

SVD LAY-PARTNERS: TOWARDS FAITHFUL AND CREATIVE DISCIPLESHIP

A Workshop for SVD Lay-Partners of India Sub-Zone

Ishopanathi Ashram, Puri

March 02-06, 2023

REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION:

The first ever India Sub-Zone level SVD Lay-Partners workshop was organised by Fr. Luvis Ronald Pereira SVD, the mission secretary for SVD India Subzone in collaboration with Fr. Dixon Lawrence D'Souza SVD, the AJS Coordinator of India-East Province (INE). Taking into consideration the forthcoming 19th General Chapter, this workshop revolved around the theme “SVD Lay-Partners: Towards Faithful and Creative Discipleship”.



The workshop was graced through the inventiveness and support of Fr. Stanislaus Thanuzraj Lazar SVD, the General Mission Secretary and Fr. Victor Rodrigues SVD, the Provincial Superior of India-East Province (INE). The presence of Fr. Maria Gregory Arockiam SVD, the spiritual director of Disciples of the Divine Word (DDW)-Pune, and of the mission secretaries of India-East Province, India-Hyderabad Province, India-Mumbai Province namely Fr. Luvis Ronald Pereira SVD, Fr. Bali Reddy SVD, and Fr. Jolly Mudakkamphurathu SVD respectively, gave a great boost to the workshop. A total of 25 participants from 9 SVD lay-partner groups took part in this workshop:



1. From India-East Province (INE): Disciples of Light-Lungai, Arnold Lay Member Associates (ALMA)- Odisha, and Divine Word Lay Associates, Burla
2. From India-Hyderabad Province (INH): SVD Fraternity-Tamil Nadu and Arnold's Association-Hyderabad
3. From India-Mumbai Province (INM): Disciples of the Divine Word (DDW)-Andheri, Disciples of the Divine Word (DDW)-Bandra, and Disciples of the Divine Word (DDW)-Pune
4. From India-Guwahati Region (ING): Apostles of the Divine Word (ADW)-Tripura

All throughout the workshop, Fr. Dixon did the job of the master of the ceremony and introduced the topics to the participants, expressed gratitude to the resource-persons and also furnished timely information. It was Fr. Ronald Pereira who introduced the resource-persons to the gathering and was instrumental in effective time management.

2. EUCHARIST AND INAUGURATION:

This workshop flagged off with the Eucharistic celebration presided over by Fr. Victor Rodrigues, the Provincial Superior of India-East Province, who gave a clarion call to be 'Life-Promoters' in mission. The workshop was formally inaugurated by Rev. Fr. Victor Rodrigues SVD who performed the traditional *arti* to the Bible as an expression of our complete love towards God and reverence towards his Creative Word. In order to signify the beginning of this auspicious event and to be enveloped with the presence of the Divine, Fr. Victor along with the SVD lay-partner representatives lighted the traditional *kuthu vilakku*, an ornamental brass oil lamp with five petals, that represents the five elements of nature.



The second day of the workshop was graced by Most Rev. John Barwa SVD, the Archbishop of the Catholic archdiocese of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar. Having presided over the Eucharistic celebration, Bishop John introduced the participants to the faith-convictions of the victims of the persecutions at Khandamal and emphatically declared that the "blood of the martyr is the seed of the Church". On the third day of the workshop, Fr. Stanislaus Lazar SVD, the SVD General Mission Secretary was main celebrant who at the end of Eucharistic celebration bestowed the traditional shawl upon all the SVD Lay-Partners. This symbolically represented the commissioning of the SVD lay-partners with a missionary mandate of being faithful and creative disciples of the Divine Word in a world shrouded with woundedness.



