



Celebrating
COMMUNITY

VOICE OF THE SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

December 2023

FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY

EDITORIAL

EMPTYING OURSELVES *to be filled with Christ*

We are on the threshold of Christmas – the birth of which took place in Bethlehem by an act of sheer love of God who loved the world so much that He sent His **SON** to give us eternal life (cfr John 3:16), powerfully changing the course of history. Christmas is a joyous event which we can choose to celebrate in different ways – stitching new clothes, making sweets (traditional and modern), buying goodies, cleaning our houses, etc.



Yet, the real essence of Christmas can be found in what St Paul wrote to the Philippians - “Even though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself (*kenosis*) by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (cfr Phil. 2:6ff).

Likewise, paradoxically, the emptying of oneself should be the real cause of our joy when we celebrate Christmas. A question that comes to my mind is, “What can I empty myself of”? Emptying my expectations; emptying pride and greed for power, position, pleasure; emptying the worldly values which are so precious to me, emptying that craze to compete with others; the list is endless. Once this emptying (*kenosis*) is complete, with God being made the be-all and end-all of our lives - if we love, reconcile with others, become instruments of peace, and possess

the values of God's kingdom, if we become humble and reach out in service to our brothers and sisters and experience Jesus in our ministering to them, we will suddenly realise that the birth of Jesus has taken place in our lives, and Christmas will be made much more meaningful.

On that first cold and unfriendly Christmas Day, about 2000 years ago, Joseph and Mary **found themselves desperately in want** as they were frantically pleading for a room with no success. But God's plan could not be thwarted. Jesus was born in a humble manger. To rediscover the real meaning of Christmas, all that we need to do is to look at the manger – and discover the plan of God and how He chose to be born in history so that all of us may be reborn! In the words of Pope Francis, the manger teaches us three things: “closeness, poverty and concreteness”. Jesus was certainly close to HIS people; He had a love for the “poor in spirit” and HE concretely chose to reach out to those in need, to ensure that **“no one should be in want”** (SCC Vision Statement). If only we can imbibe the attitude and spirit of Jesus – be close to the families in our clusters; love the poor and reach out in service to them, irrespective of caste, colour or creed, and consider them as our brothers and sisters, I believe this will bring immense joy, happiness, and above all, meaning in our lives; Jesus will be born in our lives. On behalf of the ART (Archdiocesan Resource Team) for the SCCs, I take this opportunity to wish each one of you a JOYOUS Christmas. May the birth of Jesus inspire us to love and care for our brothers and sisters, no matter what the situation, so that **no one should be in want** in our Communities and Clusters. A Happy Christmas and a Bright New Year 2024.

✠ Barthol Barretto
Auxiliary Bishop of Bombay &
Bishop in-charge of the SCCs, Archdiocese of Bombay



CONTENTS

Are our parish church and SCCs inclusive of
the differently abled? 4

Christmas

Yesterday Today Tomorrow 6

Christmas

A Time to Choose 7

"He comes,
comes, ever comes!" 9

Christmas in the
Mission territory of Raigad 12

A Vibrant Inter-Faith Celebration
of Unity amidst Diversity 15

SCCs in Action

If we work at it, it works!! 16

Deanery Rallies 42

Marathi section 46



ARE OUR PARISH CHURCH AND SCCS INCLUSIVE OF THE DIFFERENTLY ABLED?



Years ago, while attending a Retreat in church, I noticed a family sitting in the last pew with a kid who was about 8 to 10 years old. The child kept on rocking and making weird sounds, disturbing those around them who were praying fervently. During the healing service, a woman approached the mother of the child, and politely suggested she take the child out of the church. The parents were very embarrassed, and quickly moved out. Ever since, we have not seen that family at Church services again. It makes me wonder - was our loving God, Creator of the universe, who has made each one of us in His own image, hurt when He saw this? Are we tolerant of people who are different from us in looks, behaviour, thoughts and beliefs? Is the Church and our SCCs ready to accept all as one family in spirit and love, or are we torn apart by differences in language, status, education, disabilities, etc.?

Recently, the parent of a 20-year-old Person with Disability (PwD) shared that even today for Sunday Mass, no one sits in their pew. The icing on the cake [sarcasm intended] is that many think that these children behave in this way, due to poor parenting and disciplinary measures. Imagine if one of us is the parent of a child with a disability, what would I want from the members of my SCC? Definitely not advice, but empathy - an understanding and compassion, probably the same understanding that the woman who was about to be condemned by the elders for adultery received from Jesus in the gospels. If we, so-called “normal people” who cannot avoid distractions during Mass, how can we judge and condemn others for their inability to conform to socially acceptable behaviour?

Aren't some of us guilty of saying/thinking that a child is born with disability due to the fault of its parents? Is being the parent of a child with disability due to past sins? Do we question whose fault is it? Once, in a meeting, a parent shared that their baby was born normal, but due to a medical mishap at the hospital, the baby did not receive the NICU treatment at the appropriate time, resulting in the child becoming mentally challenged. How many of us have made careless talk and hurt the feelings of parents without knowing the person?

The Gospel of John 9:3-4 says, “As they passed a blind man, the disciples asked Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.”

Isn't it high time we question ourselves? In our SCCs, have we ever reached out to such families, or do we avoid even making eye-contact with them? How many of us live in fear that if our children play with such kids, they will become like them and behave similarly, and advise our children not to play with them? When we have parties and get-togethers do we invite such families? And even when we do, do we ask them how we can make it easier for their child to be part of the celebrations? Do we make an effort to understand their abilities and inabilities, and provide support accordingly?

These children long for company and social life; why not encourage our youth to reach out to them to give them a taste of companionship and belongingness? Our children, when they grow up, would go out for studies or for work. They would move out of our nest in due course of time, but the children who are differently abled cannot do the same. They will grow to become adults with disability; they continue to remain as children locked in an adult body in the parents' house. The responsibility of such parents as caregiver and protector never ends even in their old age, while others have the advantage of being taken care of by their children. Let us go a step further. Can we think of supporting these parents by relieving them of their duties for a day, so that they can have a break once in a while?

We need to break away from a narrow mindset and expand our vision to take our mind away from what they cannot do and focus on the tremendous talents and abilities hidden within. They have the talents of drawing, singing, beading, carpentry, flower-making, pottery, card-making, craft-making, cooking, baking, sports, dancing – the list is endless. Some are even gifted with the grace to pray and intercede for us. I want to conclude with this message that I read some time ago:

“A child with Autism spends hours being taught how to interact with others. Why don't we spend time teaching those without Autism how to interact with them?”

Anita Durai is a special educator with a passion for helping integrate children and adults with disability into a parish setup.

Christmas

← YESTERDAY — TODAY — TOMORROW →

A couple of weeks ago, I came across a news article about a woman giving birth to her baby at Kalyan railway station. It immediately brought to mind the biblical story of Mary giving birth to Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem. This Christmas, perhaps it's an opportunity for us to connect with people facing situations that echo the humble surroundings of that stable—individuals who are socially, economically and culturally marginalised.

Reflecting on Christmases past, the holiday season used to embody the spirit of CHRIST in its entirety. The week leading up to Christmas was filled with preparations, sweet treats, carols echoing through the neighbourhood, and festive decorations, including the traditional crib and star outside every home. Dressed in our finest attire, we attended midnight Mass, followed by a joyous family meal. People exchanged sweets, reached out to those in mourning, and extended a helping hand to the less fortunate. The arrival of the postman with heaps of Christmas cards added to the festive joy. It was a time of genuine happiness, fellowship, and celebration.

Peace was not just a theme, but the very essence of Christmas. Sadly, in today's world, the prevailing evils of hatred, revenge, and conflicts between races and nations threaten this peace. The ongoing war in Ukraine and Russia, the Israel-Hamas conflict, with thousands dead and many more maimed, make us reluctant witnesses to immense suffering. Twenty centuries ago, Bethlehem faced overcrowding, leaving no room for Mary and Joseph. Today, our celebrations sometimes make room for everything but the true spirit of Christmas, replaced by feasting, revelry, and at times, even sin. Greetings have shifted from "Merry Christmas" to the more neutral "happy holidays."

As we joyfully reflect on the past and anticipate the future during this festive season, it's crucial to remember that not everyone shares in the optimism for a blessed future. At the conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy 2015, the Holy Father emphasised the importance of keeping the doors of mercy open. In a world where digital connections are evolving, we hope to bridge the gap between lonely senior citizens and their children. Remembering the sacrifices of the Kandhamal martyrs and praying for those affected by wars globally and in our communities, especially the children, should be part of our reflections.

This Christmas, let's embrace grace-filled opportunities to reach out to those in our communities, even if it means overcoming challenges. By doing so, we can bring the true essence of CHRIST back into Christmas, ensuring that no one is in want.

May this Christmas provide us all with reasons to be grateful for yesterday, thankful for today, and hopeful for tomorrow. Wishing you a Christmas filled with the true spirit of Christ.

Melwyn Sequeira is Secretary, Archdiocesan Office for Lay Collaboration in Ministry.



Christmas A TIME TO CHOOSE

As a little child, I looked forward to the most beautiful time of the year - Christmas. It's a time when the whole family together waits to welcome Baby Jesus and celebrate His birth. We make preparations by cleaning our houses, making sweets, shopping, packing gifts, and much more. This preparation is a time of joy and cheer, because Christmas brings the family together. However, in the hustle and bustle, we may forget the real preparation for Christmas i.e. preparation of our hearts.

