



# Missions & Miracles

St. Francis Xavier Missionary Associates

Winter 2004

*God's peace be with you at Christmas and always.*

High school boys  
celebrate with a  
traditional dance.



*Dear Missionary Associate:*

As the season of Christmas approaches I'm reminded of my first Christmas in the missions in North India. After my ordination I was sent to the missions and my first task was to learn 'Punjabi' the local language. I lived and worked in a remote village with Fr. Charles D'Souza, a veteran missionary. During the day I would help Fr. D'Souza and in the evening attend Punjabi classes.

I spent my first Christmas as a priest in this remote mission. I will never forget it for it was a Christmas with a difference.

For Christmas Midnight Mass I accompanied Fr. D'Souza to another remote village about 40 miles away. The service was not held in a magnificent Church but in the front yard of a poor Christian farmer. The people wore simple clothes, with no decorations but a small star. The neighbor's cows and buffalos were in one corner of the yard. The setting seemed original, same as the first Christmas. Before mass the people acted out the Christmas story, which they organized full of meaning. For them the birth of Christ was the event of the night. They joyfully celebrated the birthday of our Lord. After the mass, the people continued the celebration by serving tea & snacks and singing carols and dancing some folk Christmas dances. I came home touched by their sincere faith and their deep joy of this wondrous event of God's incarnation.

In this Christmas issue we have two stories from our Northern missions also known as the Delhi province. Fr. Diogo D'Souza, a missionary from the Delhi province presently visiting Oregon for a short stay has a story from his parish. The second story is by Roshan Alexander, a parishioner from the same parish. It's a wonderful story of how a boy from a small city parish rose up to be a national youth representative of India. He shares the influence our fathers had on him.

Our missionaries have been able to touch people's lives because of your continual prayers and help. Thank you very much for your generosity. Fr. Peter Fernandes, sfx and I are truly fortunate to have you in our lives and we wish you God's blessings and assure you our prayers. May this holy season be a time of transformation, healing and peace.

May the incarnated Christ touch you and your loved ones.

Sincerely,

*Fr. Agnelo*

Fr. Agnelo Gomes, sfx



Caption about Fr. D.



## *A Missionary shares a story...*

*-Fr. Diogo D'Souza*

*Fr. Diogo D'Souza is a Pilar Father working in our mission of Punjab in North India. He works in the city of Bathinda. The Bathinda Parish oversees 17 villages (missions) in a radius of about 60 Kilometers (35 miles). The parish runs a school with about 1200 students, a Bal Niketa (poor boys home), coaching centers (after school programs) in the city and in the missions. It also runs medical clinics, adult literacy programs and religious and pastoral activities in the city and the missions. Our Fathers have been working in Bathinda from the year 1964. In the year 1972 we started the Bal Niketan to provide an opportunity to the children from our villages for a better education. We also provide them free clothing, shelter, food, medicine and other essentials.)*

I would like to share with you a simple story about one of our students from our Bal Niketan. His name is Gurusevak. He is a very good and clever student. He came from a poor family from the village. He is the second child among three sisters and two brothers. His father is working for a landlord of the village for more than fifteen years for a meager salary. He is the only bread earner of the family.

Gursevak was studying in grade eight. After his exams he went for his summer holidays, but did not return for the new academic year. On enquiry I



was shocked to learn that he had started working and had decided to discontinue his schooling. I visited his home to find out the reason. On my arrival at his place I found that Gurusevak's father had been seriously ill for almost a month.

The landlord came time and again to call him to work. Finally, as he could not work he demanded that Gurusevak be sent to work in his place or else no monetary help would be given anymore. (The landlord was the only person who would help them in any eventuality, thus they remained in his bondage like slaves). So Gurusevak had to give up his studies in order to take up his father's job and help the family. I did not know what to do. I inquired with his mother whether any treatment was done. She informed me that he has been taking some medicines from a village quack doctor. I asked them to get in my vehicle and brought

them to Bathinda and took him to a good doctor who saw his condition and got him admitted. After a week in hospital he was discharged. The doctor advised him to rest for several days. After some time he was able to resume his duty and Gurusevak came to the Bal Niketan to continue his studies.

