

## E-BULLETIN #64

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

item 121

### education in multi-religious India



Diversity and plurality are basic characteristics of one of the largest democracies in the world, namely India. It is a multicultural, multilingual, multiethnic and **multireligious** nation. While it is a matter of pride that, in spite of its plurality India has remained one nation, it is also a matter of concern that plurality has also been the reason for many of its conflicts, outbursts of violence and atrocities.

Ironically more people here die from religio-ethnic and communal conflict than from hunger, starvation and disease, even though such conflicts are connected with issues of socioeconomic and political injustice.

Education can play a vital role in schools and colleges throughout India. Almost all have students hailing from multi-religious backgrounds. Through careful implementation of well worked out plans, inter-religious understanding and appreciation of one another's religious practices can be cultivated.

Prior to Vatican II, and several years after that, education was not treated as an integral part of the Church's mission – but merely as a meritorious spiritual act of mercy. A new consciousness, valuing education as an essential aspect of our mission, is growing. Current Church teachings are rich with references declaring that education is an indispensable dimension of mission (Declaration on Christian Education, 3; Redemptoris Missio, 20, 58; Vita Consecrata, 96; Consecrated Person and their Mission in Schools, 6).

*"...All basic academic activities of a Catholic (Institution) are connected with and in harmony with the evangelizing mission of the Church..." (Pope John Paul II, Ex Corde Ecclesiae)*



With the arrival of a progressive secular Government, that has weeded out fundamental forces, a breath of fresh air can now blow through the corridors of educational institutions and hopefully restore a more sensitized educational focus within the country. Core values that we hope to nurture are:

**Responsible Citizenship:** In practical terms, this means nurturing a service orientation in students in their attitude to the nation and the people irrespective of creed, caste and colour.

**Commitment to Human Rights:** The seed of a human rights movement is the spiritual insight that every human being has incalculable worth, undimmed by accidents of birth and religion, in the sight of God.

**Respect for Creation:** Spirituality is a realm of responsibility. We are responsible for the health and wholeness of the earth we live on. We are mandated to care for the world in which we live. While we are free to derive our sustenance from what God has created, we are obliged to respect the integrity of creation and take motherly care of the earth and its resources. In doing so, we are required to be sensitive to the needs of our fellow human beings as well.

**Compassion:** It is important that we make a special effort to nurture compassion through education, in view of the rising tide of hedonistic consumerism and indulgence in our midst.

**Tolerance:** The cohesion of spirituality would be superfluous in a world of undeviating uniformity. Tolerance, as integral in our school system, entails not only tolerance of those who agree with us but also of those who do not agree. An inability to live with difference is a serious flaw in character formation. It is not only for others sake that we practice tolerance, but also for our own sake.

**Commitment to social justice:** Social apathy is a sign of spiritual illiteracy. Reinforcing the foundation of justice and peace of one's society must be deemed a basic duty of any educated institution.

**Freedom from discrimination:** The goal of education is liberation. At the most fundamental level, it is from ourselves that we are to be liberated. The mark of a liberated person is the ability to transcend divisive and discriminative considerations like caste, communalism and exclusivist ideologies. The Indian Constitution mandates equal respect and opportunities for all people, though we are still a long way away from this egalitarian goal. An inspired sense of our universal kinship is the best antidote against discrimination.

**Freedom of conscience and religion:** Only a person who is religiously free in a two-fold sense – free from the prejudices bred by the priestly class, and free to know the spiritual core of his own religion – can respect the freedom of conscience and religion that others are entitled to. We are trying to inculcate in students the freedom of the spirit to respect the rights of others to pursue their religion without hindrance.

**A dynamic work culture:** To educate is to activate and empower the potentialities latent in human beings. Knowledge and skills are never an end in themselves, but are valuable tools. They are to be used in the pursuit of human welfare.

**Selfless service:**

A wish to be served is innate in human nature. What needs to be cultivated is its opposite: the motivation to serve others.

**A culture of peace:**

Peace is the most desired value in theory. The learning experience made available to the students must include opportunities to cultivate the strengths required to live in peace with all sorts of people. This calls for the ability to live in harmony with differences and contradictions, the capacity to think objectively, and the willingness to respect the sanctity of the life and liberty of others.

**St Vincent Pallotti International Residential School**, Dongargarh has over 300 students from 13 States. They hail from different religious and cultural backgrounds. The teachers too come from different parts of India, with their own cultural and religious backgrounds. The picture is similar in most schools and colleges in India. However, we focus on common values which are enunciated in our mission statement:

**OUR MISSION**

*The mission of St Vincent Pallotti International Residential School is to provide a socially conducive environment for a harmonious growth of an individual who will live from moment to moment joyfully aware of his/her own specific individuality and with an admiration for the differences in others of the community. The student would be assisted to academic success, personal growth, responsibility to the societal needs, patriotism and a sense of global belonging. In a natural rustic setting away from the hustle and bustle of a choking city life, the students are introduced into a family of trust and love where individuals grow with a life-long appreciation of learning and an awareness of the awesomeness of God's providence.*

In addition to the above values the purpose of education should be above all to make students aware of God's presence in all their thoughts, words and actions. The presence of the Supreme being explained in various religions, particularly in Indian philosophy of thought, and scriptures is a wealth that students should be exposed to. The absence of an all-pervading Spirit in all the efforts of students and an emphasis on merely acquiring knowledge, can leave them empty and dry. The importance of God should be a part of the purpose of education. It is imperative that students be enabled to develop a spiritually wholesome personality that relates to society in its growth and development.

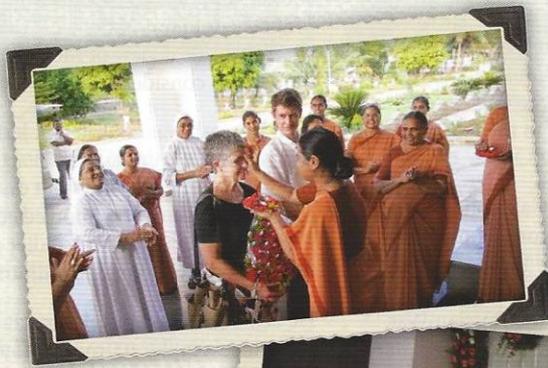


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## Indian celebration for Dr Sr Mary Glowrey

On Wednesday 27 March, in the town of Phirangipuram, India, the Bishop of Guntur diocese, the Most Rev Dr Gali Bali, celebrated an outdoor Chrism Mass at which Dr Mary Glowrey was officially declared a Servant of God. Some 7000 people, including over 400 JMJ sisters from throughout India, participated in the Mass, which signalled the beginning of the diocesan phase of her canonisation process. Look out for Fr Strickland's account of the experience in the next issue of *Kairos*.



*Scenes from the celebrations surrounding the canonisation of Dr Sr Mary Glowrey in India in late March. Fr Dan Strickland MGL and Mrs Jewell Start, president of the Catholic Women's League of Victoria Wagga Wagga, attended.*

**you commented...**

**on #63**

Reading the stories of dedicated women in the last editions of the E-Bulletin, their faith, commitment and service has been an inspiration, many thanks

**cs 14.04.13**

Thanks for your other articles of the sister-doctor. It was really encouraging.

**sn 16.04.13**