Jesus wants to be born in our hearts and in our families, and we need to welcome Him. It's often difficult to do so without making some tough choices. Jesus wants us to make those difficult choices, and choose Him. Below are a list of some choices we can make to truly prepare ourselves to welcome Jesus in our hearts.

C - Choose Christ - Give Christ the first place in your life. Make choices where you choose Him over everything else. We often think we need to 'make place' for Jesus

which entails trying to squeeze some more room into our hearts among other things that have their own claimed space. Imagine a teenager trying to cram more clothes into an already stuffed cupboard; you'll get the idea. But that's not what Jesus wants! If we plan on inviting Him, we need to clear away everything else, and let Him take over all the space. Clear out the cupboard of your heart, and say, 'Okay, Lord, now this is yours to fill!' And He will be overjoyed to fill your heart with His faithfulness, love, peace, joy, and most of all, His Spirit.

H - *Choose to be Holy* - In moments of temptation, choose a virtue over a vice. Holiness is a decision, a lifestyle. It's something we need to be aware of at every moment. As a young boy, St Dominic Savio said, 'Death rather than sin', and he lived it! We need to choose holiness above temporal pleasures. Choosing holiness leads us to life, eternal life.

R- *Choose to Reach out* - A famous example of reaching out to others is that of our own Mama Mary when she visited her cousin Elizabeth. We all have our own struggles and battles. But when we reach out to someone else in spite of our own weakness, that is when we become Jesus to the other and bring them joy, just like baby John leapt for joy in Elizabeth's womb when he felt the presence of Jesus in Mama Mary. One thing we can do this Christmas is reach out to someone in need; maybe helping them materially with food, clothes, groceries, or even simply spending time with someone who is ill or lonely in our community, or just praying with them.

I - *Choice to Invite* - As Catholics, we are all invited into the family of God and called to His heavenly banquet. St Paul, in his letter to the Romans, talks about inviting those who haven't heard the good news to come and encounter Jesus. Invite someone to listen to your experience of Jesus. Or simply invite someone less fortunate to share a meal with you and your family. That simple invitation put forth with love is enough to bring Jesus to them.

S - *Choose to Surrender* - As humans, we often like to be in control of the situation and take charge of our lives. And when things don't go our way, we grumble and fret and complain. And the whole time Jesus is waiting for us to give Him our burdens! Let us try making an honest, simple prayer of surrender this Christmas, just telling Jesus 'My Lord and my God, I give you my life.' And then pray and consult Him in every decision. WWJD - What would Jesus do?

T - *Choose to spend Time wisely* - This Christmas, let us try to skip 'Facebook' and

the ‘face-timing’ and seek real, in person, face-to-face conversations with people around us, beginning with our family and friends. This Christmas, try a virtual detox and focus on spending time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and at home with your loved ones.

M - Choose to make Memories - Make every moment memorable! And no, we don’t need Facebook or Instagram to do that.

A - Choose to Acknowledge - Everyone likes to be acknowledged and appreciated for the little things. Try saying ‘Thank You’ to three people whom you usually wouldn't appreciate, like the sweeper, security guard, etc. And of course, start with those closest to you, for they are the ones we may easily forget.

S - Choose to Share - Christmas is meant to be shared. Jesus chose to share His birth with everyone - the lowly shepherds, the rich wise men, and even the sheep, donkey and cattle! This year, let us share Christmas with every one we meet. Share a smile, share food (everyone loves that!), share your time, share gifts, share joy, share love, and above all, share Jesus.

Calvin Pereira
Our Lady of Fatima Church, Sewri



“HE COMES, COMES, EVER COMES!”

“Inclusion is an “aspect of mercy” that reaches out to everyone without regard for social conditions, language, race, culture, or religion. It is manifested in the love of each person “as God loves them.” **(Pope Francis)**

What if Jesus decides to be born as a child with special needs this Christmas? How would you welcome Him?

What are our attitudes towards persons with disabilities? Is it just pity, sympathy, or a feeling of sadness? As followers of Jesus, how can we have a paradigm shift

in our attitude towards people with disability? How can each one of us do our part to implement the concept of ***“Inclusive Church / Community”*** from the documents to a living reality? Emmanuel is God with us in a tangible way here on earth!

Jesus' teachings and actions consistently emphasised the values of compassion, empathy, service, and inclusivity. Throughout the Gospels, there are accounts of Jesus performing healing miracles. Many of these involve restoring health to individuals who were blind, deaf, mute, or paralysed. These miracles are often seen as expressions of Jesus' compassion and a demonstration of His desire to alleviate the suffering of those with disabilities.

Historically, society has often viewed individuals with special needs through a lens of stereotypes and misconceptions. These misconceptions contribute to a sense of exclusion, stigmatisation, and isolation of children with special needs.

In recent years, there has been a notable shift in the attitude of society towards children with special needs, reflecting a growing awareness and acceptance of diversity. As our understanding of inclusion evolves, communities are recognising the importance of embracing and supporting individuals with diverse abilities.

Yes! Embracing diversity is not just a slogan; it is a commitment to creating a world where everyone has a place and purpose. The Church, as a pillar of community and compassion, plays a vital role in creating an environment where every soul, regardless of physical or cognitive differences, can experience spiritual growth and support.

Dilkhush Special School, run by the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, is a special school for children with intellectual disabilities. There was a time when the world called the intellectually challenged “good for nothing, crazy and useless,” isolated them and sometimes even killed them. Way back in 1968, the sisters at Dilkhush Special School looked on them with mercy, and took their first steps to the peripheries in the Archdiocese of Bombay, working to educate and demonstrate to the world that they are God’s gifts, and we need to treat them with dignity and respect. Many other congregations and like-minded organisations followed the same path with love and compassion.

All of us can become a beacon of Hope, love, and acceptance in our own little ways to children with special needs.

- You can be a friend of a person with special needs; it costs nothing to give a smile and look at them with respect and acceptance.

- Volunteer your time and skills at special schools. Many special schools welcome volunteers to assist with various activities such as tutoring, organising events or providing administrative support.
- Address prejudice in the communities/society. If you hear people making derogatory comments about people with disabilities, intentionally or not, you should speak up.
- Raise or donate money. Fundraising is very helpful. Contribute financial support or donate resources to special schools. This includes funding for adaptive equipment, educational materials, expenses for therapy needs, or extracurricular activities.
- Advocacy: Advocate for inclusive employment practices and work with local businesses to create job opportunities for individuals with disabilities after they leave special schools.
- Purchase and promote the products made by the special Adults in the sheltered workshops.
- Encourage businesses to partner with special schools for vocational training programmes, internships, or job placements for students with disabilities.
- Support and participate in inclusive recreational and sports programmes that allow individuals with disabilities to engage in physical activities and socialise with others.
- Accompany and listen to the parents of children with disabilities to share experiences, resources, and advice. This can create a strong support network for families.

Remember, creating an inclusive society involves fostering a mindset of acceptance, understanding, and collaboration. By actively participating in these ways, we can contribute to the well-being and success of individuals with disabilities in special schools and beyond. Then surely, we will be blessed this Christmas and always!

I conclude with the Beatitude of the Children with Special Needs by Andre Masse:

Blessed are you who take the time to listen to difficult speech, for you help me to know that if I persevere, I can be understood.

Blessed are you who never bid me to “hurry up” and take my tasks from me and do them for me, for I often need time rather than help.

Blessed are you who stand beside me as I enter new and untried ventures, for my failures will be outweighed by the times I surprise myself and you. Blessed are you who asked for my help, for my greatest need is to be needed.

Blessed are you who help us with the graciousness of Christ, for often we need the help we cannot ask for.

Blessed are you who understand that it is difficult for me to put my thoughts into words.

Blessed are you who, with a smile, encourage me to try once more.

Blessed are you who never remind me that today I asked the same question two times.

Blessed are you who respect me and love me as I am, and not like you wish I were.

Sr Bindu Michael aci is the Regional Superior of the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She is the former Principal of Dilkhush Special School.

CHRISTMAS IN THE MISSION TERRITORY OF RAIGAD

Perhaps we remember the date and time that persons were born in our families. We look back and cherish the memories of their coming into our families. We might look at photographs of them when they were children or younger. We might remember their first steps, babbling sounds, their first day at school, etc. Thus, we celebrate the gift of life given to the persons in our families.

This is what we do at Christmas; we **remember** and we **celebrate**. We recall the story of Jesus' birth in a stable in the grace-filled company of Mary and Joseph. We celebrate the gift of life Jesus has brought to us. We are further asked to remember that Christmas is not something that happened in the past. The birth of Christ echoes and ripples through the centuries down to us today. Jesus' birth reminds us that God enters our world, our life and time. Jesus is Emmanuel, God-is-with us. Therefore, His birth is not just a thing of the past, but a story being continued in our spiritual journey with Him. It is about celebrating the presence of Jesus in our hearts and lives today.

Pope John Paul II wrote that "the mystery of Jesus that took place over 2000 years ago must be lived today and every day. The Word of God who found a dwelling

place in and through Mary comes to knock on our hearts this Christmas and every Christmas, this day and every day.”

John presented Jesus to the Greeks as the light-giving creative power of God or the Mind of God in poetic prose. John further summarises his Prologue as to how the Son of God was sent into the world to create history known as ‘Jesus of history’.

