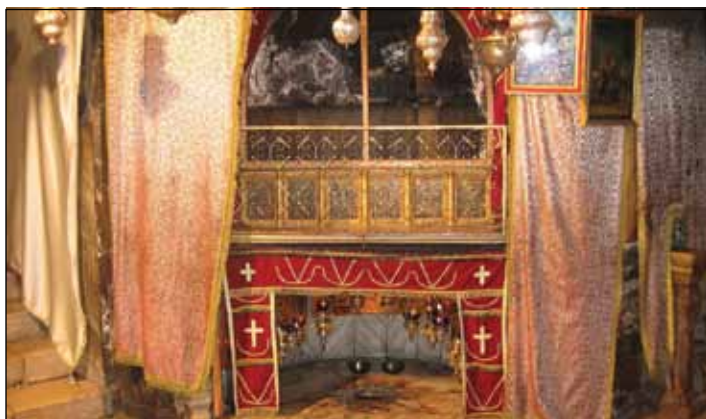


The Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate and St. Gregory The Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church in Cairo. Photo by: Alfred Kazarian, [CC-SA-BY-3.0], wikimedia.org

Also historically significant for the Middle East is the presence of Christians of the Armenian tradition. In this case as well it is a matter of an ancient Eastern Church that did not adhere to the council of Chalcedon in 451.

In spite of having its spiritual center in Echmiadzin - in modern-day Armenia - the Armenian Apostolic Church has two important sees in the Middle East: the Catholic sate of Cilicia, and the Armenian patriarchate of Jerusalem. The largest community in numeric terms is in Lebanon, where there are about 150,000 Armenians. There were another 100,000 in Syria, mostly in the area of Aleppo the final destination of the long forced marches of the persecution carried out by the Young Turks*. Armenians are also the greatest majority of Iranian Christians (80-100 thousand).

THE LATIN



The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Place of Jesus' birth. Photo by: Darko Tepert Donatus, [CC-SA-BY-2.5], wikimedia.org

The Latin-rite Church's jurisdiction covers the communities of Israel, Palestine, and Jordan that blossomed over the centuries because of the presence of various religious orders, especially the Franciscans. It is a small community that currently numbers about 235,000 faithful in the whole region. It is the group that together with the Greek Orthodox and the Melkites has suffered the most on account of the exodus from the Holy Land. Today there are only 27,500 Latin-rite members in Israel, 18,000 in Palestine, and 50,000 in Jordan.

Generally speaking the number of Christians in Palestine has been cut in half since 2000, dropping from 2 to 1 percent of the population. In Israel, census numbers suggest there are 158,000 Christians, representing 2 percent of the population.

IMMIGRANT CHRISTIANS

Thanks to immigration, today there are 1.2 million Christians in Saudi Arabia (4.4 percent of the population), 950,000 in the United Arab Emirates (12.6 percent), 240,000 in Kuwait (8.8 percent), 168,000 in Qatar (9.6 percent), 120,000 in Oman (4.3 percent), 88,000 in Bahrain (7 percent). Brought in to provide cheap labour, they represent Filipinos, Indians, Thais, Romanians and Nigerians. In Israel the Filipinos alone are more than 50,000, or practically double the Arab Christians who attend the Latin-rite parishes. This phenomenon has had a major impact on the Arabian Peninsula, a land where until a few years ago Christians practically did not exist.

This is, however, a Christian presence that is structurally foreign, exposed to precariousness and, when it comes to the countries in the Gulf, subjected to heavy restrictions on its religious life.

Sandro Magister studied theology, philosophy, and history at the Theological Faculty of Milan and at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. He received a theology degree in 1967. He is a journalist, and writes for the magazine "l'Espresso." He specializes in religious news, in particular on the Catholic Church and the Vatican. He has written two books on the political history of the Italian Church: "La politica vaticana e l'Italia 1943-1978 [Vatican Politics and Italy 1943-1978]," Rome, 1979, and "Chiesa extraparlamentare. Il trionfo del pulpito [Extraparliamentary Church: The Triumph of the Pulpit]," Naples, 2001.

Giorgio Bernardelli is a journalist specializing in the Holy Land and the Middle East. He currently works for World Mission the monthly Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions. He has written three books on the Holy Land: Gaza. Chained to a dream (2005), Beyond the Wall (2005) and Anti-Semitism. A category out of control (2007).