Gurusevak's story is not an isolated incident. It is a common story of the poor village people. Most of the parents are uneducated therefore they don't understand the value of education. Their philosophy of life is: "More hands, more income". So the children at the age of 12-13 join their parents to improve the financial situation of the family.

With the passage of time and constant visits from the missionaries explaining the value of education, parents have started sending their children to school. There are



Dining hall and study hall.

Government schools in every village but the level of education is very low, so we invite the children to our Bal Niketan and give them opportunity for a better education.

Many, who have completed their studies at our Bal Niketan are doing very well in life and there is big demand for our students. Unfortunately, due to financial constrains we can admit only limited numbers. We seek your support to help us take care of our Bal Niketan children. Your co-operation will certainly help these poor village boys to come up in life and free their families from the bondage of the land lords.

Caption about Girls dancing.



# God Plans My Life

Roshan Alexander

I write this article on a train from Bombay to Delhi. I was born and brought up in the Bathinda parish, in Punjab.

I grew up with my lovely parents and four brothers and sisters. I did my schooling at St. Joseph's High School where I absorbed the most important values as a child, the value of love, respect and discipline.

My parents could not afford to give us the best in life, but they shed their sweat and blood to give all the necessities and comforts they could. They brought us to this world, nourished us, gave us a good education, and more importantly, taught us to fish so that we could eat every day. The most important thing that I learned from them was the value of giving. "It's not important how much we have, but how much we can give."

The most important stage of my life were my teenage years. I was young and free and my imaginations had no limits, I dreamt of changing the world. The Pilar Society has had a big impact on my life. Going to Mass every Sunday, attending Catechism classes, priests visiting our home, and the camps and conventions organized by the Pilar Fathers helped me grow in self-confidence and face the world.

Down through the years, different priests attached to the parish

helped me shape my life. All dedicatedly worked to uplift the youth in the Bathinda area, which was a big contribution towards the growth of the Catholic youth of our area.

Soon after my parents' sudden death (1993), Fr. Theodore Mascarenhas, a Pilar Father and the Principal of the St. Xavier's school in Bathinda, played the role of father figure, helping me to get out of the valley of darkness and positively get back to work in the Pilar Father's school at Bathinda. Since then we've been enjoying, growing and serving this institution, to the best of our ability.

With the experience of youth work in the Bathinda area, and working with the Pilar Fathers, I was asked to stand for elections from our area at the diocesan level. In the first ever meeting I was elected the DYR (Diocesan Youth Representative), to represent it at the Regional level and stand for elections there. Later I was elected at the Regional level to represent our region at the National level, and finally I got elected National President of the ICYM (Indian Catholic Youth Movement, the official youth movement of Catholic Bishops Conference of India). Being involved with our youth at the national level was a rich experience.

One of the greatest moments I will always cherish, is the time spent with Holy Father John Paul II, during World Youth Day 2000 in Rome, sharing the stage with him for three days, and then being invited in his summer



house, where the Holy Father celebrated Holy Eucharist for us, gave us rosaries and gave us time to take photographs with him.

I pray for the Pilar Fathers working in this mission that they may be able to inspire many more young people of this region to take up the challenges of life and build up the Church in North India.

I have a vision to open a Non Profit Organization with the clear objectives: Education, Employment and Empowerment.

I'm sure with God's grace and the prayers of our fathers and co-workers and friends I will be successful in the betterment of young India.

Roshan Alexnader, is one of our youth from one of our northern mission parish. He share his life story as a parishioner and youth leader.

*Please assist our work  
through prayer and  
contributions to:*

**St. Francis Xavier Missionary  
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