

mission **tomorrow**

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The magazine of the Society of St Peter the Apostle (SPA) 2017/18
SPA is part of Missio, the Pope's charity for overseas mission



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Prayer for future priests

Please pray regularly with us:

Heavenly Father

We pray for the men you have called as they prepare for the priesthood.

Bless them with courage and perseverance in their desire to serve you.

May their hearts overflow with your compassion, understanding and generosity.

May they inspire others to answer your call.

Fill their hearts with the fire of your love, and give them the grace to follow you on their journey of faith.

Make them holy as you are holy through Christ our Lord.

Amen

Image on front cover:
Final year seminarians at the National Seminary of Our Lady of Lanka, Kandy, Sri Lanka



Seminarians at the National Seminary of Our Lady of Lanka

National Director's Message

'If we can live together in peace, then our own people can too!' These were the words of a seminarian I met at the National Seminary of Our Lady of Lanka, during my recent visit to Sri Lanka. There are hundreds of students from all over Sri Lanka that come together for four years of theological and pastoral training before being ordained.

Sri Lanka has only just emerged from nearly 30 years of bitter civil war between the Tamil minority in the north and the Sinhalese majority.

Now there is an uneasy peace which is maintained by the army and people on both sides have begun to rebuild their lives.

The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka constitutes about 6% of the population and its great strength is that it embraces both Tamils and Sinhalese.

At Our Lady of Lanka Seminary there are Tamil students living cheek by jowl with Sinhalese students. They sit next to each other at lectures, eat together and pray as one. They live together in peace and harmony and celebrate this at Holy Mass.

When the seminarian I met says that Tamil and Sinhalese can live together he means it because he is living it,

and when he begins his ministry as a priest, he will be a reconciler and a peacemaker in his own community. Priests in Sri Lanka, as in many places around the world, are not only called to be pastors, preachers and men of prayer but also agents of change, as they dedicate themselves to serving the urgent needs of the people.

When they preside at Holy Mass they are expressing, at the very deepest level, the union of all God's people, with each other and with the Lord.

In helping to train eager young men to become priests faithful to their calling, you are helping to bring peace and reconciliation to troubled areas of the world.

Thank you for making this possible.

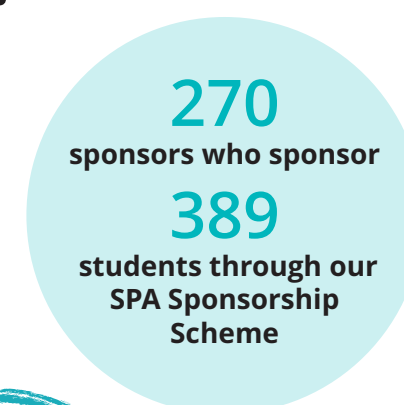


Father Tony
Fr Anthony Chantry

SPA Updates



Thanks to your support



You can find out
more about joining the
SPA Sponsorship
Scheme in the
insert!

Training the Church leaders of tomorrow

Part of the Missio network, the Society of St Peter the Apostle (SPA) trains the Church leaders of tomorrow, bringing the love of Christ to vulnerable communities, and passing on the gift of faith to future generations in over 157 countries around the world. Every year, you help support the training of 30,000 future priests and 11,000 religious sisters in the mission dioceses. Only the SPA, as the Pope's own charity, has this unique role in every mission diocese throughout the world.



Updates from the seminaries



In March, a statue of Jeanne Bigard was unveiled at the **Bigard Memorial Seminary, Nigeria**. The statue was erected by the 2015/2016 past theology students, as a tribute to the foundress of the SPA – the society responsible for the upkeep of the seminary.



A thanksgiving Mass was held in August at **St John's Regional Seminary, India**, for 25 newly ordained priests. They were awarded with their Bachelor of Theology degrees, received from the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome. Fr K. Marianna, the Rector of the Seminary wrote: *'I thank all the collaborators of SPA for your prayers to us. We assure you of our daily prayers for God's blessings and fruitful Mission.'*



Focus on: Sri Lanka

Nestled in the hills of Kandy sits one of the first seminaries to be supported by the SPA and its founders, Jeanne and Stephanie Bigard. The National Seminary of Our Lady of Lanka was inaugurated in 1893 and completed in 1899, which was when it opened the doors to its first student priests



'Our Lady of Lanka Seminary is still the premier institution for the training of seminarians in Sri Lanka today,' says present rector Fr Jayakody Expeditus (above). It enrolls 65-75 students a year, from across the country and its ethnic backgrounds.

In 1983, a civil war arose in the country due to ethnic tensions between the majority Sinhalese population and the Tamil minority. After more than 25 years of violence, and estimates of 70,000 to 80,000 dead, the conflict ended in May 2011.

'Here, living together, we are two communities of brothers – Sinhala and Tamil,' explains Fr Expeditus. 'All seminarians have lived through the Civil War and remember the conflict, but here we promote fraternity. We encourage each other to respect our backgrounds. Integration and reconciliation begin in the seminary.'

While studying for the priesthood, seminarians play an active part in the community, combining lectures and reading with a ministry that benefits those living around them. The brothers go into schools to teach children, visit prisons to minister to inmates and work with the poor.

