

Mangaloreans Welcome Fr. Richie To Chicago

By Team Mangalorean

Chicago, February 22: Mangalorean Konkani Christian Association graciously welcomed Fr. Richard Vaz to Chicago during their monthly meeting in February.



The Call from his Superior General to leave India and move to the Land of USA came as a big surprise to a person who was so deeply rooted in the lives of the poor, especially the tribals and the dalits. In the true Missionary spirit, he said "YES" to this assignment and moved into the Chicago Province on January 18th 2007. He is appointed to the Mission Office at Techy, Illinois to help develop mission awareness among the Catholic Indian Community.

The society of the Divine Word (SVD-Societatis Verbi Divini) is an international congregation of religious missionary priests and Brothers founded by Saint Arnold Janssen in 1875. Its members work primarily where the Gospel has not been preached at all or only insufficiently, and where the local church is not yet viable on its own. Their presence is strongly felt among the poor, neglected, less privileged and disadvantages groups of the society in different parts of the World. They work with the people to build a better future for them.



Fr. Richie with the slum and migrant children

The Society of the Divine Word is the only major congregation of religious men which has shown steady growth over the last 30 years. Today it has more than 6000 members working in 70 countries.

The primary mission of the Chicago province of the Society of the Divine Word is to call and train new missionaries to spread the Word of God worldwide. In the Chicago Province, Priests and Brothers do pastoral work in inner city parishes, ethnic ministries among the Black, Hispanic, Vietnamese, Polish, Portuguese and other Groups. They also minister in schools, hospitals and prisons.

Brief Profile of Fr. Richie:

Fr. Richard Vaz (Richie) was born on May 4th 1950 to the late Francis and Ignatia (Insu)Vaz. The family was a strong unit of 9 children, 5 boys and four girls among whom three boys and one girl have gone to their heavenly abode. The family is blessed with many Religious vocations. After completing his primary education in 1963 at Neerude, Fr. Richie joined the Apostolic School at Kirem run by the Society of the Divine Word. He experienced his divine call for priesthood as a young child which was guided and nurtured within the religious environment of the family and by his Mentor, Fr. LVM Fernandes who had served Neerude as the parish priest for 14 years.

After completing his PUC at Kirem, he joined the Minor seminary at Palda-Indore in the year 1968. He completed His B.Ph and B.Th studies at Pune (Seminary) and was ordained a priest on May 9th 1978. During his priestly formation, he joined the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and completed his MSW in 1975.

In 1978 Nov., he started his missionary career at Madhupur among the dalits (Harian) in the diocese of Sambalpur (Orissa). He calls this mission as his "FIRST LOVE". Dalit Christians in India are victims of exploitation, exclusion, untouchability etc. Most of them live below the poverty line without having any means of livelihood. It is to these people he was instrumental in providing education by establishing a High School and a Hostel where the dalits and Tribal children enjoyed specially priority. Today, there are Priests and Religious Sisters from this community of people. He organized the people and formed the Weavers cooperative society, developed people's land and provided irrigational facilities, built houses for the homeless. He worked to restore their Self respect and Human dignity.



Slum kids in the Creche while parents are on daily labour

In 1988, Fr. Richie was transferred to another mission at Balangir in Orissa, where he served for 16 years. These were the Golden years of his life. He established two new parishes (mission centres), two high schools, technical school, and a hostel. He invited religious congregation of Sisters and Brothers through the Bishop, to take up new challenges and render services to the most neglected and less privileged people of the area.

He was a member of Lions Clubs international and was elected as the President and received the Best President award, he was also elected as the Zonal and Region Chairman. As a priest, he made an impact in the club/District and could easily mobilize the members for many services. He made the Church campus a place dear to all. He was also member of various District committees of the Government, especially in health and education. He served as the President of the District in the Total Literacy campaign of the Government.

In 2002 October he was appointed as the Regional Director of caritas India (Orissa) but moved to the new Office only on June 21, 2003. Moving to Bhubaneswar, the Capital of the State provided a strong platform to work with the NGOs and the Government. His one vision was to project a "Common Face" of the

Church in Orissa. He was the member of the State Disaster Mitigation committee and organized many camps for the flood victims providing them with food, health, housing facilities and worked for their sustainable livelihood.



Fr.Richie with a leper Child in the colony

He has a special love for the Lepers. During his life in Orissa he has built four housing colonies for them by providing tube wells, land, electricity, goats/chicken for a dignified living. His motto as a priest is "TO BECOME ALL THINGS TO ALL". While leaving his dear mission land Orissa, he told the people that the greatest reward and joy of a priest is to live in the hearts of the people. He is very much indebted to the people of Orissa when he says "It is the Poor, who show us the way to God and therefore we must love them".

"We are indeed very happy to have Fr. Richie in USA and also we are grateful to the Society of the Divine Word for assigning a priest for the Indian Community to cater to their needs. He has assured every help and service. He believes that we can "MAKE A HOME AWAY FROM OUR HOMELAND", says Mark Rodrigues, Secretary of MKCA - Chicago.

Fr Richie has organized a day of recollection during this season of Lent on 17th March at Techny from 8.30AM to 3.00PM on the theme "Searching and Yearning for God" (A Celebration of Life). The luncheon will be served by the mission to all the attendees.

His address and other information:

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