Over the centuries, people have experienced God’s divine intervention in a frightening state of despondency. The book of Lamentation paints a sorrowful picture: “The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to the festivals; all her (boarders) are desolate, her (leaders) groan; her young (ones) grieve.” (1:4). Likewise, many of our families, neighbourhoods, towns, cities and nations are in lamentation. During the global COVID-19 pandemic, we experienced the lamentations in close proximity. We are assured of life in abundance (Jn 10:10), because the presence of Jesus is a life-giving presence in our midst. “What has come into being in him was life” (Jn 1:3).

The Word who dwelt with God now dwells with “us”, becoming a human being like us and thus bridging the great chasm between God’s world and our world. John 1:14 declares that the God who once dwelt among them in the Tabernacle and Temple now chooses to dwell among them in the person of Jesus. Today we are standing in awe as to why does our God choose to dwell among us. This is the down to earth and passionate mission of the Word, because the Word by its very nature is reaching out, communicating, dwelling, empowering. The Word is *ad gentes* (sent out to the nations). The *ad gentes* has been inextricably linked to Eurocentric prejudice for long years. Today, the buzz word of the Church “*Missio Inter Gentes*” is renowned for its non-confrontational, dialogical approach to societies with varied cultures, faiths, histories and customs. It is further said that *Missio Inter Gentes* implies “mission” of the people, for the people, with the people, from the people, and among the people. Today there is a clarion call for the relevance of *Missio Inter Gentes* because our societies are emerging as highly multicultural. Such openness to cultural diversity is a missiological imperative.

The Raigad Mission is one of the significant epitomes of the Word becoming flesh in a tribal milieu. The Church-based organisations with a meticulously prepared socio-pastoral Perspective Plan are at work in almost all the blocks of the district to reach out, communicate, dwell on and empower the lost, last and least. The approach, of course is “*Missio Inter Gentes*” - a dialogue in action, fostering hope and endurance among the tribal women, children and men who are caught up in the vicious cycle of illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, etc. The mission of God

impels missionaries to move into the diaspora and simultaneously draw people into a reconciling and restoring relationship with God and the World. The people of other faiths are shared the good news of the Word becoming flesh, while dialoguing with them in action.

Umpteen interventions in empowering and animating the poor and tribal community towards mainstreaming, capacitating and enabling them has manifested the true spirit of missiological experience of Christmas in a rural setting. The Gospel values viz. peace, joy, happiness, forgiveness, reconciliation, etc. prevailing in their families, through the interventions of the Church-based organisations, are some of the indicators of the Incarnation of the Word.

Notwithstanding the abject poverty, overriding social issues, marginalisation, exploitation, landless status, chronic unemployment, lack of sustainable livelihood, domestic violence, child marriages, low literacy rate etc., the tribal community is partnering with the Church-based organisations, popularly known as Raigad Janhit Manch (RJM), to battle against all these odds to come out victorious. The mission approach in empowering the tribals is participatory, inclusive and rights-based, in understanding the life experiences and challenges the poor and tribal communities face from day to day .

The mission calls followers of Christ to join in the *Missio Dei* translated as “mission of God”. The Christmas celebration in a rural area of the Bombay Archdiocesan mission territory, Raigad, is unique and experiential. The spiritual powerhouse of each individual who bears the torch of *Missio Dei*, needs passion for mission, both in geographic and existential mission territories. While empowering and enabling the poor and tribal community viz. promoting sustainable livelihood to curb distressed migration and environment, promotion of formal and non-formal education, enhancing land and food security rights, promotion of social advocacy for good governance, enabling self-reliance and capacity building, the mysteries of Christmas become meaningful and life-giving. In each strategy for the holistic empowerment of the people, the Word incarnates and communicates with the underprivileged through altruistic interventions of the Church. Though the partners in the empowerment process hail from different religions, the goal is to make Christmas not just an event or celebration, but a feast of hope, because at Christmas, life comes to us. “Hope is gifted to us and this hope will save us” (Rom. 8:24). Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year!

Fr Richard Quadros SVD is the Director, Sarva
Vikas Deep, Mangaon, Raigad.

A VIBRANT INTER-FAITH CELEBRATION OF UNITY AMIDST DIVERSITY

This year, Sacred Heart Parish (Santa Cruz West) took up the call of the Synod to build an inclusive Church by lighting up new paths of inter-faith bonding during the 'Festival of Lights'. Practical ways of reaching out to people of all faiths during Diwali were discussed both at the PPC and Steering Committee meetings.

Many creative ideas emerged. Plans were made and executed with the joint collaboration of Coordinators and Animators. Here we share the rich experience of St Joseph's Community (No. 19). The experience of inter-faith relationships was not new for this Community. The celebration of Independence Day this year had already been an exciting inter-faith event for them. When invited to celebrate Diwali together as one neighbourhood community, the response was reassuring.

The means chosen by this community to express the joy of the Diwali was through an inter-building Rangoli competition. Rangoli making has long been an integral part of Diwali celebrations, symbolizing positivity and harmony. Recognising the unifying potential of this tradition, the residents of Convent Avenue and St Joseph's Avenue that make up Community 19 came together for a unique celebration. People of all faiths were asked to join in, and they wholeheartedly did so in an Inter-building Rangoli competition on November 10, 2023. The focus wasn't on competitiveness, but camaraderie, fostering a sense of joy and love in the air.

The enthusiasm and excitement were palpable, and what an evening it turned out to be! Residents of all ages collaborated to create intricate Rangoli designs. The mix of amateurs and perfectionists showcased the power of teamwork, proving that even complex tasks can be accomplished when we work together unitedly as a team.

As the judges made their rounds, the Community's spontaneous outpouring was a delight to witness. Residents from different backgrounds and cultures greeted each other with great zeal and enthusiasm and complimented one another. The competition not only brought out the creative skills and teamwork, besides facilitating the building of strong neighbourly bonds among communities.

The 'Rangoli walk' - a highlight of the event - saw neighbours strolling into each other's buildings, encouraging and appreciating the creative skills displayed. The concept of eco-friendly Rangoli presentations resonated strongly with the judges, adding a sustainable touch to the celebration.

In line with the principles of Synodality, the Rangoli competition raised awareness of multicultural values and traditions, contributing to the creation of an inclusive society. The celebration was an opportunity to learn and share with one another, bringing families in the building together and bridging the gap between members of all faiths.

The beautiful community spirit witnessed that day emerged as the biggest winner which will be treasured by all. May the joy experienced during this special celebration take root in our hearts, propelling us towards a united and peaceful human community at all times.

Karl Figueredo (Animator, Community 19),
with inputs from Sr Manisha Gonsalves rscj

SCCs IN ACTION

IF WE WORK AT IT, IT WORKS!!

MT CARMEL CHURCH, BANDRA

1 An evening of potluck

Our Lady of Lourdes Community in the parish of Mt Carmel, Bandra celebrated Thanksgiving Day with Rosary and a potluck celebration on October 21. It was well attended by the cluster families, making it a very close-knit evening. What was unique is that even the house-help and domestics were part of the celebration. The hands that prepared the meal also partook of the meal, adding an element of inclusivity.

Our Lady of Lourdes community also organised free rides for the children from their community during Bandra Fair. They organised an Advent wreath prayer service in their community to welcome the new liturgical year. This community is home to St John the Baptist Oratory, and plan to organise devotions to their favourite saint.



2 The community that prays together stays together

The Crusader Community of Mt Carmel parish, Bandra gathered together to pray the Holy Rosary on the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary on October 7, 2023. The Rosary was dedicated to pray for peace in our homes, our nation and the world. What followed was a great fellowship with hot coffee, channa, chutney sandwiches and cake. It concluded with a fun-filled game of housie with lots of exciting prizes.

The Crusader community is in close proximity to the Church, and is active when it comes to popular piety. They are also fortunate to have St Anthony's Home for the aged as a part of their community. Several visits and activities are organised in its premises. Events like these bring families together and create a feeling of belongingness and love.



SCCs IN ACTION

OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL SUCCOUR CHURCH, CHEMBUR

SCC Activities from June to November



In the month of June, felicitated SSC & HSC students.



Visited grandparents & elderly with youth in 20 SCCs



Independence Day celebration



Nativity of Mother Mary & Girl Child Day



Rite of Presentation of the Lord's prayer was conducted in SCCs



Sunday School celebrated Psalms Fest.



Wedding Anniversary Mass every last Sunday of the month by the Family Cell



Youth Day celebrated in the parish.



On All Souls Day, laying of flowers was done on unattended graves.



On Nov. 12, Children's Day was organised by 19 SCCs by organising food & games stalls; 83 children participated in folk dance.



Mass for homebound celebrated in SCC

..... SCCs IN ACTION

OUR LADY OF FATIMA CHURCH, MAJIWADA

Alone, we can do so little; TOGETHER, we can do so much...

The Core Team (PPC Member, Coordinator & Animators) of St Anthony's Community visited our Community members' homes, along with our Spiritual Director, Sr Shubha from Seva Sadan, Thane in Aug.-Sept. 2023.

60 families were visited with utmost zeal and enthusiasm, and the joy of a personal interaction with individual families knew no bounds.

Sr Shubha, always zealous and supportive, undoubtedly added a spiritual touch with her physical and emotional presence. We also had the privilege of having Superior General, Sr Priya, from the Society of Helpers of Mary visit members' homes for a day; her warm and gentle charisma left sweet memories.