Providing for themselves is also a significant part of seminary life. The brothers keep pigs, cows, chickens and turkeys, and grow their own vegetables. They sell the produce to local hotels, shops and

vendors. The proceeds are ploughed back into students' education and the upkeep of buildings.

'The purpose of our farm is to increase income and use this money for textbooks, stationery and computers,' explains Fr Expeditus. 'At present, our library is out of date, we only have seven computers for 100 seminarians and we would like more teachers to improve the quality of education we offer.'

The age of the building brings challenges, with day-to-day maintenance representing substantial investment. 'Our real need is roof repairs,' he says. 'The tiles, dating from 1893, are becoming dangerous.'

Did you know?

- Shaped like a teardrop, the island of Sri Lanka lies off the southern tip of India
- There are approximately 22.2 million people in Sri Lanka
- The Sinhalese make up nearly 75% of the population, followed by the Sri Lankan Tamil community at just over 11%
- St Joseph Vaz is Sri Lanka's first saint

'We are in debt every year, but we want to breach that debt and sell more of our produce. We want to save money by not having to purchase additional food. We already don't buy in any milk, and 85 per cent of our chicken is from the farm.'

'Our aim is to become even more self-sufficient'

'Despite all our efforts, it is sometimes really difficult to find sufficient funds for teachers and books to teach the students well.'



This is why Fr Expeditus is so thankful to those who support and pray for Our Lady of Lanka's future priests.

'Every day, during morning and evening prayer, and in front of the Blessed Sacrament on Saturday, we pray for our benefactors and those that help us spiritually and materially.'

Grateful for this support, he underlines how 'contribution' in all its forms is key to the formation of the seminarians.

'I ask the brothers to ask themselves this question when they are leaving: 'What have I contributed?' And to think about that as they live out their vocation, whether it's them contributing their time, commitment or spirituality.'

'We're trying to instil in them values to help them serve their community.'

Heeding God's call

Brother Hirushan Hasantha grew up in a large Catholic family in southern Sri Lanka. When he was seven, he attended catechism at a Pentecostal church. 'We had no idea what was Catholic and what was Pentecostal,' explains Hirushan. 'We were taught to praise God and learned Bible stories through drawings, colouring and storytelling.' Hirushan even learned Bible quotations off by heart.

His enthusiasm did not go unnoticed. One Christmas, pastors from the Pentecostal church visited him. 'They insisted I join them,' recalls Hirushan. 'But I refused, telling them I was going to become a Catholic priest.' They tried to persuade him, but Hirushan stood firm.

'Reflecting on it, I know it was not I who spoke, but the Spirit speaking through me.'

At just 14, Hirushan joined the seminary. 'I only stayed three days,' he admits. Homesick, he left, completing his exams at school. He returned to the seminary but was unsettled again. He rang his father to pick him up. Hirushan waited



and waited but his father did not come. 'That night was hard, troublesome and dark,' he reflects. 'I thought about my desire to become a priest. I prayed, asking God's help to choose my vocation.'

Next day, his father arrived to take him home. 'I told him: "I will continue God's calling." Even today, I wonder how those words came to my mouth, but I'm pleased they did,' he says.

Now in his fourth year at the seminary, Hirushan says that as a priest he cannot change the world, 'but I will change my life so that others, seeing how I live, may change theirs,' he explains.

Teaching children is something he particularly enjoys. 'I like being with them and, as Jesus says, the Kingdom of God belongs to them.'

Smiling, Hirushan says: 'The most valuable gift I have been given is my smile. May that gift help me to bring people to God!'



See the insert to find out how you can help students like Hirushan

Uplifting the downtrodden



Sri Lankan tea is world-renowned. Lush green plantations are found everywhere in the country's hilly areas. Lunugala parish, in the Diocese of Badulla, is surrounded by 17 tea estates and here scores of plantation workers can be found in the greenery, nimbly picking leaves

Fr Benedict Eugene OMI has worked among plantation workers for five years. While the country's tea is celebrated, many estate workers live in dire poverty. 'I am working for the poor and marginalised to continue Jesus' mission of uplifting the downtrodden,' he says.

Kuppen Rasu is a 74-year-old retired tea estate worker, having picked tea for thirty years. Now unable to walk, he had been housebound for the last ten years.

Unable to access medical assistance due to the location of his home in the hills, Kuppen Rasu was unable to afford travel to a hospital, could not make the distance given his pain and could not pay for treatment once there.

Kuppen Rasu's wife, Thangamma, also picked tea for the estate. With employment, they were given free board and basic medical checks. Now retired with no income, they receive nothing. The couple were entirely reliant on neighbours' goodwill and the generosity of the parish.

Sadly, Kuppen Rasu's plight is all too common in the tea and rubber plantations of Sri Lanka. Unable to work, these elderly people are forgotten, relegated to living in misery.

'People living on the estate are under estate management and depend on them for everything,' explains Fr Eugene. 'However, even basic needs are not met. Government authorities presume

estate management are looking after these people... but hospitals are far away and pregnant women, children and the elderly face many problems,' he says. 'Unnecessary deaths are very common and normal in the plantation sector.'