**SVD LAY-PARTNERS & MISSION SECRETARIES WITH MOST REV. JOHN BARWA SVD,
Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar**



SVD LAY-PARTNERS COMMISSIONED TO BE FAITHFUL AND CREATIVE DISCIPLES

3. SESSIONS:

The morning session of the first day of the workshop witnessed the resourcefulness of Fr. Stanislaus Thanuzraj Lazar SVD, who helped the participants understand ‘Lay-partners and SVD Mission in the light of the 19th General Chapter towards becoming faithful and creative disciples’. Fr. Jolly contributed in the understanding of ‘formation of the lay-partners, the formation guide, and the statutes’. In the afternoon session Fr. Richard Stanislaus Vaz, the Manager of St. Arnold’s School, Bhubaneswar, enlightened the participants on the significance of ‘Fund Raising as Mission for Mission’ and presented the various platforms available today to raise funds for noble causes.



Aided with songs and video presentations on the rooted and committed missionary journey of Servant of God Marian Zelazek, Fr. Baptist Michael D’Souza, the director of Karunalaya Leprosy Care Centre & Ishopanthe Ashram, Puri, and Fr. Dixson Lawrence D’Souza SVD, the

AJS-INE coordinator, helped the participants in gaining a practical understanding of the ‘life and works of Servant of God Marian Zelazek and lay-partners’. In the evening session, Mrs. Susan Noronha Chettiar, the president of the DDW-Andheri group and the chief-editor of the SVD lay-partners newsletter, dealt on ‘sharing about the starting, formation, meetings, activities of a new lay-partner group and formulation of statutes, process of getting recognition and it’s functioning.’



The morning session of the second day of the workshop aimed at introducing the participants to the Congregations founded by St. Arnold and their missionary charism. In nutshell Fr. Dixon presented the Society of the Divine Word with its foundational charism, the Trinitarian Mission spirituality at the foundation, the four characteristic dimensions through which it bubbles, and its rootedness in 84 countries. He specifically provided a glimpse of the SVD presence in the Indian subzone and more concretely projected a video presentation on SVD mission in India-East Province. Sr. Florentina Xess SSpS, the provincial secretary and AJS coordinator of SSpS India-East province, presented the mission dynamics of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS). Sr. Bindhu Mathew SSpS, the member of SSpS India-East province leadership team, showcased the life, mission, and activities of the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration (SSpSAP). Following this Fr. Gregory Arockiam SVD laid emphasis on ‘Arnoldus and Lay-Partner’s Spirituality’.

After all these presentations, Fr. Stanislaus Thanuzraj Lazar enlightened the participants on ‘How to promote collaboration of the SVD and the Lay-partners in doing Mission’. The last session of this workshop was by Dr. Ajit Kumar Kullu, the SVD lay-partner from ALMA group and the assistant professor of English from Sambalpur University, who presented his mind on ‘Relation between SVDs and Lay-partners, challenges and prospects’. With all these presentations, the participants were divided into four groups so as to discuss and present their mind on these two questions: 1. What are the challenges of SVD lay-partners? 2. How to collaborate in doing missionary activities- with SVDs/ among SVD Lay-Partners themselves? Fr. Stanislaus Thanuzraj Lazar chaired the common assembly where the four groups presented the fruit of their discussion.

4. SHARING BY THE LAY-PARTNER GROUPS:

Based on the prior information provided by the organisers, all the lay-partner groups came prepared with a ten minute presentation on the genesis, growth, and activities of their respective lay-partner groups. These presentations marked the concluding event of both the days of the workshop. On the first day we witnessed the dynamics of five groups namely DDW-Andheri, ADW-Tripura, ALMA-Odisha, SVD Fraternity-Tamil Nadu, and Arnold’s Association-Hyderabad. On the second day groups DDW-Bandra, DDW-Pune, Divine Word Lay

Associates-Burla, and Disciples of Light-Lungai presented their journey as SVD lay-partners and the dynamics of their involvement in mission.

