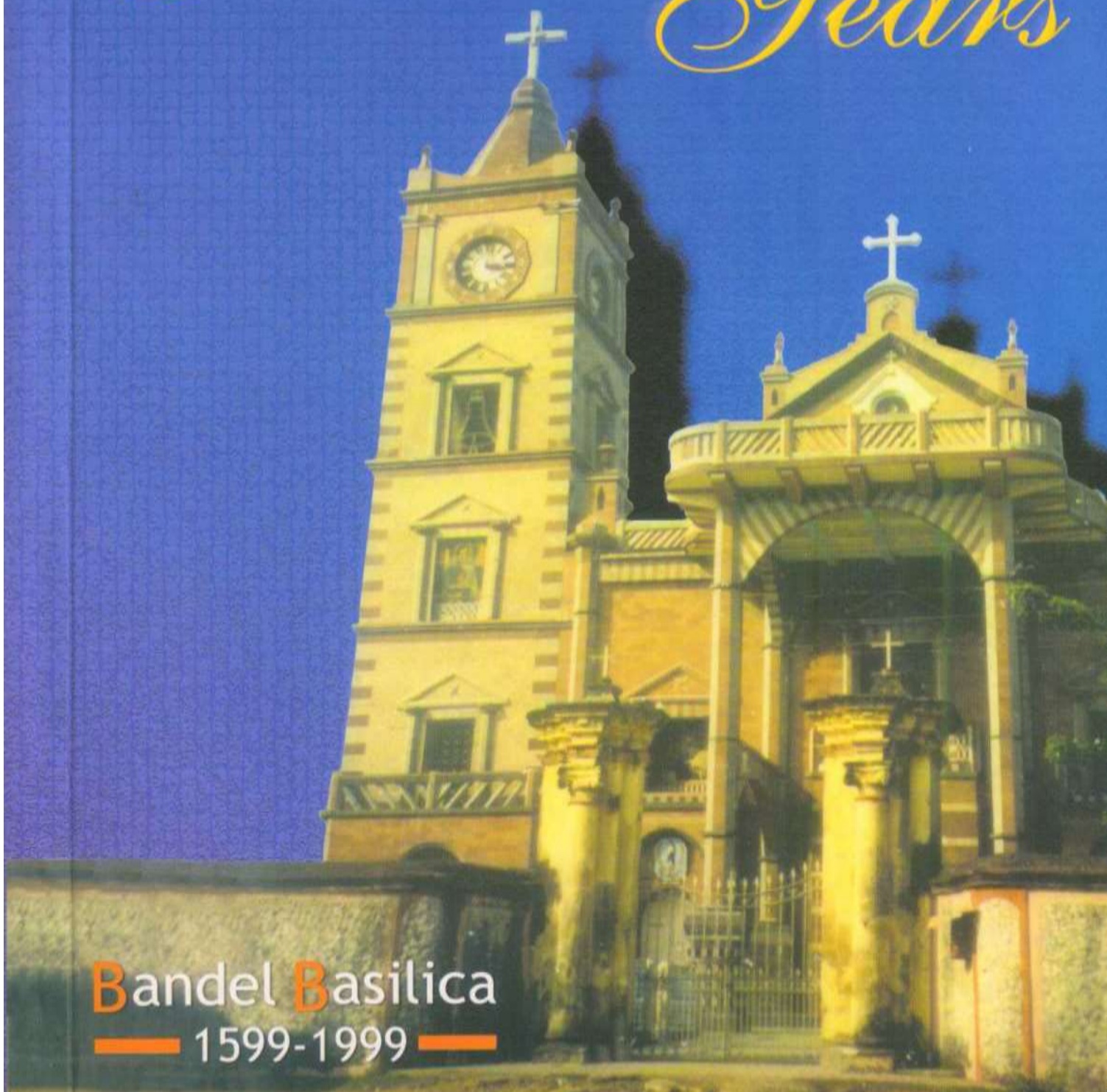


*400
Glorious Years*



Bandel **B**asilica
— 1599-1999 —



The Miraculous Statue of
OUR LADY OF BANDEL

Ever Reign, Mother of Happy Voyage

The heavy drizzle or rain, and the scorching heat of the sun, do not prevent the fervent devotee of Our Lady of Bandel from climbing, often on his/her knees, the flight of stairs to the balcony of the church. There the statue of the Mother of Happy Voyage is venerated by thousands of people from all walks of life. To the ardent devotee and the casual visitor, there is something special in this place. The compassionate Mother is there for everyone, to heal the broken hearted, to answer prayers of all sorts, to shower her blessings and graces, to lead all children in her gentle ways. Four hundred years ago, the weary travellers on the high seas, looked to this star for guidance, safety and rest from their uncertain and perilous journeys. Thus began the devotion to Our Lady of Happy Voyage.

The flourishing Christian community built around the church of Our Lady was a force to reckon with. But after the siege of Hooghly at the hands of the Muslim armies, Bandel and the Christian settlements were never the same. The Augustinian friars from Portugal, who established the monastery and through their untiring zeal and devotion kept the flame of faith alive in the hearts of people were the heroes of this place which celebrates four hundred years of its church. It is a wonder, how the church stood the test of times. This is a glorious moment in its historical progress towards newer and brighter horizons. The church of Bandel was raised to the status of Basilica in the year 1988, as a sign of the special significance it has had in the lives of so many people who have hungered for God and the divine.

We in Bandel feel proud to be part of this moment, to be part of the history, much of which has been silent and forgotten. We feel part of the special plan of God, who through the maternal presence of Mary, draws and leads so many of her children to their loving Father. The fourth centenary celebrations highlight the religious, historical, social and cultural contribution of the Basilica over the four hundred years of its history. The recent renovations and beautification of the Basilica and its surroundings have made it more attractive and worthy of the great occasion of the fourth centenary. Bandel Basilica is becoming more and more a centre of devotion and pilgrimages. The quietness and serenity of the church on the banks of the river Hooghly attracts people of all faiths.

The fourth centenary of the Basilica is a fitting preparation for the great Jubilee of the year 2000, which celebrates the anniversary of the birth of Jesus. A new millenium, a new life, a new beginning! In all this Mary has a definite part to play as she had at the birth of Jesus. History is made up of the personal and unique contribution of each and every person and posterity will judge us in the measure in which we decide to make our contribution to the making of history.

This souvenir is a humble tribute to the Mother of Happy Voyage to mark the fourth centenary of her maternal presence in Bandel from where she has blessed countless souls. This is a small effort to praise and thank her for her manifold blessings. The various features of this souvenir are to highlight the historical significance of the occasion, to arouse faith and devotion, to edify and to share the hope of all who are in one way or other part of the fourth centenary celebrations of Bandel Basilica. Through this souvenir we hope to spread her name far and wide even as she continues to reign in Bandel as the Mother of Happy Voyage.

Fr. Thomas Pulickal

Fr. Thomas Pulickal sdb
Editor



EDITORIAL BOARD Fr. Bertie Fernandes, Fr. Louis Gobetti,
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Editorial

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Prayer to Our Lady of Bandel

O Immaculate Virgin Mother of God,
You have deigned to set up your throne of Queen and
Mother in this ancient church of Bandel to lavish on your
devout friends the treasures of heavenly mercies.