But there is hope. Thanks to Missio supporters, Kuppen Rasu now travels to a clinic once a month to access the medication he needs. With a wheelchair and a walker, he moves around his home and village with a new-found confidence. With a loan, he and Thangamma have opened a small grocery shop next to their home which provides them with an income.

'Our service is needed not only by the small Catholic communities in the tea estates, but by people of different religions too,' says Fr Eugene. 'It makes serving Lunugala parish very special and we can give that service all because of Missio.'

Thanks to your continued support the Church in Sri Lanka will be able to train future priests like Fr Benedict to share God's love with the communities they serve.

Building the Holy Angels a home

During floods last year, thousands of people in the south of Sri Lanka lost everything. Holy Angels Sisters took rafts and small boats, travelling through snake and crocodile-infested waters, to help bring food and clothing to those affected



The Holy Angels order was founded in Sri Lanka in 1903 and, as contemplative prophetic missionaries, the Sisters work closely with locally trained priests to offer practical and spiritual support to their community.

Today, the Holy Angels has an increasing number of older sisters in its community. There are more than 60 nuns over the age of 60 throughout the order and to provide them with the care and attention they need, work has started on a care home.

'I feel for them as they've given their lives,' says Sr Ranapriya, who is 70 herself. 'They have made many sacrifices and we cannot abandon them. They always shared what they had with the poor.'

She tells the story of a local family, a single father with five children. When the eldest girl became pregnant at 14, the family was supported by the nuns. When the girl married the father of her child at 18, the young family went to live at the convent. 'The baby was fed, washed and looked after by the nuns, and that baby is now a man working in London. When he comes to Sri Lanka, he always visits us,' she shares.

Sr Ranapriya says that the older nuns are happy, and never say if they are in difficulty. 'But they do need some extra support as they get old and we just don't have the means to do it.'

As well as construction on the home, younger nuns will need to be trained as nurses in geriatric

'I feel for them as they've given their lives'

care, with two stationed at the home. Other sisters will take care of cooking and other day to day needs. Some lay domestic staff will be employed to help. The order also needs support for medical care at the hospital, which can be expensive.

'To those people who support us, thank you so much,' smiles Sr Ranapriya. 'We'll pray for you. We're grateful forever!'



You can help bring peace to South Sudan

The conflict continues; more and more people are hungry, homeless and terrified. Retribution is rife. South Sudan is on the brink of collapse, but Bishop Paride Taban is trying his upmost to bring peace to his people

Bishop Paride Taban, aged 80, is one of the few South Sudanese who can remember peace in his country. In 1999, Bishop Paride started a farm on the eastern edge of South Sudan. Today that farm is a village: an oasis of peace where the name 'enemy' has died.

In stark contrast to the rest of this scarred and divided country, the *Peace Village* is home to people from 24 different tribes who live and work happily together.

Bishop Paride Taban explains:

'I was made a priest in 1964 when the missionaries were expelled from the southern Sudan. There were very few priests left in southern Sudan and I lived through two decades of war.

'I founded the *Peace Village* because of the human suffering I saw and because I could not bear the way people were segregated from each other. I have to make Sudan a nation where people live as brothers and sisters, different religions living as people of God.

'The *Peace Village* started with 81 families. Now we have over 3,000 people. People came because of the services we brought to the

area where, before, there were no services at all. People who were enemies now call each other brothers and sisters. They play football together; they have workshops together; they pray together.

'What South Sudan needs today is forgiveness, repentance, to say "I love you, I forgive you, we forget the past together, I am wrong and I am sorry".

'We are connecting people with love.

'My mission is to make disciples of the whole world; to make everyone into the image of God.'

You can help South Sudan train the 'peace priests' of tomorrow. There are currently 77 young men training for the priesthood at St Paul's Major Seminary in Juba.

Fr Stephen Ameyu, the Dean of Studies tells us: 'As Catholic priests we play a very great role within our communities. People look to us for guidance and support. Priests hail from the many different tribes which make up South Sudan.

'We spend eight years together training to become priests. That time together transforms us.



'You begin to see people from different tribes not as enemies but as fellow human beings. We transmit this transformed view of one another to our communities, which helps to change the mentality of all people.

'We have begun a specific practical course to help the students to read the situations they will be faced with and to discern how to take positive action as a result. In this way, the Church will continue to play its vital role in helping to bring peace and justice to South Sudan.'

Find out how you can help train future priests, like Bishop Paride and Fr Ameyu, by visiting:
www.missio.org.uk/spa-sponsorship-scheme

Obituary

A much-loved rector, colleague and family member, **Fr Clement Chimwala** died suddenly on 9 January, 2017. Fr Clement was trained with help from the SPA as he had a family sponsor him through our SPA Sponsorship Scheme. He also featured in a past issue of *Mission Tomorrow*.

Fr Clement acted as Rector of St Peter's Major Seminary in Malawi from 2008-2012. He later worked in England and often provided support for the parishes in Clifton Diocese. We offer our condolences to those in the Clifton Diocese and elsewhere who were fortunate enough to meet him. Please remember him in your prayers.

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