Great opportunities to help others come seldom, but SMALL ones surround us everyday. Roshvin Lasrado (age 10 years) from our community never failed to make his presence felt, as he voluntarily accompanied the Team on most visits, proving that 'inside every child is a rainbow waiting to shine'.

We began our Community Rosary from October 1-31. Mother Mary's statue was brought from Seva Sadan, Thane; the daily Rosary was recited in members' homes, with Mother Mary visiting a new home daily. Our joy knew no bounds, as we mingled with one another every day, getting to know more about each other in the presence of our Blessed Mother.



From Mary, we learn to surrender to God's will in all things. From Mary, we learn to trust even when all hope seems gone. From Mary, we learn to love Christ her Son. From Mary, we experienced a boundless sense of community spirit throughout the month of October.

We returned Mother Mary's statue back to Seva Sadan, Thane on November 1, 2023. We thank all the Sisters at Seva Sadan for lending us Mother Mary's statue.

Dear Mother Mary, show us the right and shining way. In the end, your Immaculate heart will triumph in our community always, we pray.

We are a happy family, built on trust, full of fun, praying together and believing in each other, choosing the right, together forever.

Lynn Dominic Braganza
Coordinator, St Anthony's Community



OUR LADY OF LOURDES CHURCH, ORLEM

Orlem shifts from SCCs to SHCs

It was at the Western Region SCC Convention at Vasai in October 2019, that the transition from SCC to SHC was given focus, with the theme “SCCs to share and witness faith”. Then came the pandemic where we lived in isolation, but SCCs reached out in novel ways to those affected, doing our bit to make life a little easier for all.

SCCs in our parish are now back to making a difference to the parish – with spiritual and outreach activities - and have also transitioned to Small Human Communities. Some of the SCCs, keeping in mind the SHC concept, organised events where 'all' from the sector were invited.



A Family Fiesta organised by an SCC saw families of all faiths gather together for a fun evening. A prayer dance by children of all faiths, followed by games and a fashion show, among other items, made for an enjoyable evening

Another SCC celebrated the invaluable contribution of teachers in making this world a better place. The SCC put together an evening of fun and entertainment for about 40 teachers of all faiths on September 10, 2023. The programme began with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp, followed by a prayer and an enlightening talk by one of the teachers present.

Children's Day in the SCCs was celebrated with children of different faiths, in unity and diversity, creating a tapestry of joy and understanding. Together, they shared laughter, embraced differences, and built bridges of friendship. This celebration echoed the spirit of togetherness, fostering a future where harmony prevails.





Sessions on Redevelopment awareness, Financial awareness and Cooperative Society awareness were organised by another SCC, which saw a large attendance from all sections. Topics covered included Wills, Gift deed, Redevelopment etc. among others.

Much is being done by SCCs in parishes, but much more can be done to include people of all faiths, whether it's small family get-togethers or organising health camps, and also probably help lead the way in the local socio-civic field.

Michelle Pinto

(Parish SCC Coordinator,
Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Orlem)

..... SCCs IN ACTION

OUR LADY OF IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH, BORIVLI

Maryland 2 Sector organised a Drawing Competition and Storytelling puppet show for children on November 14.



1. Children's day programme –November 14, 2023

- PPCs – Mr. Romano Fernandes, Ms. Olivia Verdes

Children's Day was celebrated on Nov. 14 at Samaj Kalyan Kendra (YMCA), IC Colony, along with children adopted by SVP families and children from sectors New Link Road NLR 2, NLR 3 & NLR 7. Over 50 children participated, danced, and enjoyed. It was a pleasure seeing the children come together, irrespective of their faith, with no prejudice, no animosity, no jealousy, but pure joy and innocence in their hearts. There is a lot for us as adults to learn from these children and make our world a better place. Thanks to a great team effort of both NLR 2 & 3

animators, ably supported by generous donors who made this day possible for these little children. Each and every one had a role to play, knew their responsibility, and delivered. Teamwork and effective collaboration always excels.



2. SCC Reflection Paper with Youth – November 2023

- Parish – IC Church Borivali
- Sector – Navagaon 2
- PPCs – Ms. Shalini Dsouza
- Youth Animator - Anthony Joseph

We conducted the SCC reflection paper with the youth during their monthly meeting and had a fruitful discussion on the questions below.

What do you take home from here?

Which of the 7 qualities you would like to focus upon?

They had fun doing the crossword; some of them had lost touch with such activities. Choosing a quality to contribute better to Church activities; the following four were their favourite qualities:

1. Accountable
2. Respectful
3. Empathetic
4. Selfless



ST. JOSEPH PARISH, GOKULDHAM

Strolling Down Memory Lane at St Joseph Parish Family Day

On November 19, 2023, St Joseph Convent Quadrangle came alive with vibrant hues and nostalgic melodies during the annual Parish Family Day – Kutumb Utsav. It is one of the biggest and most-awaited events of the year. The theme this year was 'Retro,' and the event was a joyous celebration of community spirit, togetherness and a trip down memory lane.

The festivities kicked off with a procession led by the parish youth leaders – Manuel Pasi and Nisha Monis, proudly bearing the parish flag. The Chief Guest, Sr Sophia D’Souza, the former superior of St Joseph Convent and the present Administrator of Assisi Bhavan was escorted by Fr Denzil, priest-in-charge and Fr Lonappan. Our Guest of Honour was Bishop Vincent Aind, the Bishop of Bagdogra and the Chairman of the CCBI Commission for Doctrine and Theology.

This year, Kutumb Utsav coincided with the World Day of the Poor, giving us the opportunity to invite less fortunate families of other faiths, one from each of our ten SCCs. These families were our guests for the evening and they were a part of the parade. They were seated in reserved seats to make them feel really welcome.

To begin, we invoked the Lord’s divine presence through the solemn lighting of the lamp, followed by a graceful prayer dance performed by the sisters and the girls of the convent, setting a spiritual backdrop for the day's festivities.

What followed was a mesmerising showcase of talent, as eight SCCs presented retro-themed programmes inspired by classic Bollywood numbers. From toddlers to senior citizens, participants of all ages shared the stage, fostering a sense of warmth and bonding. Different SCCs got together rehearsing for days to put up entertaining performances - skits, dances and songs all covering various shades of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The young and the young at heart relived memories of Shammi Kapoor, Mumtaz, Helen, Rajesh Khanna, Kishore Kumar and many other icons of yesteryears through the lively performances. The highlight was the final presentation by the vibrant, active and talented youth of our parish



in the form of a dance to a medley of songs.

The comperes - Polita D'Souza and Ronald Fonseca - held the show together with interesting repartees and crisp comments, while ensuring a smooth and seamless flow of events.

There were exciting and interactive spot prizes, where participants' knowledge was tested with interesting audio-visual questions related to the retro era. Laughter and cheers echoed through the crowd, as participants showcased their wit and wisdom on stage. To add an extra layer of excitement, there were lucky draws with huge bumper prizes creating a buzz of anticipation and suspense among the crowd.

The specially invited guest families were felicitated on the stage and given gift hampers of groceries and other essential items, emphasising the parish's commitment to supporting and caring for those in need.

The Chief Guest, Sr Sophia D'Souza, gave an apt and inspiring talk on family life, how it nourishes and strengthens us to face the challenges of life. Fr Denzil gave the vote of thanks, thanking each member of the Organising Team and all those who made the Kutumb Utsav a huge success. The event closed with the Lord's Prayer.

The *Kutumb Utsav* was more than just an event; it was a celebration of families, inclusiveness and the enduring spirit of togetherness. As the echoes of retro melodies lingered in the air, the event left an indelible mark on the hearts of all who attended, fostering memories that will be cherished for years to come.



OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY CHURCH, DOCKYARD ROAD

- On the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, members of the Zone 2-6 gathered at the cross in their community and prayed the Rosary together.
- Our Lady's visit to the communities – Zone 1,2,3,4,5,6 had the privilege to receive our Lady from the church during the respective days of the novena.
- The community of Zone 1 met every Friday in November to recite the Rosary at the four crosses in the zone. The 10 a.m. Mass on Sunday, November 26 (Feast of Christ the King) was offered for the good health of the community members of Zone 1, followed by adoration and Holy Hour.
- Zone 3 Community offers Intercessions every third Thursday of the month, after the 7 p.m. Mass in the chapel and prays for the needy members of the community (sick, jobless, students appearing for exams, etc).
- Zone 6 community started a Prayer Tower on October 13 to pray for intentions of the members of the Zone, the Parish, and the world at large. During their home visits, the animators became aware that many seniors wanted to be of service to the parish, but in a passive way. Fr Shavito suggested that the best way of service was for these members to pray for the needs of the community, and suggested that we start a prayer tower. When we requested for volunteers, we were happy and surprised to have both young and elderly parishioners ready to be committed members of the Prayer Tower. The intentions received from the community are clubbed and posted to the Prayer Tower every Friday. The members pray for the intentions in their daily personal prayers throughout



the week. May God bless us and help us stay united through this spiritual and prayerful experience.

- Community Breakfast - All the senior ladies of our community organised and prepared a sumptuous breakfast for the entire community. It was a good way to get to know the new families of our zone. New members introduced themselves and were welcomed to our zone. Everyone enjoyed the home-made breakfast. Specially designed aprons were stitched by one of our community members.



