

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

item 379

### Faraja Pallotti

It is almost 5 years since I first arrived in Tanzania, as a volunteer in the Esso area of Arusha at the foot of Mount Meru.

When **Fr Michael O'Sullivan sac** was home in Ireland, on leave in Milltown, Co Kerry, he spoke about life in Esso where he was parish priest. A survey had indicated that there were many children and adults with disabilities and he asked if I would come to Tanzania to help them. I came initially for a month and the seeds of 'Faraja' were sown.



We started therapy and support services in a classroom in August 2010 and a year later we moved into the new Therapy Centre [below]. I will never forget the joy and smiles on the Mamas faces as we entered the therapy room. They could not believe that the Centre was just for them and their children. 'Faraja' is a Kiswahili word which means **'Hope, Compassion and Encouragement'** and Pallotti is the name given by Fr Michael to the complex in which the Centre is located.

We now cater for 200 children and 75 adults, and 30 to 40 attend on a weekly basis. Many of the children have severe cerebral palsy, and had been locked away in a dark room with no light, while the Mama worked to provide food for herself and her family. Life is difficult for Mamas and having someone with a disability makes it even harder as there is no State support and they would have to pay for any services, if available, which most of them could not afford anyway.

At Faraja Pallotti we provide free therapy services to all who come to our door. We give encouragement and hope and try to show compassion over a cup of tea and 'Vitumba'. After therapy, they share stories and give each other support.



The Centre could not operate without the wonderful staff – **Salome** the Occupational Therapist and **Hidaya**, the Therapy Assistant – who deliver quality service with care and compassion. We try to visit their homes when people are unable to come to the Centre. We also visit other Centres and hospitals who have surgeons from Germany and the USA who come once or twice a year and provide free surgery for those we refer to them. We only have to pay the hospital costs, then we do the rehabilitation after surgery at Faraja.



Hidaya, Sr Lucia [Daughters of the Sacred Heart – Primary Headmistress], Salome

We are currently working with a business called Shanga which trains and employs people with disabilities to see if we can get some of our young adults to work in their workshop. This would provide some income for them and give them self-confidence and empowerment. Shanga manufactures products for tourists and also exports to many parts of the world.

During the last 5 years the greatest change I have seen is that the children and adults with disabilities are no longer confined or “hidden away” and that Faraja helps families to realise that they are not alone and isolated and that they can give valuable support to each other. Coming to the Centre dispels the myth that they are cursed, that it is their fault and that they deserve this cross to bear. We showed the film “My Left Foot” at our May Day celebration and the Mamas cried because they did not think Mzungos (white people) had handicapped children. They also saw that ‘white Mamas’ had to work hard just like themselves as they saw Brenda Fricker do in the film. It was an eye-opener for them.

At the end of our celebration **Fr Reginald Kimathi sac**, our parish priest, spoke with them and told them that every child is a blessing and to have courage and accept life as it is. He blessed them all and said to always remember that God loves each and every one of us just as we are. We have many Muslims who attend Faraja and it is wonderful to see them coming to the clinic and sharing their stories with us.

May the Holy Spirit of God fill our hearts with His love so that like the early Christians we may bear witness to that love in our fractured and broken world. On behalf of the children and adults and their families who attend Faraja Pallotti we say “Asanteni Sana” for your generous support, and please keep us in your prayers.



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## born at Bethlehem – alive in the Eucharist!

I came across this caption on 13 Dec. 2015, when the three Superiors General of the Core Communities of the Union, Srs Ivete Garlet, Izabela Swierad and myself visited **Sister Adalgisa Cammarata**, the Superior General of the other important community of the Pallottine Family, the *Eucharistic Sisters of St Vincent Pallotti* at San Prisco in Italy. Our intention in travelling there together was to foster greater communion among the major communities of the Pallottine Family and it was indeed a wonderful experience.



There, at the entrance to their Generalate house in a crib with a beautiful statue of the Child Jesus, was a statement: "Nato a Betlemme, Vive nell'Eucaristia" (*Born at Bethlehem, alive in the Eucharist*). This is an expression originating out of the Sisters special charism. Coinciding with our visit on the third Sunday [Gaudete] of Advent, this caption really provides fruit for reflection.