5. EXCURSION AND EXPOSURE:

The third day of the workshop was a day set aside for witnessing the SVD mission among the victims of leprosy and to savour the auspiciousness of Puri which is the Eastern-gate of Hinduism. In the morning the participants were spellbound to view the architectural wonder of Sun Temple, Konark. The time spent at the golden beach as a refreshing balm created an ambiance to nurture fellowship and friendship among the SVD lay-partners. On the



way back the participants visited the Catholic Church of Puri dedicated to the Immaculate conception of our Lady which was constructed by Servant of God Marian Zelazek.

Fr. Baptist D'Souza and Fr. Ronald Pereira accompanied the participants who witnessed the leprosy mission begun by Servant of God Marian Zelazek under the banner of Karunalaya Leprosy Care Centre (KLCC). The participants walked through the leper colony, the mercy kitchen, Fr. Marian Museum. Fr. Marian Memorial, Fr. Marian chapel, Beatrix School, and hostel. They were touched by the reality of rejection, loneliness, and unwantedness and the societal stigma that has stripped off the victims of leprosy from their dignity. The prophetic manner in which Karunalaya Leprosy Care Centre serves to empower these victims through the warmth of acceptance was awe-inspiring and heart-touching.



6. FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS:

6.1. Appreciation:

- The organisation of the program was well done. All the details of arrival and departure was meticulously planned.

- Inputs from resource persons were well presented which brought us to the realisation that there is need to grow spiritually and to reach out.
- The topic chosen for the workshop and the arrangements therein were excellent and fitting to enlighten the participants on the role of SVD lay-partners. The workshop has fuelled our journey into a deeper understanding of Trinitarian mission spirituality as lived by St. Arnold and his commitment to mission. The prophetic call of this workshop was to unearth the woundedness in our vicinity and as creative and faithful SVD lay-partner do whatever we can to bind woundedness and heal brokenness.
- The sharing cum presentations of each lay-partner group served as a platform for mutual enrichment, encouragement, and for looking into newer avenues to foster service.
- The hospitality extended by the confreres and staff at Ishopanthe Ashram and the minute details attended to with regard to food and accommodation all in all created a homely atmosphere.
- The experience of physical meeting helped each one to build a sense of bonding and a community feeling. We felt very close to the SVD family.
- The sense of simplicity and the amicable outlook with which Most Rev. John Barwa SVD, Fr. Stanislaus Thanuzraj Lazar SVD, and Fr. Victor Rodrigues SVD interacted and moved along has created a lasting impression in the hearts and minds of the participants.
- The life history and mission dynamism of Servant of God Marian Zelazek inspire us to serve the Lord tirelessly.
- While this workshop has catalysed a shift to move towards networking and openness, it has immersed the participants into the vulnerabilities of our mission situations helping us realise that these vulnerabilities can become effective opportunities to move out in love and service. The field visit organised as part of this workshop has truly introduced us to the vulnerabilities never spoken off and has helped us unearth newer pathways of bubbling as SVD lay-partners.
- Our heart-felt gratitude to Fr. Stanislaus SVD the general secretary mission and the mission secretary of India Subzone Fr. Ronnie and his team. We thank the community of Ishopanthe Ashram. Thanks to Sr. Florentina and Ms. Anjana for taking lead in organising the final get-together and to all the lay-participants who with their dance and song, crossing all ethnic and linguistic barriers served the cultivation of the “we” and the “us”.
- Fr. Luvis Ronald Pereira and Fr. Dixson D’Souza- the Organizers of the Programme have laboured hard to ensure that the participants got the maximum benefit applying a high degree of ‘Content-Management’.
- Admittedly, most of us were a little apprehensive at the beginning as to what such a workshop could bring to the table. But when leaving Ishopanthe Ashram, many had another question: ‘What took them so long?’

6.2. Scope for Improvement:

- Most of the presentations were in English, as some lay-partners were from Hindi speaking areas, Hindi language also could have been used for the workshop presentation.
- This type of Workshop could be arranged in future at relevant times to keep SVD lay-partners more enthusiastic and it may be at different places as convenient and target

groups for Workshop could be both older and younger ones. It would be nice if we meet once in two years.