Blessed Sacrament Marathon - 27 families visited the Blessed Sacrament, each for half an hour to pray, read the Bible or just spend some time before the Lord.

Intentions were prepared in advance. Each of the families that attended was given a small token. The entire zone gathered for the closing. Each was asked to say a prayer. The final blessing was given by Fr Shavito.



2 August: The Blessed Sacrament Fathers celebrated the feast of their founder, St. Peter Julian Eymard at their Provincial House in Matharpacady Village. The mass was celebrated by Bishop Allwyn D'silva and attended by several residents of the village and nearby areas.



12 August: Zone 6 conducted a chain adoration for their community members at the Blessed sacrament chapel in the village. The 12 hour adoration from 9am to 9pm saw 27 families coming in every 30 minutes to meditate and worship before the blessed sacrament.

ST MICHAEL CHURCH, MAHIM

The World Day of the Poor was initiated in 2017 by Pope Francis, and has been celebrated annually on the third Sunday in November ever since. Marking this day on Nov. 19, the parish of St Michael, Mahim, invited street children from the communities in the parish for a programme. 90 children participated.

Fr Lancy, our Parish Priest, began a fun-filled afternoon session seeking blessings from the Almighty. The team organised some games and gave the children the opportunity to have some fun and celebrate themselves! Many parishioners came and helped in the preparation of an amazing lunch which was relished by all the children. At the end of an amazing afternoon, the kids were presented with a towel as a gift, along with some delicious samosas and ice cream to beat the heat. Sometimes a little innocent smile can leave an everlasting mark on your heart, and it becomes an interesting part of a chapter in your life. Every child who attended the programme left with a smile that will stay with us.

Vacation Bible Joy, also known as VBJ, was a short three-day programme organised by the Sunday School at Saint Michael Church, Mahim for the children of the parish in the month of November, during the Diwali vacation. It was a very enjoyable experience where we spent our time learning more about Jesus and how we can love Him more and more in the Sacraments.

At the beginning of the VBJ, every student was given a badge - yellow, green, blue, purple. Each day began with assembly and cheerful action songs, after which we went to our classes, and our teachers taught us about the Sacraments and answered our doubts and queries. We also learnt about the life of blessed Carlo Acutis, who was the patron of VBJ this year.

We were served snacks, and also played some exciting games, quizzes and crossword puzzles; the winners were given prizes. On the third day, we had the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where we had the opportunity to make a good confession.

I would like to express my gratitude to our Parish Priest, Fr Lancy Bernard Pinto, all my teachers and everyone who contributed to this programme for all their dedication and hard work, so that they could make this programme a wonderful experience for all of us.

Trufa Almacs

OUR LADY OF MERCY CHURCH, POKHRAN

MISSION SUNDAY 2023

Keeping in mind the theme for Mission Sunday 2023 - “Hearts on fire , feet on the move” - our parish organised an awareness session on the various Cells and Associations in the parish and the work done by them.

An exhibition was arranged in the church auditorium; 13 Cells/Associations participated, including the Family Cell, Health Cell, Bombay Catholic Sabha, Sunday School catechists, SCCs, Lectors, Eucharistic Ministry, Legion of Mary. Each Cell/Association displayed its Mission statement and photos of their work. The parishioners visited the stalls and interacted with the members to know more about the work done. Each Cell prepared a short Audio-Visual which was displayed on the large screen.

The overall response was good and the objective of creating awareness of these cells was achieved. New registrations were received from those who wanted to join the group of their interest.

We also had Teresa Bhavin, an external guest speaker to motivate the Coordinators, animators and the heads of all Cells and Associations in their mission. The focus was on the Spirit of Mission as seen by the cells and associations in the ministry. The hour-long session was very interactive and appreciated by all participants. We had 70 attendees which included the Coordinators, animators and members of various Cells and Associations.

The choir helped animate the programme with hymns, action songs and a jingle on the theme “Hearts on fire, feet on the move.”



ST ANDREW CHURCH, UTTAN-CHOWK

Train the youth today... to be leaders of tomorrow!

The purpose of celebrating 'Youth Day' at the Parish level is to encourage today's youth to move ahead in life, and to make them aware of their responsibilities towards their parish. The future of any parish largely depends on the youth, because the youth play a major role in shaping and functioning of that parish. The mission of the Youth Ministry therefore is vital for the formation and organisation of the youth, especially when it comes to the celebration of certain events in the parish, organising retreats, arranging Mission trips etc. to realise their full potential and empower them to live as disciples of Jesus, participate in Church activities, and thus prepare themselves as future Parish Leaders.

Youth Day was organised on October 1, 2023, by the Youth group of St Andrew Church, Chowk. The preparation for this day had begun a month earlier. I could see the enthusiasm and zeal of this group. Since most of them are students and a few are working, they could come together to pool in their ideas only in the evening, so as to prepare for this great day. I was amazed as they divided themselves into smaller groups, with each group taking up a specific responsibility. One group collected the names of participating youth, the second collected funds, the third put up a small skit, the fourth did the shopping, the fifth conducted the games.

The Youth Day dawned on October 1, 2023. The theme for this day was "With the strength of Christ, I can do everything." The registration of names was followed by breakfast. The Dean of Bhayander deanery, Fr Edward Jacinto, celebrated the holy Eucharist. In his sermon, he stressed the importance of youth as well the role of youth in their respective parishes. He was happy and appreciated the youth numbering about 100, including the Confirmation students.

After the Holy Eucharist, all the youth were led to St Andrew School hall. The programme began with a welcome dance performed by the Confirmation group girls. The lighting of the lamp took place at the hands of our Parish Priest, Fr Gonsalo, Fr Francis, Sr Veronica, Sr Vimal, Deacon John, Miss Ivana (Youth leader) and the resource person, Fr Ashley Bhanga. During his session, he emphasised the importance of life and education. He spoke mainly on three issues, namely, education, unity and faith.

His talk served as a great eye-opener to the parish youth, because parishioners in general spend a lot of money on celebration of marriage and other rituals

connected with it, including garments and costly jewellery. Less importance is given to the higher education of children, as money is spent on unnecessary things and thus wasted. Fr. Ashley emphasised on getting more and more education and knowledge in order to change the lives of Chowk parishioners for their own good. The lunch menu consisted of biryani, fish fry and salad. After lunch, the Youth group members performed a skit on the Ten Commandments, highlighting their values in the lives of youth. The rest of the day was spent in Bible quiz, games, dances, prize distribution. The youth prepared a glass frame with multi-coloured thumb impressions, thus creating a beautiful face of Jesus.

Finally, the day ended with an encouraging message by Sr Veronica Tuscano, who congratulated the Parish Youth Group which had worked very hard to make the Youth Day a great success.

A final hymn was sung to express gratitude to God for His great and wonderful presence throughout the day.

Reported by Sr Veronica Tuscano SHM



ST PIUS X CHURCH, MULUND

We started our journey with a community get-together jointly celebrated with the feast of the

Assumption of our Lady on August 15. We welcomed 120 families to join in fellowship, followed by

games, fun spot prizes, and food. Our Parish Priest, Fr George Athaide, and our Spiritual Director, Fr Gavin, graced the occasion with their presence. Handmade quilled cards were presented to the priests and Sr Sanila. These customised cards were presented by a few senior members of the families. The gathering was a big success as all the families got to know each other, and they had a good time.

The Rosary month of October was celebrated by reciting the Rosary every day with about 20-25 community members joining. The last day of the month concluded with fellowship and dinner followed by gifting our community members who attended the Rosary regularly.

Along with our community leader, three of our animators completed the two-day training on “Skills for SCC Animators” at Goregaon. ‘Seven Step Method of Gospel Sharing’ was a very informative session, and a few of our animators are eager to start this in our cluster meeting.

Lastly, our Spiritual Guide, Fr Gavin, visited all the families of our community in a span of

three days. During his visits, he spent some quality time with families and blessed their homes. We

are grateful to Fr. Gavin for visiting our homes with his valuable time and presence.

Clara Almeida
Community L Animator



ST SEBASTIAN CHURCH, MAROULI

“Ride to Bethlehem” - a Community-wise Christmas Carol Singing Competition was organised at St. Sebastian Church, Marouli, Chembur on December 17, 2023 in the morning after the 8:30 a.m. Mass. The preparation for this event began from the first Sunday in Advent where ‘Carol games fiesta’ was organised after the 8:30 a.m. Mass for all adults. The prizes were given on December 17, the main event day. On the second Sunday of Advent, we had a costume parade where Sunday School children dressed up as Christmas characters when they came for Mass. They too received gifts on December 17. On the third Sunday of Advent, we rejoiced with the theme of Gaudete Sunday, where we had Bishop Barthol Barretto as the main celebrant. Bp Barthol blessed the newly painted statues of saints and also the Grotto of our Lady. He was the Chief Guest at our Carol singing competition. Immediately after the Mass, Fr. Jude Rodrigues, our Parish Priest organised a sumptuous breakfast for all the participants as well as the audience. Twenty-two areas of the parish were divided into six groups that took part in this competition. Each group of thirty consisted of men, women, children and senior citizens who sang heart-warming melodies. Carols were sung in English, Marathi, Hindi and Tamil, along with enactment depicting the nativity scene, creative tableaux, as well as the Manipur violence. Performers were dressed in Christmas colours of red and green and in the traditional costumes of lugras, sarees and Keralite sarees. We saw the use of keyboard, acoustic guitars, electric guitars, saxophone, trumpets and Cajon. They were judged on the basis of presentation, pitch, voices, creativity, rhythm and costume. All the six groups received prizes. The first three groups also received a trophy each. We thank Bishop Barthol for making time and coming to our parish as we move towards Christmas by singing carols. Our thanks to Fr. Jude Rodrigues, Fr. Robin Kinny and all the Parish Pastoral Council members who worked to make this day a memorable event in the parish of St Sebastian, Marouli, Chembur.