From that throne where you reign so mercifully
O Mother of God, cast your pitying eyes on me and have
mercy on me, who am in much dire need of your help.

Show yourself to me, as you have shown yourself
to so many, a true Mother of mercy. From the depths of
my heart I greet and invoke you as my Mother, and place at
your feet my request. *(Here make your request)*

Intercede and obtain from your Divine Son the
favours I ask, if it be for the good of my soul,
or of those whom I recommend to you.

Hail Mary (3 times)

Hail Holy Queen

Glory be to the Father



To the Most Reverend **Henry Sebastian D'Souza**
Archbishop of Calcutta

On the occasion of the Fourth Centenary of the Shrine of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary in Bandel, I send warm greetings to you and the priests, religious and lay faithful of the Archdiocese of Calcutta. In a special way, I am spiritually close to all present at the Solemn Novena marking the close of the year dedicated to the celebration of this significant anniversary.

It is only right to look back in pride over the four hundred year history of this church and to give thanks to Almighty God for all He has done for those who turned to Him in confidence in good times and in bad. Today we marvel at how Christ's saving Gospel has taken root in the local Christian communities from the small seed sown here four centuries ago and, in gratitude, we ask the Saviour to continue to look after his people and to bless them.

In a particular way, our thoughts turn to Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer, who is venerated at Bandel as the Lady of Happy Voyage. May she continue to protect and intercede for those who come and pray in Bandel. Inspired by her example may they commit themselves anew to building up the civilization of love, "founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 52), so the Third Christian Millennium will truly be a new springtime of the Gospel in the Archdiocese of Calcutta.

Entrusting you all to the maternal protection of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

Joannes Paulus P.P. II

From the Vatican, 9 September, 1999





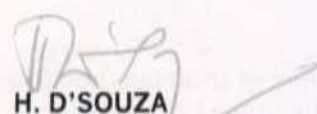
The Bandel Church has been a singular blessing to Bengal for the past 400 years. In a thousand ways the Church has been a meeting place for God and Man through the intercession of Our Lady of Bandel. Pilgrims from all over the world have come to pray at her shrine. Innumerable favours have been received.

The events around the Basilica Church during the past two years have also indicated the very great protection, which Mary gives to her Shrine and the faithful. As we marvel at her Maternal Solitude we want to renew our commitment to her protection and love.

I wish the celebration of the 4th Centenary every success.

With my warm good wishes,

Yours sincerely,


H. D'SOUZA
Archbishop of Calcutta



The centenary that 'Bandel Church' commemorates this year is a particular call to give thanks to the Lord and a motive of deepest joy for all of us who are united by a bond of love to our Lady.

The Four Centuries are replete with events, alternately bringing joys and sorrows, but constantly and fully in the care of the Virgin who on Calvary accepted to be mother to all the brothers of Jesus her Son. She manifested this more openly in a few shrines one of which is certainly Bandel Basilica.

It is not my purpose to narrate facts and events. With gratitude I am satisfied that the present times record a great number of pilgrimages, some coming from distant regions, and that educational and other institutions are flourishing and doing charitable and apostolic works around the Basilica of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary. This is a title that particularly attracts our attention to the *event that is Christ*, going through the fifteen mysteries that recall the visit of God to mankind in the past but which we consider a permanent reality of revelation and salvation.

As Successor of Don Bosco I congratulate my Confreres and all friends who express their love to Our Lady during the solemn celebrations of the Centenary. In the meantime I ask Mary, the star of the new evangelization, to help us all walk on with Her towards the New Pentecost of the Third Millennium.


D. Juan E. Vecchi
Rector Major, Salesians of Don Bosco



I received your letter in which you ask me to send you a message to be published on the occasion of the Fourth Centenary of the Shrine: Our Lady of Happy Voyage of Bandel.

Eagerly I associate myself with the joyous and significant event.

The Celebration of the Fourth Centenary of the Foundation of Bandel Church, now elevated to Basilica, dedicated to Our Lady of Happy Voyage, is itself an invitation to be present there with my message of greetings.

I am happy to insert it in the context of the celebrations in preparation for Jubilee 2000. The year 1999 being specially dedicated to the Heavenly Father, opportunely the theme of the 'Pilgrimage to our Home' is proposed. Our Lady of Happy Voyage reminds us that we have to venture on this journey in her company.

May She, a pilgrim herself in the Faith from the **Fiat** to the Assumption, through experiences of fatigues and joys on the way, assist all those pilgrims who visit the Basilica of Bandel, to undertake their pilgrimage with the same spirit. We shall then together meet Jesus, who in her maternal womb became the Way on which we orient ourselves and have the strength to reach the Father's Home, haven of mercy and love!

United in and sharing the same charism,

Sincerely yours,

Sister Antonia Colombo, FMA
Superior General, Daughters Of Mary Help Of Christians



The whole General Council of the Order joins me in extending sincere felicitations to the ecclesiastical administrators of the Bandel Basilica and the thousands of devotees of our Lady of the Holy Rosary, to whose honour the church is dedicated, on the occasion of the Fourth Centenary Celebration of the foundation of this venerable temple in North East India.

It is truly a great pleasure to know that this church that has played an important role in the evangelization of that part of India has been founded by our Augustinian confreres four-hundred years ago. Obviously, our presence now as a religious Order in your great country has been reduced to the minimum with only two communities in Southern India, but we can be proud of the fact that we have contributed to the foundation and the spreading of the Catholic faith in the Indian sub-continent.

The challenge of evangelization for the Church in India is still very great. But I sincerely believe that with the zealous and dedicated clergy, religious and lay faithful that our Church in your country has, exemplified particularly by the local church to which the Bandel Basilica pertains, the growth of the Church, in all its dimension, is assured.

The history of the Bandel church reflects the history of the Church in the whole of India. It has survived, flourishing despite natural and man-made difficulties along the centuries. This is because it has kept always its resolve to continue being the centre of spiritual nourishment for thousands of souls longing for the bread of life, Jesus our Lord, and for the maternal protection of Mary, our Beloved Mother.

I join you all in this joyful celebration of the fourth centenary of the foundation of Bandel Basilica and I pray with you for the continued growth of the Lord's vineyard in your wonderful land.

Devotedly yours in the Lord and in St. Augustine,

P. Miguel Angel Orcasitas
Prior General, OSA



Thank you for your letter dated 8th March, 1999, and for the privilege of being able to contribute a message to the Souvenir commemorating the Fourth Centenary of the Bandel Basilica.

Above all, I wish to express my gratitude to God for the presence of Our Lady in this Basilica. What wonders this Basilica has done for the people of West Bengal! They come with great faith, believing in the intercession of Our Lady. There they experience Mary's motherly care and protection and draw close to Her Divine Son, the source of every blessing. I also thank all the priests, religious and dedicated faithful who have rendered excellent service in and through the Bandel Basilica.

My prayer for each one who visits the Basilica and joins in the Fourth Centenary celebrations is that you may have a deeper devotion to our Lady. Our dearest Mother Teresa had a great love for Our Lady, and deep trust in the Rosary and the Miraculous Medal as means to cling to Mary and obtain favours through her prayers. Mother taught everyone this simple prayer, "Mary, Mother of Jesus, be a Mother to me now."

