

## E-BULLETIN #40

*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5,16)*

item 80

## JEEVODAYA

### Social and Leprosy Rehabilitation Centre, Raipur, India



*Jeevodaya* – ‘the dawn of life’ as it is called in the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit – was established as a ‘Social & Leprosy Rehabilitation Centre’ in the year 1969, at Raipur, India by late **Rev Fr Adam Wisniewski sac** (1913-1987).

Fr Adam W combined his personal talents with his great zeal and ardent love of Jesus Christ in a very concrete realization of the charism of St Vincent Pallotti, founder of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate (Pallottines). He established this centre primarily with the intention of caring for lepers and their children, who are considered even today socially destitute and ostracized.

Fr Adam W was born on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1913 in Dębiny near Bydgoszcz in Poland. His father was a clerk at a local post office and his mother a housewife. His family inculcated in him a deep spiritual formation and social consciousness which served as a base for his missionary vocation to priesthood. The fervent missionary zeal of Pallottine confreres, Fr Jan Macikowski sac (former Provincial) and Bro Ludwik Krajniewski sac (a missionary in South Africa) who were his uncles, inspired and attracted Fr Adam to the Pallottine way of life.

From childhood Adam was immensely sensitive to human misery. His desire to serve the poor took on a new dimension when he came across a book entitled “Ojciec Damian” (Father Damian). The story of St Damian of Molokai (a priest who served lepers), inspired him and led him to work for the welfare of lepers in central India. Later he wrote, “Today, after years of service among the people suffering from leprosy, I wonder about the origin of my vocation. I think that the root of my vocation is precisely in this book”. His vision of life was simple and clear, be a missionary and devote all his efforts to helping the poor and the sick. Be it at school, or in the seminary, he unassumingly mastered his art.

Fr Adam commenced his Indian ministry as a medical doctor in Raipur. Over time he visited many Pallottine missions in what is now the state of Chhattisgarh, and thus became acquainted with the life and culture of India. During this time he also visited many leprosy centres and got first hand information on the spread of leprosy and leprosy statistics in India. His will to serve was crystal clear as he mastered some of the prominent Indian languages like Hindi, Kannada, Chhattisgarhi etc.

Fr Adam, with his deep knowledge of leprosy and his medical acumen, explored the possibility of setting up a Polish foundation for lepers as a *votum* offering for the 1000th anniversary of Christianity in Poland. His idea quickly materialised. In 1969, together with Ms Barbara Birczynska, a lay person, Fr Adam bought a field to build *Jeevodaya* in the Raipur diocese. The cornerstone was consecrated by Bishop J Weidner sac. Initially the centre ran under three makeshift tents. *Jeevodaya* was officially inaugurated on January 30, 1971 on World Leprosy Day. Fr Adam served in the Centre both as a priest and doctor. Little by little he also visited some large colonies of lepers in the local region and treated them.

The routine life of Fr Adam was characterized by great discipline and commitment. He expected much from himself, and from others. He slept only a few hours a day – always reminding himself of the words of Pallotti: “Let us work while it is day, in heaven we shall rest”. He ate with lepers, worked with them, cared for them, and shared his life in common with them. He was to spend the rest of his life with and for lepers.

Fr Adam died of cancer on July 31, 1987. His grave is located next to the church he built in *Jeevodaya*, which is named after Blessed Teresa Ledochowska. Later in 1997 the Indian Pallottines assumed responsibility for the centre. Under the able administration of Fr Abraham T sac and **Dr Helena Pyz**, it grew in leaps and bounds.



*Jeevodaya* clinic has thrown its doors open to all. Leprosy patients, TB patients and others who may need health care, irrespective of social status and creed, are helped every day. It has a school and hostels for the children of the affected patients, and a mobile health care unit to take care of patients in villages, and an outreach awareness campaign.

On June 1, 2008, one more milestone was added to this remarkable institution with the inauguration of a Community Care Center for HIV/AIDS patients. Additionally, on December 30, 2008, the campus opened a Research and Diagnostic Center for tuberculosis patients. Thus the *Jeevodaya* family, initiated by a Pallottine, has stretched out its arms in a service which is one of the most humanitarian and challenging in India.

In carrying out this noble apostolate, *Jeevodaya* has a number of collaborators of good will from Poland, Germany, Italy, Australia and India. Charitable associations like the *Mission Secretariat of Jeevodaya* in Poland, and *The Global Fund* [<http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/>], form a stable backbone of support to the institution in partnership with the SAC Khrist Jyothi Province, Raipur. A tremendous amount of good will in providing *Jeevodaya* with professional personnel comes from religious congregations like the Pallottine Missionary Sisters, the Franciscan Sisters of Dellingen, and the Medical Sisters of St Francis of Assisi. Every year numbers of volunteers from home and abroad provide a helping hand. One can acutely sense the spirit of collaboration that was as was envisioned by St Vincent Pallotti in the form of his Union of the Catholic Apostolate (UAC), active and thriving in this extended family of *Jeevodaya*.



I had the humbling privilege to begin my priestly ministry in this family in 2006. My ministry has been enriched with the profound experience I have been part of in fulfilling my apostolate here. As I continue to minister in this Centre, I perceive *Jeevodaya* as a place with enormous potential. The children are full of love and enthusiasm and excel in study, sport, and many extracurricular activities. I believe and pray that day by day *Jeevodaya* becomes a dawn of new life to all those who enter its gates, a beacon of hope that can surpass pain, anguish and social ostracism.

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