Francis D’Souza
Marouli B SCC

ST JOSEPH CHURCH, MIRA ROAD

Small Christian Communities - Pilgrims of Hope

In the Coronavirus pandemic period, the people had the first-hand experience of not only the tragedy of dying alone, but also the uncertainty and fleetingness of existence, and in doing so, has changed our very way of life. Together with all our brothers and sisters around the world, the Church endured those hardships and limitations. Our churches remained closed, as did our schools, factories, offices, shops, and venues for recreation. All of us saw certain freedoms curtailed, while the pandemic generated feelings not only of grief, but also, at times, of doubt, fear and disorientation. However, the world has fought back and has returned to its usual pattern of personal relationships and social life. For a full return to normalcy, the Church must grow in solidarity, so that our neighbours most in need will not be neglected. Pope Francis desires that we “fan the flame of hope that has been given us, and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision.”

With the announcement of the Jubilee Year 2025, with the motto of “Pilgrims of Hope”, Pope Francis sees the world as capable of recovering a sense of universal fraternity that refuses to turn a blind eye to the tragedy of rampant poverty that prevents millions of men, women, young people and children from living in a manner worthy of their human dignity. Nothing could better illustrate the enormous attractiveness of Small Christian Communities than the Christian fraternity and solidarity on which they are founded. It testifies that Jesus lives in the community of His followers, our SCCs led by committed Christians, the flame of faith alive so that it shines forth brightly.

The Year 2024 is the Silver Jubilee year of the dedication of St Joseph Parish, Mira Road, Thane. The Parish Community drew together a new Vision statement - “Connecting People, to God, to People and to Outreach”, and a new mission statement - “To Live, To Love and To Serve in the name of Jesus Christ”. The parish also decided to reflect on the six mysteries of the Birth of the Saviour (Five Joyful Mysteries and the Epiphany). The PPC Leaders with the help of their communities have collaborated and made six cribs depicting the six mysteries of the Nativity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The First Crib, on the Annunciation, reminds us of the profound significance of bringing good news. Like the Angel Gabriel spoke to Mary, the Christian

Community is called to be harbingers of the good news. Much like the angel's assurance to Mary, "Do not be afraid", we are called to bring Hope to our brothers and sisters. The Crib also highlights the annunciation to Joseph. Joseph received the good news and found peace in that message. As a Christian community, amidst a plethora of social media and gadgets, we are called to ponder whether we are truly connected to God.

The next Crib, on the Visitation, shows Mary visiting Elizabeth. While making the Crib, many people from the various communities who joined together met people they did not know before and got to know each other better, finding togetherness, love, laughter, happiness and oneness. The Crib asks the Christian community to focus on the poor, sick and the oppressed just as Mother Mary did. We need to reach out to every needy person not only during this Christmas season, but always. Like Mother Mary's visit to Elizabeth brought overwhelming joy, we also must be harbingers of joy to one and all. In the modern world, we are connected to people who are far away, but distant from our own families and neighbours; we are called to visit and rediscover our relationships.

The third Crib, on the Nativity, depicts the connection between Jesus' birth and humanity. Just like the Crib brought the communities together, Jesus gathers us together. He invites us to get connected to Him. The Vision and Mission statement of the parish are represented here, We connect people to God, we connect people, and we connect people to outreach. Each figure in the crib carries a symbolic meaning, and the act of assembling the crib is a tribute to the birth of Jesus. Am I attracted to Jesus as He calls out to me, or am I too busy with my routine life?

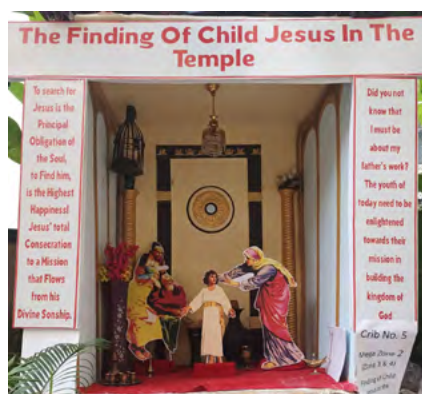
The next crib on the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple points to a significant event in the Christian faith, and it holds great relevance in current times. The crib holds deep symbolism and meaning. The mountains represent the strength and stability of God, while the sky and the image of the glory of God with angels and the Holy Spirit depict the divine presence and the heavenly realm. The Temple symbolises the sacred space where Simeon receives Jesus, fulfilling the prophecy and recognising Him as the long-awaited Messiah. The waterfall from the mountains represents the living water that Jesus offers to every believer. The Crib incorporates the corporal works of mercy, such as caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, and visiting the imprisoned. It emphasises the importance of compassion and service to others, as taught by Jesus. The crib serves as a powerful reminder of the significance of recognising Jesus as the light of the world and embracing His teachings of love, compassion, and service. It serves as a powerful visual reminder

of the divine presence in our lives, and calls us to live out the teachings of Jesus in our actions and interactions with others.

The fifth Crib, on the Finding of Jesus in the Temple, portrays Jesus in the Temple seated among the scholars, listening to them and asking them smart questions, which left everyone amazed by His intelligence. This mystery tells us that Jesus was aware of His identity as the Son of God, yet He obeyed His parents and was responsible towards them and others as a human being. His parents thought that He was lost, but He was where He was meant to be, in the Temple. In our communities, we have youth and adults who are lost to wasteful addictions – social media, drugs, alcohol, porn, etc. The Crib reminds us of our responsibility to lead these lost people to the Church, to Jesus, so that they can also find themselves.

The final crib portrays the Epiphany of the Lord to the three wise men. The crib symbolises the arduous journey of the three wise men guided by the star. When they encountered the Lord, they poured out to Him the choicest gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. The Crib asks us to set out on a journey to meet Christ. It calls us to halt, Be Still and encounter the Lord. The Crib asks us if we are following the true Star - Jesus, or if we are running behind the wrong stars. Are we, like Herod, obsessed about ourselves or are we willing to humble ourselves to meet the Saviour of the World?

These portrayals of the coming of the Saviour make us and our Small Christian Communities pilgrims of hope, bringing light to those who live in darkness, wisdom to those who live in ignorance, and love and forgiveness to those who live in hurt and hatred. May we pilgrims journey together in synodality to meet our Saviour Jesus this Christmas.



Fr Regan OCD

ST VINCENT DE PAUL CHURCH, KHAR

It is rightly said that living a life of love is an authentic living of Christian faith and can bring about society transformation, and so the SCCs of St. Vincent De Paul Church, Khar set about various activities in their communities.

On Parents' Day, the Sunday School children made cards for their parents and grandparents. Our children also visited the aged and homebound and spent quality time to let them know that we think and care for them too.

The Nativity of Our Lady was celebrated by putting up various skits, dances, PowerPoint based on the girl child by our Sunday School children. Choirs and lectors joined in the Nativity of our Mother of the Mount at the Basilica. During the Diwali Vacation, our parishioners went on a walking pilgrimage to Mount Mary and joined in the Eucharistic celebration with the parishioners of St Joseph, Juhu.

Members of the Care for Creation group participated at the Deanery level in the beach clean-up, collection of waste plastic, old clothes and shoes drive, planting of fruit and vegetable plants and distribution of water aerators; the children are awarded a "Green warrior" certificate. Awareness of Shroud Burial is created by way of a sign-up drive for which 242 signatures are received.

On Teachers Day, we thanked our teachers by visiting them with flowers, cards and a token of appreciation for making us what we are. We showed our love and care for children of different communities by taking them for an outing, and having drawing competition, games, snacks and gifts.

Rosaries, Christ the King, Holy Hour and prayer services for the FHC and Confirmands are well conducted at all Crosses, homes and in church on weekdays and first Fridays of the month respectively by our SCCs. We also conduct various training cum interaction in and outdoor, by our Steering Committee to enhance the working of our SCCs.

The SVP provides medical and cash aid, ration supplies, 'Share a meal' and Hampers to deserving families of our parish.

We must support one another by living the values that the Lord Jesus taught us.