With my whole heart, I join in the Fourth Centenary celebrations of Bandel Basilica. I pray that people for many centuries to come will draw near to Our Lady there.

God bless you,

Sr. M. Nirmala, MC
Superior General, Missionaries of Charity



On the Fourth Centenary of the Bandel Basilica I wish to express my praise and thanksgiving to the Lord who has given us this beautiful place of worship where so many people from all parts of India come unceasingly to venerate His holy Mother, the Lady of Happy Voyage.

It is for us, Adorers, a real blessing to have a community so close to this Basilica and to be able to co-operate in the wonderful work which the Salesian Fathers carry out on behalf of the Santal people in the many villages near by and in our boarding.

May Our Lady continue to bestow her blessings and favours on the devotees who in such great number come to her shrine with love and faith and may Jesus, her holy Son, make this Basilica a place of peace and understanding for all the people in India.

Emilia Orta

Emilia Orta
Superior General, Sisters Adorers



I deem it a great privilege to join you in the celebration of the Fourth Centenary of Bandel Basilica, to thank God for His manifold blessings and favours. On behalf of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, I extend my HEARTY CONGRATULATIONS and FERVENT PRAYERS on this auspicious occasion. The Lord has wrought wonders for His people through Our Lady of Happy Voyage, through her intercessions and mediation. It is a moment to look back and acknowledge gratefully God's immeasurable love shown to us through Our Blessed Mother.

We recall with joy His Holiness' appreciation of the good work accomplished through the Basilica when he conferred on the Prior the singular honour, "Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice" in 1998.

I appreciate the good done through the various activities at Bandel Basilica. The Monthly magazine, "Our Lady of Bandel" is very informative and carries inspiring articles that help us to grow in our love for our Mother. The magazine, that is being read by thousands of people, is a medium through which devotion to our Blessed Mother is fostered.

I congratulate the Prior and all those who are responsible for the great accomplishment over the past centuries of the existence of Bandel Basilica. I wish a fruitful celebration of the fourth Centenary of Bandel Basilica and pray for its success. May the Basilica continue to be a place of grace and life for everyone.

With every good wish and prayer,

Yours sincerely in O.L.,

Sr. Elizabeth Packumala

Sr. Elizabeth Packumala
Mother General, Missionary Sisters Of Mary Help of Christians



We, Sisters of Mary Immaculate of Bishop Morrow, rejoice wholeheartedly as we join the Salesians of Don Bosco to thank and praise Abba, Father, commemorating the **Fourth Centenary** of the foundation of our Bandel Church (1599-1999). At this **historic** moment we are filled with gratitude to our Blessed Mother who has revealed her predilection for this hallowed spot on the banks of the River Hooghly to draw her beloved children of all faiths, far and near, closer to God, our Father.

“Our Lady of Happy Voyage” has graciously answered our prayers on many occasions and blessed us copiously whenever we sought her maternal help. A pilgrimage, spiritual retreat or visit to her Shrine at Bandel always brings much joy, peace and love. Our hearty congratulations to all our Salesians who rendered valuable services through the years, especially our dear Father Louis Gobetti who worked zealously for the remarkable renovation of the Basilica, making it still more conducive to prayer and contemplation of God’s countless blessings.

We pray that our Blessed Mother of Bandel help the entire Church in India in its journey towards a new Millennium of peace and concord among people of all faiths.

May this beautiful place of worship, as a haven of peace and healing grace, continue to attract crowds of pilgrims who hunger for true love and serenity.

Sr. Marie

Sr. Marie Pothanamala
Superior General, Sisters of Mary Immaculate



The basilica of Our Lady of Bandel is very dear to all of us who have been in any way associated with it. More than that, being the oldest church in the whole region, it is a point of reference for the Church in North and Northeast India.

Bandel Church, as it is traditionally referred to by everyone, is not just another historical monument to be admired by curious tourists and students of history. More than anything else, it is a place of pilgrimage, a place where troubled minds find peace and solace. During the past four hundred years, and in a more significant way during recent decades, people from all walks of life, irrespective of caste or creed, from various parts of the country and even from abroad, have come to this holy place and experienced the maternal protection of Mary, the Mother of God.

It is a place where hundreds of seminarians experienced guidance and protection on their journey towards religious life and priesthood. It was under the protecting mantle of Our Lady of Bandel that my own vocation to salesian and priestly life matured. I consider it a great privilege to write this message on the occasion of the quadcentenary of the Bandel basilica.

It is true that Bandel Church is dedicated to Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary. Perhaps this fact escapes the notice of many devotees of Our Lady of Bandel. Because of the shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Happy Voyage, and the history surrounding this shrine and devotion, Our Lady of Bandel is readily identified by devotees with Our Lady of Happy Voyage. Whatever be the title under which she is honoured, Mary is always the loving mother of all and leads everyone to Jesus her Son.

People often compare human life to a journey. No child can make it alone, without the help of its mother. The more difficult the journey, all the more the child needs the mother's help. During life's journey, too, we need the help of a mother. Again, our Life is like a voyage, sometimes through the "stormy ocean" of this world. In one of the hymns we ask Our Lady to help us when our life is "tossed by the storms of life". In the history of Bandel church it is narrated that Mary most holy protected and saved the captain of a storm-tossed ship. She is there to help everyone who cries to her when assailed by the storms of life.

Through the tireless and enthusiastic efforts of the staff at Bandel church, very many programmes have been organized during this quadcentenary year to renew Christian life and to promote devotion to Mary. It is my prayer and wish that under the impulse of these renewal programmes more and more people will live their Christian faith with fresh enthusiasm and commitment. And may Our Lady of Happy Voyage lead many more people to Jesus and his saving Gospel.

As we thank our Blessed Mother for her presence and action in our history through Bandel church during the past four centuries, we also ask her to continue to be our constant companion as we walk our earthly paths on our pilgrimage to heaven.

*Be with us Mary along the way
Guide every step we take
Lead us to Jesus your loving Son
Come with us Mary, come.*



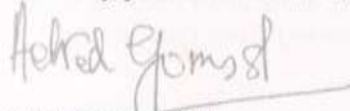
Fr. Francis Alencherry SDB
Provincial, Salesians of Don Bosco

The Fourth centenary of the Bandel Basilica is a wonderful occasion, on the threshold of the new millennium, to thank God for four centuries of pastoral and missionary work in Bengal, and to renew our Christ-inspired commitment to all the people of this land.

May Our Lady share with us her Magnificat, her wholehearted dedication to the Kingdom of her son, and her dream of a world where the small and poor ones will be exalted.

We shall be one in spirit and prayer with you and all the friends of Our Lady of Bandel as the fourth centenary celebrations draw to a spiritual climax.

Fraternaly yours in the Lord,



Aelred Gomes, SJ
Provincial, Society of Jesus



It is a great privilege for me to send you this message for the Souvenir being brought out to commemorate the 4th Centenary of the Bandel Basilica. I feel, that my being here as Prior, at this period of time, when the Bandel Basilica is celebrating its *Quatercentenary* Jubilee, is providential for me and a special gift from our Lady of Bandel.

