



Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat of the Society of Jesus

September

...to exchange social justice and ecology news, stimulate contacts, share spirituality and promote networking...

Narrative

LIVING MY FAITH AMIDST THE MARGINALIZED

I had to walk up and down 10 kilo meters every day to the (High) school. When I was seventeen years old and doing my final year of schooling there was a severe drought in our region and people were facing starvation and struggling even for drinking water and my family and I were not spared. We had hardly a meal per day and seeing rice was seeing like God and the whole family eating a full meal was experiencing the grace of God.

For the first time 'The week-end Market' was introduced and gathered three Kilo meters away from my village. We had a cow which was a source of income to our family, and my mother prepared a pot of buttermilk from our cow milk and took it to the week-end market for sale. The buttermilk was sold within half-an-hour and the consumers appreciated its taste. The little money she collected from the sale of buttermilk, my mother purchased some rice and vegetables and after a long time we had a full meal. We had good sleep that night.

For the following week my mother prepared even better buttermilk and took it to the market. We were waiting for my mother to come back in the evening so that we could have a meal. We waited and waited and to our disappointment my mother came back with the same buttermilk without selling even a glass of buttermilk. When we had asked for the reason, with tears she said, "last week being the first day of the market people did not bother to identify me, but now they have identified me as an 'untouchable woman' and so nobody wanted to drink the buttermilk from an untouchable woman". We drank the buttermilk that our mother brought back and went to bed. The whole night I could not sleep. I became restless, charged with emotions, tears etc.



Untouchability, which is a cruel form and expression of casteism, had deprived my food, aggravated my poverty and humiliated my mother and made us realize that the Indian society treat us and count us less than human beings. The whole experience and reflections about it did not make me revengeful rather nurtured vocation within me to become a priest in the Society of Jesus, a priest to work among the victims of dehumanization. And all through my formation I had been in touch with such situations and the people to keep my spirit alive.

After becoming a priest in the Society, I had started living and working with the poor, the marginalised and the dalits - raising awareness, promoting and protecting human rights, building up network and solidarity with the oppressed masses. Building up people's movements such as Dalit Movement, Dalit Christian Movement, Workers Movement has been my main task and commitment. I see the movement in Indian context as a symbol of hope and a sign of God's Kingdom. I realized and experienced that a social Movement of the Poor is a channel of God's grace for salvation and liberation.

In one of the struggles for Dalit land rights, I was arrested, kept naked, tortured, and imprisoned. (I have been imprisoned a few times because of my solidarity with the dalits and the marginalised). During that time, one of the police officials said "you look intelligent and talented why do you waste your talents and life with these people - the untouchables etc., instead you could start a Matriculation School that will be useful for us all and we will be thankful". A message given to me was that intelligence and talents should be used only for the influential and the privileged. The marginalized dalits and the poor should never get nor be allowed to appropriate what is best. My arrest and imprisonment was a moment of grace for me; made me commit more deeply for the cause of the poor, the marginalised and the dalits. Using the best things for the poor, the marginalised and the dalits is a challenge in the Indian and caste-ridden cultural context. I realised and experienced that building people's movement is a response to such a challenge.

By participating in the struggles of people's movement I also get liberated (sanctified).

Because of such involvement reading of the Holy Scripture, the Spiritual Exercises and the celebration of Holy Eucharist give me new meaning, energy and understanding of the universe.

As I get more involved in people's movement I am drawn towards the prayer of generosity: "not to count the cost, not to heed the wounds, not to seek for rest, not to look for reward." I feel and pray that I should absolutely give myself to the poor because it is through the poor I have my liberation and salvation - "Blessed are the poor because they own the Kingdom of God".

L. Yesumarian, SJ

Flashnews

Madagascar: African Social Apostolate Province Coordinators meet and make plans for future



The African Assistency Social Apostolate Coordinators and the directors of social centres held their annual meeting in Antananarivo, Madagascar from 12 to 18 August. They reviewed and updated themselves on the achievements made so far by the networks that they have been developing and made plans to strengthen and determine the response of African delegates during the coming years. They also visited Arrupe Centre and Ambiatibe, the venue of the martyrdom of Blessed Jacques Berthieu in 1896, who will be canonized in October 2012. The participants expressed their happiness on the progress made in the Social Apostolate ever since Fr Rigobert Minani became the full time conference coordinator of the Social Apostolate.