Antoniette Pinero
Parish SCC Coordinator

HOLY MAGI CHURCH, GORAI

जागतिक गरिबांचा तिवस

"आकाशातील प्रत्येक काळया ढगाला चंदेरी झळक असते". ददनांक 30 नोव्हेंबर 2023 रोजी होली मॅगी चर्च, गोरई येथे जागदतक गररबांचा ददवस साजरा करण्यात आला. या कायचक्रमाची सुरुवात फादर स्टीवन दकका, सहाय्यक धमचगुरु, यांच्या प्राथचनेने झाली. तदनंतर फादरांनी यांनी सवांचे सहर्च स्वागत के ले. दवशेर् म्हणजे स्नेहसदन मधील मुली, ददल खुश होस्टेलची मुले, म टफोटच आश्रमात राहणारी मुले आदण दव्हन्सेंट डी प ल संस्थेची दत्तक कु टुंबे अश्या १७० सभासदांनी या कायचक्रमात आपला सहभाग

दशचदवला. स्वागता नंतर दसस्टर दक्रस्टल यांनी कायचक्रमाचे प्रास्तादवक के ले. त्यांनी सांदगतले की हा जागदतक गररबांचा ददवस पोप फ्रादन्सस यांनी खास तुमच्यासाठी घोदर्ट के लेला ददवस आहे आदण म्हणून ह्या ददवसाचे औदचत्य साधून आपणास आमंदित के ले गेले आहे. आयोजत के लेल्या खेळ,

गाणी व नृत्याद्वारे आजच्या ददवसाचा आनंद लुटण्यास दसस्टरांनी सवांना आमंदित के ले. अश्या प्रकारे कायचक्रमाची रूपेर् मांडून दसस्टर दक्रस्टल यांनी आपले प्रास्तादवक आवरले. श्रीमती मॅगी दकनी व सवच स्वयंसेवक यांनी मुलांसाठी bombing the city, musical chair हे खेळ घेतले तर दत्तक कु टुंबांसाठी passing the parcel हा खेळ घेतला. त्याच बरोबर अनेक मुलांनी स्वतःहून उत्स्फूर्तचपणे गाणी गायली. या कायचक्रमासाठी दतन्ही क न्हेन्टच्या दसस्टराच व ब्रदर जोसेफ हजर हजर होते.

या कायचक्रमास दतन्ही क न्हेन्टच्या दसस्टराच, संत दव्हन्सेंट डी प ल संस्थेचे सभासद, चर्च स्टाफ, दलजन ऑफ मेरीचे सभासद, सवोदय समाज कें द्राचे स्टाफ ह्या सवांनी मदत के ली. दसस्टर वेर दनका ह्यांनी जेवणा अगोदरची प्राथचना के ली आदण दसस्टर दसदसदलया ह्यांनी सवांचे आभार मानले. फादर अन्सेलम आदण फादर स्टीवन जयांनी हा संपूणच कायचक्रम घडवून आणला त्यांचे सवांनी आभार मानले. तसेच हा कायचक्रम यशस्वी करण्यासाठी फादर दकका ह्यांनी पॅररश तफे मदतीचा हात देऊन पूणच सहकायच के ले. सभासदांना अल्पोपहार, जेवण आदण भेटवस्तू देऊन देवाचे आभार मानून ह्या कायचक्रमाची सांगता के ली.

गरीब हे मुख्य प्रवाहाचे भाग आहेत व त्यांच्यावर आपले दवशेर् लक्ष आहे हे त्यांना भासवून देणे हेच कायचक्रमाचे उदिष्ट होते जे आमच्यापरीने आम्ही पूणच करू शकलो.

-दसस्टर दक्रस्टल



ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, BANDRA

COMMUNITY L- Our Lady of Assumption

The Community celebrated Aunty Millie's 93rd Birthday. She is one of the most senior member of the Community

COMMUNITY OF - St. Maria Goretti

On the occasion of grandparents day, the children of the community visited the homes of senior citizens, sang for them and handed them handmade cards.

On the occasion of World Day of the Poor a hamper of necessities which included rice, dal, oil, sugar and flour was handed over to the watchmen, gardener, sweepers and rag picker of the area Celebrated the 82nd birthday of Mrs. Vilma with community members. She was fraile as she had just been discharged from the hospital a few days ago. But just seeing everybody around her brought a smile back to her face.

COMMUNITY X - Our Lady of the Mount

During October, Community X decided to take Our Lady of Fatima to the homes of the sick and housebound. Our lady was there to soothe the broken hearted, to heal the sick and to bring hope, joy, love and peace. This gesture brought cheer and smiles to the face of the homebound

COMMUNITY Y - Pope St. John Paul XXIII

On World Day of the Poor, Community Y sponsored a meal for the Angel Express - the children who study on the footpath of the Promenade. They had a snack of vada pav and a juice carton.



ST FRANCIS XAVIER CHURCH, PANVEL

Glorifying Christ our King

We, the Parishioners of St Francis Xavier Church, Panvel, celebrated the Feast of Christ the King this year with all the pomp and splendour it deserved. We began with a Feast Mass in the morning which was followed by Adoration every hour, conducted by the different communities in our parish. The different communities belong to nine different zones in our parish stretching far and wide.

Each community led us in prayer every hour with scriptural readings. They also led us in singing with carefully curated hymns that glorified Christ as our Universal King. After the last SCC concluded its adoration, it was time for us to embark on our procession through the streets of Panvel. We had parishioners holding placards and posters featuring the many miracles and teachings of Christ.

This allowed us to enlighten onlookers on the impact Christ had during His lifetime and in the 2,000 years since He ascended to His heavenly abode. We chose a small route for our procession, but one that allowed us to expose the Blessed Sacrament to a large number of people in Panvel. The route was carefully chosen to allow parishioners to participate, regardless of their age and physical condition.

Everyone participating in the procession was dressed in white to show the people of Panvel the strength in our numbers and give them a sense of our unity. The children of the Sunday School too dressed beautifully in white and carried small flower baskets to adorn the streets in preparation for the Blessed Sacrament to be exposed. Laden with wreaths and wings, they looked every bit the angels they were meant to represent amidst us.

Finally, we had our Priest in Charge, Fr Melroy Fernandes, expose the Blessed Sacrament through our procession route standing atop an open pickup truck. He was accompanied by the Sunday School children and ensured that the Sacrament was visible to all throughout the procession. This allowed every onlooker to witness the power and majesty of the Blessed Sacrament.

We ended the procession with Benediction in our church. This was followed by fellowship and we concluded a beautiful evening, hoping that all who witnessed the display of our faith had been touched, as we are, by Christ our King.

Rallying in Style

On Sunday, June 25, we had our first ever Parish SCC Rally. The aim of the Rally was to bring our SCCs, Cells and Associations together to express their understanding of the Vision and Mission of our Parish.

Our Chief Guest in attendance for the event was Fr Joe D'Mello, priest-in-charge of St Theresa of the Child Jesus Church, Airoli. The morning progressed with different colourful performances from our various communities, interwoven with promotional pieces from different Cells. These promotional pieces were meant to encourage parishioners to join these Cells and actively participate in community activities.

The day ended on a decidedly high note with a musical rendition of our Parish Vision sung by the Choir. Parishioners carrying placards rallied around in the ground floor hall while singing the words of their new Vision in unison.

Sasha A. Dias

Christ The King Feast



Parish SCC Rally



HOLY FAMILY CHURCH, CHAKALA

To commemorate the seventh edition of the World Day of the Poor, Holy Family Church, Chakala invited the underprivileged and the poorest of the poor children of God to its campus on November 19, 2023. The priests, religious sisters, some SCC members and Parish Councillors join the specially invited poorest of the poor for lunch and fellowship.

This act is in response to Pope Francis urging the Church to “go out” to encounter poverty in the many ways in which it manifests itself in today’s world.

The Organising Committee had asked every cluster head of the SCCs to identify the poor from their cluster, irrespective of religion, caste or creed, and invite them for fellowship lunch titled Sneha Bhojan. We invited housemaids, construction workers, rag pickers, underprivileged people living in slums, on the streets, and below the flyovers. We also personally visited areas dominated by the poorest of the poor the previous day to remind them to come the next day for lunch.

A caterer offered to give ready food at cost price without any profit margin. All of us came together in the campus and made salad for lunch as our Shram daan (donation of labour)

Approximately 400 people had lunch. The expenses were borne by the Church, but it was a lesson to each one of us to uplift the poor and the needy in our small capacities as Tobit 4:7 says, ‘Give alms from your possessions. Do not turn your face away from any of the poor, so that God's face will not be turned away from you.’



DEANERY RALLIES

NAVI MUMBAI DEANERY SCC RALLY

Teamwork makes the dream work! When we all come together and work hand in hand, amazing things can happen." – Mattie Stepanek

At the Navi Mumbai Deanery SCC Rally on Sunday, December 10, 2023, a vibrant reunion unfolded with 350+ persons from all twelve parishes, embodying the SCC Mission Statement: "No one in want." This Rally marked a mission journey through SCC towards "No one in want," aligning with our Archdiocese's vision and mission.

The venue, Don Bosco Seawoods, graciously provided by Fr Barnabe, the Rector of Don Bosco, and Fr Akhil, the Administrator, served as the perfect backdrop for this meaningful event.

Each parish proudly marched in with flags in a colourful parade, showcasing their unique spirit. The lighting of the lamp acted as a switch for a shared mission, and the prayer dance fostered a spiritual connection.

Fr Joe, the Deanery SCC Coordinator of Navi Mumbai, in his Welcome speech, greeted Bp Barthol Barretto and Fr Mario D'Souza, the Dean of Navi Mumbai, along with other priests, religious sisters, animators, coordinators, and everyone present, reminding everyone of their collective purpose.

Bishop Barthol congratulated and appreciated Fr Mario D'Souza MSFS, Dean, Fr Joe D'Mello, Deanery SCC Coordinator, all the priests of the Navi Mumbai Deanery, the Religious Women, the Animators and Coordinators for their overwhelming response and participation in their Rally. He motivated them to continue working towards translating the SCC Vision statement: NO ONE IN WANT into reality. Three specific areas were chosen for reflection: Food, Education and Medical assistance. Bp Barthol encouraged the SCC Animators and Coordinators to ensure that no one in the SCCs should go to bed hungry, be deprived of education or die due to lack of money to pay the medical bills. Bp Barthol was confident that the Animators and Coordinators would work towards the realisation of the SCC Vision Statement in their respective SCCs.