I say providential because my very Salesian vocation seems to have originated from a visit to Bandel Shrine in 1959 while attending a National Congress of the Young Christian Workers (Y.C.W.). It was after praying at the Balcony in front of the miraculous statue of Our Lady of Happy Voyage and experiencing the enthusiasm of the Salesian aspirants, praying and singing, all dressed in Khaki shirts and short pants, that I was touched and moved in my decision to become a Salesian. Our blessed mother of Bandel, after 40 years, has led me back to her Shrine to join the Salesian community in honouring her.

Again my appointment to Bandel has been an invaluable gift of Our Lady to me. Right from my installation as Prior I have been greatly encouraged by the wonderful collaboration of all. Further I was and am still inspired by all the letters I receive from the pilgrims and devotees of Our Lady and am impressed by their generosity to help maintain the Shrine. Consequently I am enjoying every bit of my stay at Bandel under the mantle of Our Lady and in the Community of Bandel.

Yes! In the history of Christianity in Northern India and in the work of the Salesians there is scarcely a more memorable place than Bandel Church. The memories of the Portuguese centre, where we find the old Augustinian Convent (Monastery) and beautifully designed Church (1599), with the ancient statue of our Lady of Happy Voyage, have fascinated and attracted many historians, visitors and pilgrims. Bandel also being the cradle of the Salesian Vocation finds many a Salesian coming to thank Our Lady for the assistance and protection they have received from our Blessed Mother.

Recently Fr. Louis Gobetti, the former Prior, undertook the renovation of the church. He has succeeded in making it more functional and durable and has helped to raise its dignity to the status of Minor Basilica.

He has also embellished the Monastery rooms, repainted the Retreat House and beautified the gardens so as to make Bandel an important spot of "Spiritual Splendour". We have succeeded in building the Boundary Wall around the Church Grounds and in preparation for the 4th Centenary of the Basilica, we have been able to unite a little more the parish community through the celebration of the sacraments. We pray that through these celebrations many may come closer to Jesus through Mary.

Your affectionately in our Lady of Bandel.

B Fernandes

Fr. Bertie Fernandes
Prior, Bandel Church

Witnesses Of Mercy

A Gift Of Love

It is common belief among pilgrims to Bandel Basilica that Mary gives the gift of a child to childless couples who have recourse to her.

One lady narrated a story: "I was on a city bus plying from Bandel Station to the Shrine. I soon exchanged a few words with a lady sitting beside me. She was holding a bouquet of flowers in her hands, I asked her where she would get down. "At Bandel Church," she said. Then she went on telling why she was going there:

"Every year on this day I go to thank Mary for the great gift she made to me: She granted a child to my family after twelve years of marriage. My days and years were passing, sad and dull. A friend told me to pray to Our Lady of Happy Voyage at Bandel Church. I did so.

"The following year I came to Bandel to give thanks to Mary carrying a lovely child of my own in my lap. Every year, the growing little girl would come with me on this day, but she has grown up and has to sit for the MBBS exams in the Medical College of Calcutta. So, this year, I have come alone to offer prayers, flowers and to light votive candles."

Then the friend asked the lady: "Did you convert to Christianity after receiving such a great favour?" "No," she replied: "But I know that Mary is the Mother of Jesus. It is written on one of the tablets in the Basilica that her Son died for all mankind. I think his Mother too loves all. Nobody can stop me from loving Jesus and Mary." ●

LIST OF SALESIAN PRIORS AT BANDEL CHURCH

Rev. Fr. H. Raygasse	1928 - 1931	+ 1962, New York
Rev. Fr. J. Mazzetti	1931 - 1934	+ 1949, Ivrea (Italy)
Rev. Fr. J. Hauber	1934 - 1936	+ 1946, Shillong
Rev. Fr. A.Cocco	1936 - 1937	+ 1967, Santo Lussurgio
Rev. Fr. J. Farassino	1937 - 1939	
Rev. Fr. D.J. Wollaston	1937 - 1940	+ 1979, Shillong
Rev. Fr. J. Bacchiarello	1940	+ 1985, Shillong
Rev. Fr. D.J. Wollaston	1940 - 1942	+ 1979, Shillong
Rev. Fr. G. Buisman	1942	+ 1942, Bandel
Rev. Fr. L. Buri	1943 - 1946	+ 1961, Cordoba (Spain)
Rev. Fr. D.B. Fiori	1946 - 1949	+ 1978, Turin (Italy)
Rev. Fr. L. Piasecki	1949 - 1952	+ 1957, Digboi (Assam)
Rev. Fr. E. Cinato	1953	+ 1964, Cheerapunjee
Rev. Fr. J. Marchesi	1954 - 1959	
Rev. Fr. P.J. Sheehy	1959 - 1964	+ 1997, Calcutta
Rev. Fr. R. Stroschio	1965	
Rev. Fr. M. Baroi	1966 - 1970	+ 1983, Krishnanagar
Rev. Fr. John Schilder	1970 - 1971	+ 1983, Calcutta
Rev. Fr. J. Dal Broi	1971 - 1983	
Rev. Fr. A. Kuriakose	1983 - 1986	
Rev. Fr. C.J. Sebastian	1986 - 1988	
Rev. Fr. Louis Gobetti	1988 - 1997	
Rev. Fr. Bertie Fernandes	1997	

DOWN MEMORY LANE...

My heartiest Congratulations for the Celebrations of the Fourth Centenary of Bandel Basilica. In 400 years much has been done to improve and spread devotion to our Blessed Mother, and much was done to make the Shrine ever more present to the needs of the people.

I do remember with joy my five years spent as Guardian of the Shrine, of the Marian Feasts celebrated with our dear Archbishop, Monsignor Perier, S.J., and of the many friends and benefactors who on these occasions never failed to turn up.

And who can forget the wonderful choir, which Fr. Charles Niznansky succeeded in putting up with our dear aspirants, whose beautiful voices filled the Shrine with joy and devotion. Indeed the aspirantate attached to the Shrine has been for it life-giving and a real boon.

May Our Lady of Bandel continue to bring many a soul to Her and lavish on all Her motherly affection.

Ad Multos Annos.

Fr. Joseph Marchesi, SDB
Prior, 1954 - 1959



On the occasion of the 4th Centenary of Bandel Basilica, I am happy to offer a short reflection on what impressed me most during my stay there as Rector of the Salesian Aspirantate and Prior of Our Lady's Shrine.

My stay was a short one, from the middle of December 1964 to the beginning of October 1965, when regretfully, I left that hallowed place for a new assignment. However, those short months have remained deeply engraved in my mind and heart.

That atmosphere pervading the whole place was one of deep reverence, veneration and piety, as day after day, thousands of people of all religions kept coming to the feet of Our Lady of Happy Voyage to pour their sorrows, anxieties and petitions into the Heart of One, Who, they felt, was a merciful and powerful Mother.

The Aspirantate, overflowing with fervent boys, desirous of becoming Salesian Priests, lent splendour to the Sacred Functions, which were numerous and very solemn, delight to the eyes and joy to the heart.

Often at night, when all noise had ceased and silence reigned supreme, I would climb to Our Lady's Balcony and muse over the wonder of God's infinite love, Who, during the last four centuries had placed his own Mother on that lofty height to watch over the children of men. How many thousands of people, I wondered, had lifted imploring eyes towards this loving Mother and Queen, who watched over them with tender and anxious care and obtained from God solace for their sorrows, peace for their hearts, health for their bodies, light for their minds and strength to press on with courage along the difficult journey towards their heavenly home.