USA: Jesuit Social Research Institute explores the implications of New US Voter ID (Identity) Laws



The Jesuit Social Research Institute (JSRI), affiliated with Loyola New Orleans University, recently published an article entitled "The Real Fraud in 'Voter Fraud.'" The article examines the implications of a number of recent voter identification laws in the United States. According to the JSRI, the host of recent laws place undue restrictions on the right to vote on a whole, with particularly

disastrous results for minority groups. New laws often require photo identification. The report notes that "25 percent of African Americans, 20 percent of Asians, 19 percent of Latinos, 18 percent of 18-24 year olds, 18 percent of seniors, and 15 percent of those earning less than \$35,000 all lack valid photo identification." This statistics are especially shocking considering "only 8 percent of whites lack valid photo identification." [Read more...](#)

London: GIAN workshop on Governance of Natural and Mineral Resources (GNMR)



Between Sep. 3 and 8, the Global Ignatian Advocacy Network (GIAN) held a workshop on Governance of Natural and Mineral Resources (GNMR) and chose "Transparency, Accountability and Solidarity" as the focus area for advocacy action for GNMR - Transparency and accountability on the part of local governments, mining companies and international organizations and building solidarity alliances

among Jesuits, NGOs and Networking forums to advocate for the rights of the miners all over the world. Sixteen delegates from all 6 conferences, besides a few partners from London took part in the workshop and drafted a position paper and prepared a clear strategic and action plans at conference, inter-conference and global levels for the next 3 years. A deep sense of openness, communion, commitment and an optimistic desire and hope to work together was felt throughout the workshop. [Read more...](#)

Philippines: Strengthening the migrant ministry network



A group of 23 participants, Jesuits and collaborators, from 10 countries - Indonesia, Korea, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Vietnam and Cambodia - working with migrants and refugees in Asia Pacific conference gathered in Manila for a two day meeting from June 30 to July 1, to share their insights and ideas for co-operation among the migrant ministries within the

Conference. The two-day meeting on "Migration, Religious Experience and Mission with Migrants in Asia", was organized by the Loyola School of Theology and the Scalabrini Migration Center. This is the second time the migration network has met since migration was identified as a common priority for the Conference in July 2010. [Read more...](#)

India: SAPI National workshop on Ecology through the eyes of Dalits and Tribals



South Asian Peoples' Initiatives (SAPI) - a forum for networking, held its National workshop at Bagaicha, Ranchi, Jharkhand from August 17-19, 2012 and brought together 79 participants from 8 States with the theme: "Ecology from the perspective of the marginalized - dalits, adivasis and other backward classes." It called for taking more proactive responsibility to preserve and save Mother

Earth (Ecology). They recognized how the development induced displacement has created a situation of insecurity and fear among the tribals and dalits; and has totally ignored their customs, culture and philosophy of life! With the help of resource persons they prepared concrete actions plans both at the local and national levels. [Read more...](#)

Asia Pacific: Training on Ignatian Institutional capacity building

The annual gathering of social apostolate coordinators and directors of some social centers was held at Chiang Mai, Thailand from August 20-24. As in the previous year, they also brought some scholastics to participate in the meeting. The meeting helped the participants to review the progress made during the last one year and also to provide training about Ignatian institutional capacity building. The training provided an opportunity to reflect on



Ignatian organizations, leadership, communication, advocacy and other key issues that the social apostolate faces when trying to respond better to the needs of the poor. The meeting was also an occasion to visit some of the works with the poor of the Thai region Jesuits.

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Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (SJES)

Borgo S. Spirito 4 - 00193 Rome, Italy

Tel: +39-06-6986-8393, Email: sjes@sjcuria.org

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