- All the Provinces and Region in India Subzone especially the mission secretaries need to make a conscious effort in identifying and sending SVD lay-partner representatives when workshops are organised at the national level and not refrain from participation.

6.3. Proposals:

- All the Materials, Inputs, Discussion Results could be documented as a small booklet with photographs.
- We propose that all the SVD Lay-Partner groups of a Province/Region could meet every year to share about their formation, progress, and mission involvement.
- We propose that once in three years India Sub-Zone level workshop for the representatives could be organized.
- During the past two years India Sub-Zone Lay-Partners have conducted online Global Rosary in the month of October and have participated in the online Christmas Carols singing. We propose to continue with online Rosary in the month of October and Christmas Carols in December in India Sub-Zone taking into account the need for better participation.
- Looking at the specificities of each Lay-Partner group, we propose that each Lay-Partner group in collaboration with their spiritual director and mission secretary draft the SVD Lay-Partners Formation Manual for their group.
- We propose to create a greater awareness about the importance of lay-partner groups among the SVD confreres in all the PRMs of India sub-zone to foster better animation, accompaniment and to avail our local facilities for the lay-partner groups.
- vivatdeus.org, the Arnold Janssen Spirituality website could be made available to all the lay-partners for their spiritual formation and growth.

7. CONCLUSION:

The first ever India Sub-Zone level SVD Lay-Partners workshop with the theme “SVD Lay-Partners: Towards Faithful and Creative Discipleship” was a grand success. We, Fr. Luvis Ronald Pereira and Fr. Dixson Lawrence D’Souza, the organisers of this workshop, praise God Almighty for His wisdom and grace, for health and happiness bestowed all throughout our journey of conceptualisation, planning, preparation, and execution of this workshop and for blessing our resource persons and participants with the gift of health, hospitality, and safety. We are grateful to the Governing Body-India Subzone for granting us permission to organise this workshop. We are grateful to SVD Generalate for granting permission to Fr. Stanislaus Thanuzraj Lazar to travel to India to participate in this workshop. We appreciate Fr. Stanislaus for his lively and down-to-earth presentations and for his guidance all along the planning and execution this workshop. We are thankful to Fr. Victor Rodrigues SVD, the Provincial Superior of INE, for your sterling backing catalysed by constant appreciation.



We are indebted to the mission secretaries of India-East Province, India-Hyderabad Province, India-Mumbai Province namely Fr. Luvis Ronald Pereira SVD, Fr. Bali Reddy SVD, and Fr. Jolly Mudakkamphurathu SVD respectively and Fr. Gregory Arockiam, the Spiritual Director of DDW-Pune for your presence and

timely interventions that played role in enriching the workshop. We thank all our resource persons: Fr. Stanislaus, Fr. Richard Vaz, Fr. Jolly, Fr. Gregory, Fr. Baptist, Mrs. Susan, Sr. Florentina, Sr. Bindhu, and Dr. Ajit for your resourceful presentations and insights into the topic. A special note of appreciation for Sr. Florentina for accompanying the entire group and giving a motherly touch to the workshop. *Kudos* to Fr. Baptist Michael D'Souza SVD, Fr. Ashley Fernandes SVD, Fr. Paul Moras SVD, Fr. Simon Lakra SVD and the support staff at Ishopanthe Ashram for extending the best of hospitalities. Thanks to Sr. Florentina and Ms. Anjana Bongcher for helping organise the final get-together.

We always remain grateful to our benefactors whose generosity as the financial backbone of this workshop has ultimately resulted the success of this workshop. As organisers, we have received your appreciation, suggestions, and help in arranging this workshop. We have invested the best of efforts to help you dear SVD lay-partners to realise your vocation of being faithful and creative disciples. May God bless us all to actualise this vocation.

Programme Organizers:

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