May She continue to be a source of consolation and a beacon of light to generations yet unborn, till the end of time.

Fr. Rosario Stroschio, SDB
Prior, 1964 - 1965



The year 1970 was a memorable one as the superiors decided to give to Bandel Church a stable parish priest mainly meant for this Apostolate in order also to make a genuine effort to secure the expansion of the same. All the previous parish priests (priors) had been also Rectors of the adjoining Salesian Aspirantate.

Fr. John Schilder (a Dutchman who died in April 1983) was appointed for the purpose. He was still active and was well acquainted with the Bengali language. He would then be a full fledged Parish Priest (Prior). The name of Prior was and is officially used by the government. He was also secretary of the aided St. John's School. Unfortunately Fr. John did not exercise such authority for long as in 1970 he went for a well deserved rest. When he returned to India he was transferred elsewhere. Who was going to replace him? The writer of these lines, who for three years had been Rector of the C.O.P. (Calcutta) and Vicar at the Catholic Cathedral, was appointed the new Prior. He had never dreamt of coming to Bandel as he was not conversant with Bengali language. He was told that Bengali was similar to Assamese! I am sure that in the beginning I spoke more Assamese than Bengali! Fortunately the young confreres of the community were of great help to me.

The Parish Priest was also in charge of the Retreat House built behind the Shrine. The financial running of the Church (repairs and improvements) was not a burden to me as the superiors of the community would use for this purpose the money collected from the two iron boxes placed on the Balcony.

The number of parishioners was more or less five hundred, made up of Bengalis, a few Anglo-Indian families, a dozen Adibashi families, and a sprinkling of other tribes. The area of the Parish would extend from the Khal of Tribeni in the North, to Chandannagore in the South. The Eastern boundary would be the river Hooghly. The Western side of the Parish was indefinite as the name given in the document of the erection of the Parish could not be traced in the map. The opening of the Kalna Parish later on in the North, unfortunately gave rise to some misunderstandings as the very zealous Parish Priest of Kalna tried to encroach on our parish and take over the small community we had founded at Rajhat, some seven kilometres from Bandel Church on the Calcutta-Delhi highway. The matter was somehow settled by the intervention of Bishop Alan DeLastic (now Archbishop of New Delhi).

The first duty of a Parish Priest is that of knowing his Parishioners. This is done by contacting them especially in their homes. I therefore tried to visit them possibly once every two months. This was by bicycle in the evening. These visits were greatly appreciated. The Sundays were well taken care of, with Holy Mass in English at 6.30

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in summer, 8.30 in Bengali, 11.00 am in English for the pilgrims coming from afar. There also used to be a Holy Mass in English at 5.00 pm. This was poorly attended (120 or so faithful,) and was later changed into a Hindi Mass, with far better results. On Sunday afternoons, a public recital of the Rosary followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Could the Parish Priest remained indifferent to the small number of his faithful? Expansion is a duty of an apostle. Attempts were made to contact the few protestant families in the area especially at Chinsurah. They had a little Church. These approaches did not bring the expected results. The Hindus and Muslims spoke highly of their appreciation of Mother Mary, whom they considered the preserver of peace in the area. The social system made impossible every impact. The fishermen residing near the Marian Shrine were as indifferent as ever. The only way open to our apostolate was that of turning to the adibashis and tribals who were not prejudiced against Christianity. Thus the expansion began with the opening of a small community of twelve families at Rajhat some 7 kilometres from Bandel Church.

Thirty six khatas had been secured for Rs.3600. A solid Chapel, the donation of a benefactor, was followed by little houses for the Christians at Rajhat. These were followed by a score of others in the vicinity of Bandel Church. An extension of the community was then in our plan as to make the place an independent parish. We were prevented from doing so by new government ordinances.

The new pagan families of Adibashis around Rajhat were irresponsive to our efforts. We then realised that our greatest future would be among the Santhals. There are several villages inhabited by people of the tribe between Rajhat and Polba. To contact them we badly needed a Catechist and a Priest conversant with the Santhali language. We had nine of them. The Fathers at Azimganj helped us with a temporary catechist. This experiment worked, but little; and we had to wait for more favourable times.

The writer of these lines was going on trusting that the good Lord would give him a more fruitful apostolate. But his ill health compelled him to be hospitalized. He had to undergo a major operation. Thank God it was a success, but his former activities could not be resumed. He was thus relieved of his former responsibility of prior after some 12 years of service. He prayed, and still prays for a marvellous development of the Parish of Bandel and a glorious success in the apostolate for his zealous successors.

Fr. Dal Broi, sdb
Prior, 1971 - 1983

Priors Speak



Bandel Church is a name that brings nostalgic memories to my mind. It was in 1951, along with several companions that I first landed at the sacred place. Later on three other occasions I had the honour of being closely associated with the shrine of Our Lady of Happy Voyage, the last time as its Prior from 1983 to 1986.

From the time of my first contact, I have always experienced a fascination for the Shrine, its history and surroundings. The persevering faith of the many pilgrims who throng the place, their simple piety, has at all times been an inspiration and encouragement to me.

People come and people go and the Shrine has continued to grow as a popular centre of Marian devotion during the past 400 years of its history. Bandel Church has been a landmark, an attraction and prayerful pilgrim place to countless devotees, Christian and non Christian alike, for peace of mind as well as cure from various physical ailments. Numerous are the blessings they describe as received through the intercession of Our Lady of Bandel.

It is so beautiful to witness the many people who pass by the front of the Church bow their heads in reverence towards the statue of the Mother of God, their "Guru Ma". I pray and hope that Our Lady of Bandel will continue to be a beacon of light in the life-journey of all those who turn to "Bandel Ma" for assistance.

Fr. A. Kuriakose, sdb
Prior, 1983-1986



My work as a Prior of the historical shrine of Our Lady of Bandel was quite a short one, lasting only two years. I had however been helping at the shrine in different capacities from the year 1979. The two years I spent at Mary's shrine were truly eventful years, very fruitful years. After having reorganised the parish, with sodalities, associations, youth groups and a vibrant choir and an active Parish council, my attention was directed to procuring from the Holy See, for Bandel Shrine, The status of a Minor Basilica. During that year, thousands of pilgrims from all north India came to pray at Bandel Shrine as it was the Marian year. I can vividly recall instances of miracles that took place in Bandel. When the suggestion to make the Shrine into a Basilica was made to His Grace Archbishop Henry D'Souza, he readily accepted to do what ever possible to expedite the process. Suggestions for safeguarding the property, renovating the sanctuary and other requests made by the Holy See were complied with, without delay. The Bandel parishioners, one and all came forward to contribute generously towards the renovation work. On 8th May 1988 the new altar was consecrated and all that remained was to get the formal approval from Rome which came later in the year. I look up to Mary with gratitude that I was made the instrument for bringing honour to her.