The word 'Bethlehem' literally means 'house of bread'. From Bethlehem until his death on the Cross and for all eternity, the Son of God made himself bread to be eaten so that we may have life – a perfect act of self-giving!

I was reminded of something I recently discovered on the internet. As the second group of Syrian refugees arrived in Canada, a video surfaced of a children's choir singing a traditional song in Arabic – 'Tala' al-Badru 'Alayna' – originally sung by his Ansar (supporters) to the Prophet Mohamed when he sought refuge in Medina. It was a surprising and amazing scene. "Welcome to your new home", said the newly-elected Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to these Syrian refugees. He was pictured making the children smile again by offering them toys and Christmas gifts. [It is really worth watching some of these videos on the internet even though, while some may be deeply troubled and annoyed, many are touched by such gestures!]



With a good part of the world today crippled with paralyzing fear and paranoia by terrorism, often not without reason, such a show of humanity and compassion is worth more than many billions of dollars in financial aid. It shows the goodness hidden in every human being and the refusal of the human spirit to surrender to sheer fear and hatred. As history shows, the more we are pushed into a corner, the more heroic will be the manifestation of

such divine qualities in those around us. Christmas is indeed the celebration of such goodness and unrelenting human spirit.

The Child of Bethlehem, living today in the Holy Eucharist, is also the source of fraternal communion among us. He is the “Holy Communion”. The Union of Catholic Apostolate, the core of which is also communion, can become an authentic group of apostles only when we are able to give each other ‘to be eaten’ in order to bring forth life.

Our *SAC Asia Oceania E-Bulletin*, which wakes you up every Sunday morning with a “hi” from Fr Ray from Down Under, is another humble effort to build up such a communion among members of the Pallottine Family. There is no shortage of motivation in our “Editor in Chief” for this initiative, while I continue to use my good office to encourage members from all over the world to contribute. There are also a few who continue to contribute without any prompting. This Bulletin, which some thought would never last for more than a few months, has begun to catch the attention of many. Lately we have even started adding some issues, especially the life-testimonies, to the website of the SAC Generalate [[www.sac.info](http://www.sac.info)] because there are many inspiring stories from around the Pallottine world.

On behalf of Fr Ray and myself, a very happy Christmas to all the readers and good-wishers of our little E-Bulletin. Special thanks to all who are contributing to and reading it.

Following the example of the babe ‘born in Bethlehem and alive in the Eucharist’, let us be believers in the goodness of God and our fellow human beings. St Vincent Pallotti was a saint whose vision went even beyond



baptism. He founded his spiritual inspirations on the most fundamental anthropological principle applying to all humankind – that we are all living images of God. A child whether he is European or African, Italian or Indian, Christian or Muslim, rich or poor is always a reflection of that divine image imprinted in our deepest self. If we are not moved to compassion by the tears of one of these suffering children in any part of the world, even though he or she is from another culture, continent or religion, then we may be already experiencing a certain numbness in our own humanity in some way. The danger in this case is that we reduce the birth of Jesus merely to a fairy tale or a cultural, or even commercial, event. The truth is that the “Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1, 14).

Once again, a merry Christmas and a grace-filled New Year 2016.

**Ray Hevern sac + Jacob Nampudakam sac**

## sac asia oceania e-bulletin

### you commented...

#### on #198

Many thanks for the article in E Bulletin 198 on hospice-palliative care. It is wonderful to know that the publication is in English and I look forward to reading the book. Palliative care is such an important work and indeed one that requires great Mercy.

CS 15.12.15

Fr. Peter Krakowiak and a number of our confreres do a great work in Poland in looking after the terminally ill patients. These hospices run by our confreres in collaboration with numerous lay volunteers and workers become spiritual centres to prepare the most vulnerable cancer patients for their final journey to the "home of the Heavenly Father". Most of them make this final pilgrimage with great serenity. These are homes where the holy *Year of Mercy* is a daily event! Congrats and thanks to these apostles of mercy.

**JN 15.12.15**