Performances by each parish highlighted the uniqueness and greatness of each community, emphasising the significance of SCC in their respective lives. The

Rally wasn't for specific age groups; it embraced everyone—kids, adults, and grandparents, each playing a vital role.

The entire programme, awesomely hosted by Mr Selwyn Santmajor from Airoli parish, was a joyous, collective celebration. The theme, "No one in want," echoed through skits and performances, emphasising SCCs impact in every parish.

A fellowship meal brought everyone together, savouring not just food, but quality time before the conclusion. Recognising the historical moment, each parish received momentos as a formal acknowledgment of their exceptional contributions.

Mrs Felicia Tauro, the Deanery Secretary of SCCs, gracefully concluded the proceedings.

To add a beautiful touch, all joined in singing the SCC RALLY ANTHEM, which added more value to the evening.

The Rally was a huge success, making the first-ever SCC Rally in Navi Mumbai Deanery an unforgettable and memorable event.

Mrs Sunita Sarote
Airoli

SOUTH MUMBAI DEANERY SCC RALLY 2023

On Sunday, December 10, 2023, the South Mumbai Deanery SCC Rally took place at St Stephen's Church, Cumballa Hill. The central theme for the event was "You are the Salt of the Earth and Light of the World."

All the participating parishes came well prepared, each having clearly defined roles. Bishop Dominic Savio Fernandes was the Chief Guest. Fr Tarsicius Fernandes, our Deanery SCC Coordinator and other distinguished clergy members, including Fr Pravin D'Souza, Fr Sachin Lopes, Fr Joshan Rodrigues, Fr Camrello DeMaker, and Fr Anthony D'Souza - our dean, were in attendance. Additionally, religious sisters from various congregations graced the event.

A total of 125 coordinators and animators from ten parishes in the South Mumbai Deanery participated, with registrations efficiently handled by St Anne's Parish, Mazagaon. The evening was hosted by Hugo D'Souza from St Anne's Parish, Mazagaon; his baritone voice added flair to the event.

The Rally commenced at 5:00 p.m. with a Prayer Dance performed by children from Regina Pacis, Gloria Parish. Keith Sequeira (from St Teresa's Church,

Girgaum), serving as the Deanery Lay Coordinator, took charge of leading the Praise & Worship session.

Parishes showcased their creativity with mascots, banners, colour-coded attire, and slogans. A Tribal Dance by Hindi migrants from St Stephen's Church emphasised the importance of integrating migrants into parish life.

A cleverly designed quiz on parishes in the South Mumbai Deanery, composed by Hugo D'Souza, kept the participants engaged. Parishes creatively represented the Statue of Liberty, the Crib scene at Bethlehem, a sewing machine, and the Last Supper.

Holy Name Parish presented a skit on SCCs, illustrating how one can be the Salt of the Earth and Light of the World. Each parish shared its unique SCC activities, fostering a spirit of mutual learning.

The Youth of St Stephen's Church enthralled everyone with community dancing and action songs.

Bishop Dominic Savio commended the participants for their commitment, emphasising the crucial role of SCC Coordinators and animators as the backbone of every parish. Gratitude was extended to St Stephen's Church for the hospitality and delicious snacks.

The evening concluded at 7:30 p.m. with a Vote of Thanks by Ms Rena, DHM, from Our Lady of Dolours parish.

Saviana Phulsunghe
Holy Name Cathedral

अहवाल: "डिनरी पातळीवर लहान ख्रिस्ती मेळावा"

भाईंदर डिनरी मध्ये लहान ख्रिस्ती समुह मेळावा गुरुवार दिनांक ७ डिसेंबर २०२३ रोजी सायंकाळी ५ ते १०.३० वाजेपर्यंत "अवर लेडी ऑफ लुर्डस् चर्च पाली" येथे आयोजित करण्यात आला होता. सदर कार्यक्रमास मुंबई सरधर्मप्रांताचे लहान ख्रिस्ती समुह समन्वयक बिशप बार्थोल बरेटो आणि भाईंदर डिनरीचे डिन फा. एडवर्ड जसिंटो तसेच कार्यक्रमाचे आयोजक स्थानिक प्रमुख धर्मगुरू फा. ट्रेवर फर्नांडीस यांच्यासह इतर १९ धर्मगुरू आणि ४२ सिस्टर्सच्या शुभाशीर्वादाने यशस्वीरित्या संपन्न झाला. सुरुवातीला सहा धर्मग्रामातून लहान ख्रिस्ती समुह मेळाव्याला आलेल्या भाविकांचे बॅन्डच्या तालात संस्कृतीनुसार स्वागत करण्यात आले. तदनंतर प्रमुख अतिथी, मान्यवर धर्मगुरू आणि धर्मभगिनींचे औक्षण व पुष्पवृष्टी करून मुख्य प्रवेशद्वारापासून ते स्टेजपर्यंत प्रार्थनामय नृत्याद्वारे बॅन्डच्या तालासुरात मिरवणुकीने स्वागत करण्यात आले. रंगमंचावर मा. बिशपस्वामी यांच्या शुभहस्ते पवित्र शास्त्राचे पूजन करून सर्व मान्यवरांच्या हस्ते समई दिपप्रज्वलन झाले. सि. छाया यांनी सिनडची प्रार्थना म्हटली. फा. ट्रेवर फर्नांडीस यांनी प्रास्ताविक करून सर्वांचे स्वागतपर अभिनंदन केले. श्री. स्टीफन बोर्जेस, सि. वेलेन्सिया व श्री. नोवेल दालमेत यांनी कार्यक्रमाचे सूत्रसंचलन यशस्वीपणे केले.

कार्यक्रमासाठी परीक्षक म्हणून फा. विल्सन रुमाव व श्री. टोनी निग्रेल यांनी यथायोग्य परीक्षण करून उचित गुणदान देऊन गावपरीवारातील सर्व मूलगामी सेवक / सेविका नेत्यांना विशेष धन्यवाद दिले. लहान ख्रिस्ती समुह मेळाव्याची संकल्पना महत्व, उद्दिष्टे व कार्य जबाबदारी यांचा अहवाल व नाट्य स्वरूपाने सादरीकरण धर्मग्रामाच्या ब्रीदवाक्य घोषणेतून उत्तमरित्या सादरीकरण एकूण ६ धर्मग्रामानी करून प्रेक्षकांची मने जिंकून टाळ्यांच्या गजरात आनंदोत्सव साजरा केला. संत अण्णू चर्च - चौक, लुर्डस् माता चर्च - पाली, दर्या माता चर्च - उत्तन, होली मेजाँय चर्च - गोराई, नित्य सहाय्यक माता चर्च - मनोरी, बेथलेहेम माता चर्च - डोंगरी या सहा धर्मग्रामानी यात सहभागी घेतला होता.

मा. अतिथी व मान्यवरांचा शाल, श्रीफळ, पुष्पगुच्छ व स्मृती चिन्ह देऊन सत्कार करण्यात आला. जमलेल्या सर्व भाविकांसाठी व प्रेक्षकांसाठी पौष्टिक अल्पआहार व सायंकाळच्या स्नेहभोजनाची उत्तम व्यवस्था स्थानिक स्वयंसेवकांनी चोखपणे पार पाडली. कार्यक्रम अतिशय शिस्तबद्ध, शांततामय व आनंदी वातावरणात यशस्वीरित्या पार पाडला. याचे सर्व श्रेय अहोरात्र अथक परिश्रम करणारे माजी उपाध्यक्ष अँथोनी अंद्रात, सध्याचे पाली धर्मग्रामाचे पी.पी.सी मंडळ अध्यक्ष श्री. साविओ पाटील,

सुकाणू समितीचे सदस्य, पालकीय सभासद सदस्य, भोजन समिती महिला व मुलीची सोडॅलिटी, मुलींचे नृत्य शिक्षिका सिसिलिया घर्शी, सहा धर्मग्रामाचे प्रमुख धर्मगुरु व देणगीदार, सर्वप्रकारे आर्थिक सहाय्य करणारे दानशूर यांचे अमुल्य योगदान व सहकार्य सर्व स्वयंसेवकांना कोटी कोटी धन्यवाद. विविध धर्मग्रामातून अनेकांनी लोकगीते सादर करून प्रेक्षकांची करमणूक देखील केली. सि. वेरोणिका व ऑलिव्हिया पाटील यांनी सर्वांचे मनःपूर्वक आभार मानले. शेवटी सर्व विजेत्यांना पारितोषिक चषक देऊन कार्यक्रमाची सांगता झाली.

"अवर लेडी ऑफ लुर्डस् चर्च पाली" यांच्या सौजन्याने

फा. ट्रेवर फर्नांडीस
 प्रमुख धर्मगुरु आणि भाईंदर डिनरी
 मराठी भाषिक लहान ख्रिस्ती समूहाचे
 समन्वयक धर्मगुरु





*Bishop Barthol Barretto
and the ART members wish you a
Happy Christmas
filled with the
blessings of the newborn
Saviour of the world.*

Published by Bp Barthol Barretto & the Archdiocesan Resource Team for SCCs

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