To the thousands that flock to Bandel Basilica, Mary has ever remained the loving and caring mother dispensing blessings in plenty. For four hundred years Bandel Shrine has been the hallowed spot where countless number of her devotees from different denominations and creeds, have experienced the divine assistance brought to them by the powerful and maternal intercession of Mary. And the Virgin Mary at Bandel will continue her work of obtaining mercy and grace for all who call upon her. I have seen and witnessed to the fact of the Virgin Mary's presence at Bandel. May she continue to intercede for all people. May she be truly the defender and protectress on our life's voyage.

Rev. Fr. C.J. Sebastian sdb
Prior, 1986 - 1988



In view of bringing the presence of the Saviour to souls through the Blessed Virgin Mother, Bandel Basilica is one of the most prominent spots in India and we may say in the world. It has been my privilege to be the Prior for nine years during an extensive and planned reconstruction of the Shrine to promote the aims mentioned above and to make Bandel Basilica a showplace of the presence of the Mother of Jesus and of the Church in the country. Here tourists and visitors admire the beautiful river Ganges, the open grounds and gardens, the balcony on which the historical statue of Our Lady of Happy Voyage is venerated, a ship mast, the beautiful Basilica and all its historical treasures.

For the Christians and non-Christians who so desire, the Basilica is especially a place of peace and prayer: the Liturgy, the feasts and religious celebrations including processions and Retreats, elevate the soul to Jesus and give to Bandel and aura of spiritual splendour.

This progressive trend has acquired new impetus with the present Prior, the increased number of Catholics and the great development of the Educational Institutions, Missions and the advent of more Religious Congregations. Old pressing problems regarding the properties of the Shrine are also coming to a satisfactory solution.

I pray that Our Lady may be present at Bandel Basilica and protect her children for all centuries to come. We are grateful to you, Dear Mother.

Fr. Louis Gobetti, SDB
Prior, 1988.- 1997.

A Short History Of Bandel Basilica

The story of Bandel Church begins with the first Portuguese settlements in Bengal. Most historians agree that in 1537, an Admiral, Sampovo, entered the River Hoogly with nine Portuguese vessels to support Mahmud Shah, the Pathan Nawab of Gaurav, who being hard pressed by the famous Sher Khan, had asked the Portuguese representatives in Goa for assistance.

As a reward for their efforts, the Nawab allowed the Portuguese to set up a factory at a spot close to the present Hooghly jail. In 1579 the Portuguese constructed a port on the bank of the river Hoogly. It became a centre of trade and commerce.

To protect their interests they built a fort. They soon secured the services of a small band of Augustinian Friars, then the largest religious body in Goa. About the year 1580 a certain Captain Pedro Tavares, a great favourite of the Moghul Emperor Akbar, obtained from him full liberty to preach the Christian faith publicly and to erect churches. In 1599, a monastery was established at Bandel, a village about a mile from the factory.

History



In a short time two other churches were built within the limits of the factory — a military chapel was added to the fort and an alms-house under the title of 'Santa Casada Misericordia' which provided help to the poor, and was also used as a school.

Persecution of the Christians

About the year 1622, Prince Harun, afterwards Emperor Shah Jahan, revolted against his father Jehangir and asked the Portuguese Governor at Hooghly, Michael Rodrigues, to help him with men and artillery which he refused.

Shah Jahan who ascended the throne in 1628, ordered the Moghul Subedar of Bengal to exterminate the Portuguese.



• Original buildings in the vicinity of Bandel



• Map depicting the Siege of Hooghly

The Subedar laid siege to the fort. But the large Moghul army was no match to the two hundred well-trained Portuguese and their plentiful supply of ammunition. Finally, however, the Portuguese were betrayed by one of their own officers.





• *The destruction of Hooghly*

On 24th June 1632, feast of St. John the Baptist, while everyone was in Church attending a religious service, the enemy were given secret entrance to the fort, they set on fire the arsenal, took possession of all the arms and blew up the fortifications. The panic stricken people were massacred without mercy. The Governor was captured and burnt alive, and over four thousand men, women and children were made prisoners and carried off to Agra, the then capital of the Moghul Empire. All the Churches and other public buildings were razed to the ground. The only place that escaped major damage was the monastery at Bandel.

Of the five Augustinian Friars made captive, only one aged priest, Father Joao da Cruz, was spared. The brave priest, and all the Christians were taken to far away Agra to be thrown to the wild beasts.

The Triumph of the Christians

A grand Durbar was arranged, and a vast arena prepared. Huge crowds flocked to Agra, to witness this extraordinary spectacle. Four savage, famished, wild elephants made a dash at the Christians. But their fury vanished and they grew calm. The biggest elephant approached Fr. Da Cruz, caught him by its trunk and set him on its back. Then with the priest still on its back, it approached the Emperor, knelt down before him and bowing its head, saluted him with its trunk.



History



The crowd considered this a divine intervention. They shouted that Christians were friends of Allah and should be set free.

Shah Jahan sent Fr. Joao da Cruz back to Bandel commissioning him to rebuild the mission. The Emperor presented him with 777 bighas of land in the village of Bandel around the monastery by a 'Firman' which also listed seventeen privileges to govern the community. He also exempted them from Moghul interference and taxation and they were to be directly under the Emperor. The Firman conceded by Shah Jahan guided the destinies of Bandel for many years. In fact, in days gone by, the Prior of Bandel was like a petty governor, collecting rent, administering justice and even having a police force of his own.

Fr. Da Cruz and the Christians on returning to Bandel began immediately to rebuild the church from the ruins of the old one.

The Statue of Our Lady of Happy Voyage

The centre of attraction at Bandel Church is the statue of Our Lady of Happy Voyage high up in the niche on the top most part of the façade. Originally this statue was on the altar of the military chapel attached to the Portuguese factory which was destroyed in 1632 during the siege of Hooghly.



During the capture of Hooghly one merchant, Tiago, tried to take the statue to safety to the other side of the river. But, struck by arrows, he disappeared with the statue in the water. During one stormy night after the return of the Christians from Agra, while the rebuilding of the church was going on, Fr. da Cruz saw a strange light on the river bank and heard a voice like that of his old merchant friend Tiago calling him, "Hail, hail, hail to Our Lady of Happy Voyage who has given us victory. Arise, arise, O Father and pray for us all."

• Fr. da Cruz sees a vision of Tiago



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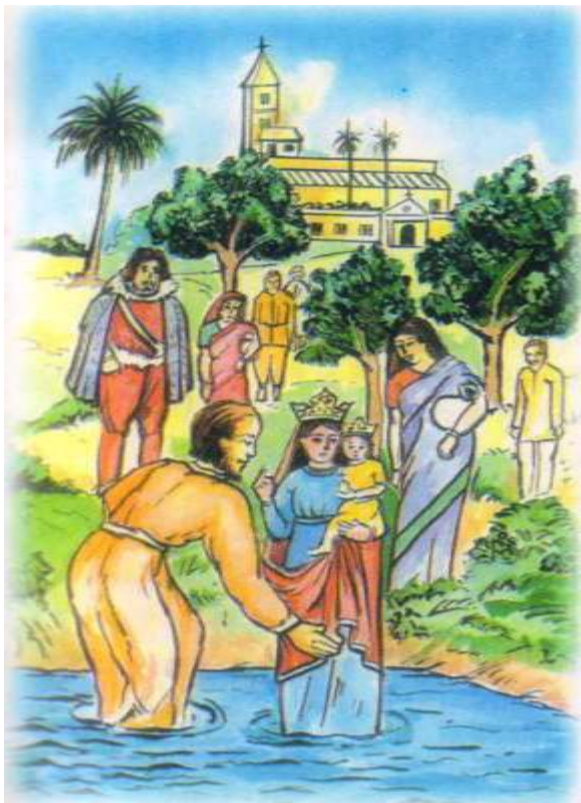
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History





Early next morning some villagers were seen near the church shouting, "Guru Ma" (the Blessed Mother) has come back. To his surprise Fr. da Cruz found the lost statue of the Virgin a few yards away from the gate of the Church. He placed the statue on the main altar and to commemorate the event, instituted a feast during which the statue is carried in procession. In the year 1910, the statue was moved to the balcony of the Church.