Holy Childhood Association

STUDENTS' CORNER



Holy Childhood Association members around the country have been busy raising funds and awareness of their mission. And having fun while doing it! Check out these examples:

Ms Linda Guzzo's grade six class at Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic School in Vancouver, BC takes the initiative to keep the Holy Childhood story alive by visiting other classes to talk about the program and to recruit new members. This year, the class raised money for Holy Childhood projects by receiving donations at the annual Christmas Concert and by organizing dress down days.



Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic School in Vancouver, BC

February 3, 2014

Dear Holy Childhood Association,

We are in grade one at St. Joan of Arc school. We had a candy guessing contest. Each guess cost 25 cents. We raised \$25.00 and our teacher put in \$25.00 too. We want to give the money to the Holy Childhood Association to show that we care about others. We had fun!

Your friends in Grade One.



St. Joan of Arc Catholic School is in Regina, SK

Kevin Ivan
Olivia
Zayha Gage
Zander
Teaconnen
Kallie Jordan
Neal Maria Isabella
Chadley Garsimrat Carter



Ryerson Kunz and Kaden Gramlich

Ryerson Kunz and Kaden Gramlich celebrated their sixth birthdays in February, 2014 with a shared birthday party, but instead of accepting gifts they asked their friends to make a donation to the Holy Childhood Association. Their thoughtfulness and concern for others led to the raising of \$375.00 for children in need. Both Ryerson and Kaden, who are students at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School in Kelowna, BC, wish to challenge other children to consider helping others instead of accepting gifts at their next birthday party.



St. Martin School

P.O. Box 459, Terrace Bay, Ontario P0T 2W0
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 Fax: (807) 825-2742
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To The Holy Childhood Association

Please find enclosed our cheque in the amount of \$1066.62. This was raised at our annual 'Holy Childhood Day', our Advent Holy Childhood project.

Each class plans an activity and we all gather in the gym for all great variety of events; face painting, penny auction, raffles, photo booth, bike sale, cake walk and book sale.

It is a fabulous day, loads of fun and the proceeds are for the Holy Childhood.

Thank you for all of the materials that you send. They are all put to good use in the classrooms. And thank you for all you do for those in need.

Sincerely,
 Marylyn Jarrette

P.S. I am sending a few pictures of Holy Childhood Day.

The mission of St. Martin School, as a family of learners dedicated to promoting quality Catholic education, is to ensure that each student develops as a whole person; intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, socially and physically, through personal growth and achievement in a Christ-centred community.



THANK YOU CANADA from South Africa

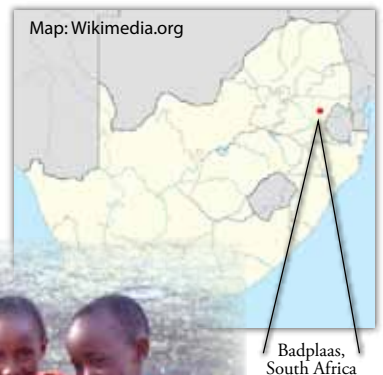
ST. ANTHONY'S CLINIC
 P.O. BOX 71
 BADPLAAS
 1199

Sister Mariala Nsuami Augustine writes to Holy Childhood Association Canada to thank you for your generous financial support of her medical clinic in Badplaas, South Africa. Your support allowed the clinic to purchase medicines and pharmaceutical items to treat over 1,500 children last year. While the children are treated their parents or guardians (since many of the children are orphans) are educated in basic hygiene, health care, nutrition and personal development. The children are taught daily prayers to encourage their spiritual growth. All are treated with dignity and kindness in caring for each person's spiritual, emotional and physical needs. The accompanying picture shows four of our children who were sick but are now much better. They remain at the clinic to take catechism classes.