• "Guru Ma" has returned!

The Mast: A Captain's Votive Offering

While the celebrations for the blessings of the rebuilt Church were in progress a large Portuguese ship appeared on the river bank. The ship had encountered a terrific storm in the Bay of Bengal. The Captain, a deeply religious man, had made a vow to the Blessed Virgin that, if saved he would offer the biggest mast of his ship to the first church to be sighted. He kept his word and presented the mast to the Virgin Mary at Bandel Church, where it still stands, in mute witness to a captain's gratitude to the "Lady of Happy Voyage."



• The mast is preserved on the grounds of the Basilica.

History



Christian Community Rebuilt

By the middle of the 17th century, the Christian Community around Bandel numbered nearly 10,000. Bandel again became a little commercial centre, but it never reached its former greatness as the biggest port in the Moghul Empire.

Fr. Joao da Cruz who had become too old and feeble handed over the Shrine to the newly arrived Augustinians from Goa. His superior advised him to leave Bengal and go to Goa where he died in June or July 1638, and was buried in the church of *Nossa Senhora da Graca*.

Bandel Church Today

In 1928 Bandel Church and the monastery were entrusted to the Salesians of Don Bosco. Attached to the Church there is a Minor Seminary, three High Schools, a Centre for Spiritual Retreats and a boarding for village girls.

The coming of the Salesians in 1928 marked the end of the "Padroado" (dependence on the king of Portugal and the Diocese of Mylapore). The Salesian Society handed over by formal document to Mylapore Diocese, the Don Bosco Press and Mission at Tanjur (Tamil Nadu) in exchange for Bandel Shrine, structures and lands. Thousands of people of all faiths visit the Church. On Christmas and the New Year their number swells to many thousands.



• *Today Bandel Basilica stands completely renovated — a new marble exterior and many modifications make it befitting of the title.*

Bandel Shrine: Basilica

Petitions to the Holy See were submitted by several Priors in the past to have the Shrine elevated to Minor Basilica.

The Vatican did not grant the requests considering the poor construction of the Church-building and the lack of Catholic population at Bandel.

H.E. Henry D' Souza, Archbishop of Calcutta personally visited the Vatican and moved the Holy See to finally elevate Bandel Shrine to Minor Basilica. In the meantime, the Church building was renewed and beautified and Catholic settlements were established to fulfil the main conditions of the Holy See.

The Decree granting the title of Basilica is dated November 25th 1988. The public proclamation was made on the Feast of Our Lady of Bandel on May 7th 1989, by **H.E. Arch. Agostino Cacciavillan**, Pro Nuncio of the Holy See in India.

Below is a faithful translation in English, the original decree is reproduced on the following page.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

IN EVERLASTING REMEMBRANCE

The widely renowned and deeply venerated Shrine to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary of the Holy Rosary is the oldest Church in the region of North India. It was erected in Bengal, India, in the sixteenth century by missionaries hailing from Diocese of Mylapore. This Church passed through various disturbances of the times and under changes in sacred art, so that in time it was beautified and thus became an attraction for the furtherance of piety among the faithful of the Archdiocese of Calcutta.

It therefore appeared clear to Our Venerable Brother Henry Sebastian D'Souza, that nothing was lacking to this sacred historical monument to be honoured with the title of Minor Basilica. To this effect he petitioned the Apostolic See to have this favour granted. Being fully aware of how greatly this privilege can promote the piety and fervour of the clergy and faithful, we have been pleased to accede to this petition of the Archbishop. Therefore after consulting the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, by our Apostolic Authority and in virtue of this decree, We declare the Church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Most Holy Rosary at Bandel in the Archdiocese of Calcutta to be raised to the dignity of Minor Basilica with all relevant rights and privileges in accordance with the sacred canons, strictly adhering however to everything laid down in the decree, 'Concerning the Title of Minor Basilica', published on 6th June 1968.

Given at Rome, at the See of St. Peter, marked with the Seal of the Fisherman, this 25th day of November 1988, the eleventh year of Our Pontificate.

John Paul II, Pope

Augustine Card. Casaroli
Secretary, Public Affairs of the Church



IOANNES PAVLVS PP. II

ad perpetuam rei memoriam.

Vetustissima sane inter suae regionis septentrionalis templa christiana merito et numeratur et praedarum existat sacellum Beatissimae Virgini Mariae sacrum sub titulo - Sacratissimi Rosarii - utpote quod iam ad finem vergente sexto decimo saeculo missionales Evangelii praecones intra tunc temporis dioecesis Meliaporensis fines in India providi excitaverint. Eadem vero deinceps aedes varias per temporum vicissitudinis ac mutationes ita artis sacrae aucta est monumentis, ita catholicae pietatis instructa adiuventis ut praecipua iam vitae Christifidelium iis in locis sedes habeatur ac modius veluti locus quo alia complura referantur ex tota ad quam pertinet archidioecesi Calcuttensi. Nihil propterea nec momenti historici nec sacri artificii visum est eidem huic templo deesse, iudicante loci Praesule sacro Venerabili Fratre Henrico Sebastiano D'Souza, nisi liturgica illa quasi corona, titulus nempe Basilicae Minoris, quem proin magnis nuper precibus ab hac Sede Apostolica commemoratus pastor petiit. Cum saepe numero simus Nos ipsi experti quantum huiusmodi insignia manifestaue decora denique conferant tum ad animos cleri ac populi fidelis in cotidiano religionis solidae cultu firmandos tum in caritatis opera pietatis officia Virgini Mariae obsequia inflammandos, rem adeo salutarem frugiferamque esse arbitrati hanc libentes sic flagitanti pro se suoque grege Archiepiscopo satisfacere cupimus. De consilio propterea Congregationis pro Cultu Divino de Nostraeque potestatis apostolicae plenitudine et harum Litterarum iustite constitutum ut dicta aedes Beatissimae Virgini Mariae sub titulo Sacratissimi Rosarii in loco Bandel - archidioecesis Calcuttensis ad conditionem provebatur dignitatemque Basilicae Minoris, cui simul iura universa addantur et privilegia, quae talibus in Ecclesia templis ad canones sacros congruunt, servatis tamen iis singulis, quae Decretum De titulo Basilicae Minoris - die VI mensis Junii anno MCMLXVIII foras datum, iubet profecto servari. Contrariis quibuslibet haudquaquam obstantibus rebus. Datum Romae, apud Sanctum Petrum, sub anulo Piscatoris, die XXV mensis Novembris anno MCMLXXXVIII, Pontificatus Nostri undecimo.