MARIALA NSUAMI AUGUSTINE

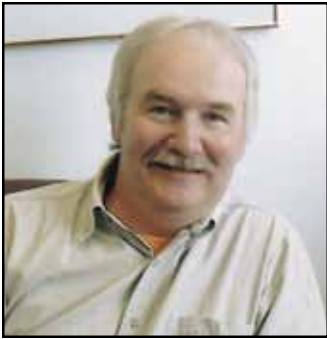
S. Mariala

Map: Wikimedia.org



Mission Conversations with the Editor

No One is Saved by Themselves



One of the more enjoyable aspects of my job is the daily opportunity I am given to explore our faith and those who have devoted their lives to bringing that faith to others. In an earlier column, I wrote of my deep respect and admiration for all who follow the calling to spread the Good News. Admiration, for their profound strength of character, mind, and faith to persevere when conditions seem impossible; and respect for their ability to trust completely in the message of Our Lord when faced with sceptics on all sides. Thus, the pilgrimage story that appears in this issue resonated deeply within me. I also knew that the deep faith expressed by the people of Papua – New Guinea through their trek caused me to dig into the Divine Word Missionary order. Something very different is to be found in the connection between these people and their missionaries that goes far beyond church building and sacrament distribution. Go back and look at the photographs in the article. You can see it in the expressions on their faces. The trite expression, “he’s a man on a mission” came to mind. They were not out for a Sunday afternoon stroll; a quick visit to Martyrs’ Shrine and then a picnic on the lawn. No, they were following, step by step, a call to faith that first arrived decades ago through the intervention and example of a small group of missionaries who in turn were following the call instilled in them by Father Arnold Janssen.

The Divine Word Missionaries’ website provides a short biogra-

phy of Father, now Saint Arnold Janssen. I quote from it. Arnold became more acutely aware that there was no German mission-sending religious society and wanted to see that need filled. This is where his deep faith in Divine Providence showed itself. He was determined to found a German mission-sending society at a time when anti-Catholic laws in Germany forbade such religious schools. At one point, Arnold went with some Ursuline nuns to visit J. A. Paredis, Bishop of Roermond, to discuss his plans. The Bishop’s comment after the visit was, “He wants to build a mission house and he is penniless. He’s either a fool or a saint.”

On Sept. 8, 1875, with only three candidates, little money, and a run-down inn which he was able to purchase just across the German border in Steyl, Holland, Arnold founded his mission seminary and a religious order, to be named “The Society of the Divine Word”. The beginning was difficult, with his first few candidates leaving, but eventually, more and more candidates came, joined, and stayed. He steadily guided this new Society for 34 years and quickly expanded it to include religious brothers. Arnold also helped co-found the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSpS) and the Holy Spirit Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (SSpSAP). At his death in 1909, the missionary societies that he had founded had over 1,500 priests, brothers, Missionary and Adoration Sisters working in the missions in China, Italy, Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Papua New Guinea, U.S., Chile, Japan and the Philippines.

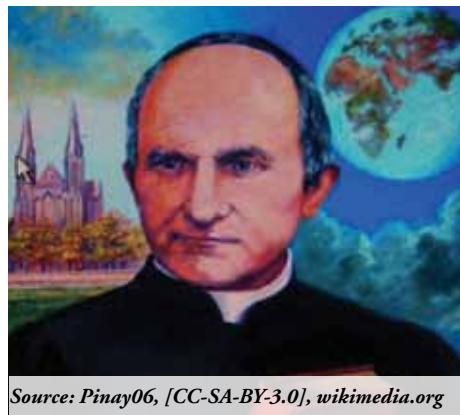
– Saint Arnold Janssen

So the next time you find yourself questioning your faith, or feeling down about the increasing secu-

larism around you, think of Arnold Janssen, a fool and a saint.

For more information on the Divine Word Missionaries, please visit: www.svdmissions.org

Paul Coady
Editor



Source: Pinay06, [CC-SA-BY-3.0], wikimedia.org

“The Lord challenges our faith to do something new, precisely when so many things are collapsing in the Church.”

Missions Today is always interested in hearing from you. If you have any comments on the articles we have used; the new structure of the magazine; or anything you would like to see us explore in future issues, please get in touch with us!

Contact the Editor via email at: editor@missionsocieties.ca

Or write us at: Editor - Missions Today Magazine
2219 Kennedy Road Toronto,
Ontario M1T 3G5

Don't forget to visit our web-site.

www.missionsocieties.ca offers: access to feature stories from our magazine, Missions Today, child activities and news from Holy Childhood, and direct links to World Mission TV (RomanCatholicTelevision) where you can find stories of mission work from across the globe in documentary formats complete with teacher/student guides and activities. Our site also makes it easy to donate in a safe and secure way. Visit us today!

In Remembrance

Our Deceased Donors

Please remember in your prayers the recently deceased members of the Pontifical Mission Societies

Clovis Benoit Saint John, NB
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Joseph Cassar Toronto, ON
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Andrew Cybulski Barry's Bay, ON
Genevieve Demoissac Edmonton, AB
Adam Dietrich Moosomin, SK
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"At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them"

Taken from Laurence Binyon's poem, "For the Fallen" Photo: camil951, morguefile.com

God visits us freely,

but most of the time we are not at home.

**John Tauber
14th century mystic**

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