Augustinus Lombardi
a publicis Eccl. negotiis



**OTHER IMPORTANT DATES AND
EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF
BANDEL BASILICA**

1646 The Governor of Bengal confirms the grant of the land.

1660 Manucci the foreign traveller and historian visits Bandel.

1666 Bernier visits Bandel. He resided in India for twelve years from 1657-1669. The greater part of his residence was spent at the court of Aurengzeb, whose camp he followed in 1665 from Delhi to Kashmir through the length of the Punjab. He was a physician by profession.

1670 The church was enlarged.

1690 Some Portuguese accompany Job Charnock to Calcutta and established a church, which eventually became the cathedral church of Calcutta. This is the fourth oldest church in Bengal, the earlier ones were in Bandel, Chinsurah and Serampore.

1712 The Bishop of Mylapore visits Bandel Church.

1756 Siraj-ud-dulla pillages the monastery and all the documents are destroyed.

1785 Controversy with the Portuguese government over ownership of land Memorandum by Prior.

1797 The English Governor General of East India Company abolishes the Prior's magisterial power.

1820 The Prior sends the second memorandum.

1867 The priests from the diocese of Mylapore take over the administration of the church.

1870 The St. John School was started.

1897 The belfry of the church was damaged by earthquake.

1910 The statue of Our Lady of Happy Voyage is taken to the newly erected balcony.

1928 The Salesian Fathers of Don Bosco take over the administration from the Bishop of Mylapore.

1935 Major repairs of the church.

1959 New altar and chapel on the roof of the church attached to the balcony.

1960 Monastery rebuilt after collapse of old walls.

1980 Damage to the church caused by lightning.

1981 Major repair of part of the roof of the Sanctuary.

1983 West Bengal governor Mr. Pandey visits the shrine.

1986 • West Bengal governor Mr. Nurul Hasan visits the shrine.
• The boundary wall construction begins.

1987 L.F. Workers forcefully stopped the construction of the boundary wall.

1988 On November 25th the church is elevated to the status of Minor Basilica. The work of renovation and beautification is in progress.

1995 14th Jan, Mother Teresa visits Bandel Basilica on the 125th anniversary celebration of St. John's school.

1998 25th October, West Bengal governor A.R. Kidwai visits the Basilica. Inauguration of the yearlong celebrations for the 4th centenary of the Basilica to be concluded on Nov. 14th, 1999.

History



Bandel Shrine: Minor Basilica

Several Priors in the past had submitted petitions to the Holy See to have the shrine elevated to Minor Basilica. The Vatican did not grant the requests considering the poor construction of the Church-building and the lack of Catholic population at Bandel.

Rt. Rev. **Henry D'Souza**, Archbishop of Calcutta, personally visited the Vatican and moved the Holy See to finally elevate Bandel shrine to Minor Basilica. In the meantime the church building was renewed and beautified and Catholic settlements were established to fulfil the main conditions of the Holy See.

The Decree* granting the title of Basilica is dated 25th November 1988. The public proclamation was made on the feast of Our Lady of Bandel on May 7th 1989 by H.E. **Agostino Cacciavillan**, Apostolic Pronuncio of the Holy See in India. His Excellency was assisted by Archbishop Henry D'Souza and many other prelates from different parts of India.

A solemn novena preceded the celebration of the feast of Our Lady of Bandel and the proclamation of the shrine a Basilica.

pictures on
facing page



*See previous pages for a photograph, and a translation of the original Decree in Latin.



Before the Declaration: The new marble altar was consecrated during an impressive ceremony by His Grace Archbishop Henry D'Souza of Calcutta, on May 6th 1988.

A special Mass and other celebrations were held on the day of dedication, in anticipation of the declaration of Minor Basilica.



The Pro Nuncio receives a warm Indian welcome.

Entrance procession for the Mass



Declaration of Minor Basilica — Solemn concelebrated Mass



Cultural programme after the Mass



Pilgrims' Devotions at Bandel Shrine

The Intentions Letter Boxes

A moving tradition has been established at Bandel Shrine through the centuries: writing messages to Our Lady, praying to Our Lady, praying for graces or thanking for favours received.

Ascending the stairs to the Balcony of the Basilica at the left of the statue of Our Lady of Happy Voyage, the 'Intention Box' is placed, similar to the safe for offerings on the right side. A replica of these two safety-boxes is to be found within the Basilica, opposite the baptismal font, for those who cannot go up the staircase to the roof and the balcony. Here the relic from the veil of Our Lady is exposed.

The messages written by the faithful are collected and burnt on the 24th of each month before the Grotto of Lourdes in the Monastery Garden, while the Mothers of the Confraternity of Our Lady Help of Christians pray the Rosary, chant hymns and light candles. Often in these letters one single expression is written: Dear Mother, I love you!

Offering Votive Candles

Devotion to Our Lady is also expressed in a grand way by offering and lighting votive candles of various sizes and colour at all altars and statues of the Shrine.

Candles go on burning all through the day.

Blessings and Holy Water

The Prior and the Priests of the Shrine are called to bless pilgrims and families at all times. These devout visitors are happy to take home blessings from the Shrine.

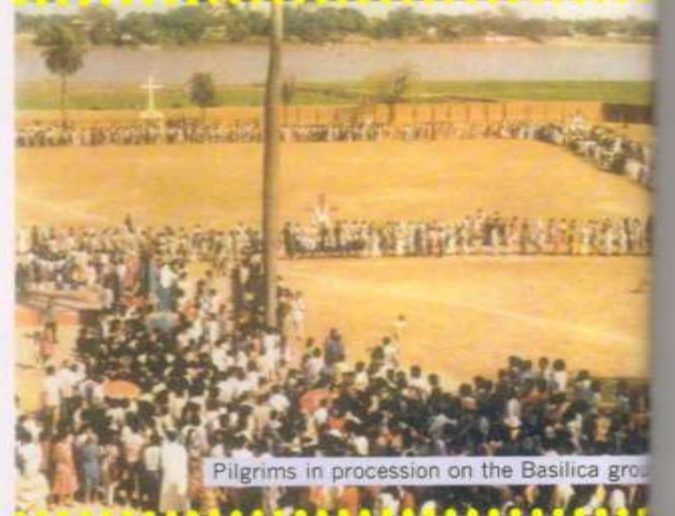
Holy Water, blest in the Shrine, is taken home in bottles or sprinkled on the sick or used for simple blessings. All understand that petition and thanksgiving letters, Candles, Holy Water signify devotion and express a deep love to the Blessed Virgin Mary.



The Prior with a group of Santhal pilgrims



Frs. A.U. Jose and E.V. Chacko on a thanksgiving pilgrimage to the Basilica.



Pilgrims in procession on the Basilica grounds



Celebrating their ordination Silver Jubilees... Sa...

Ownership of land and property of Bandel Church

Friends of Our Lady of Bandel may find it interesting to know the historical and documentary evidence about the ownership of the original vast estate and the present possessions on which the Basilica and the Institutions stand.

By Fr. L. Gobetti SDB

Historical Evidence

Augustinian Monks from Goa, the Diocese of Madras-Mylapore and finally the Salesians of Don Bosco became, in succession, the legal owners of the Church properties at Bandel.

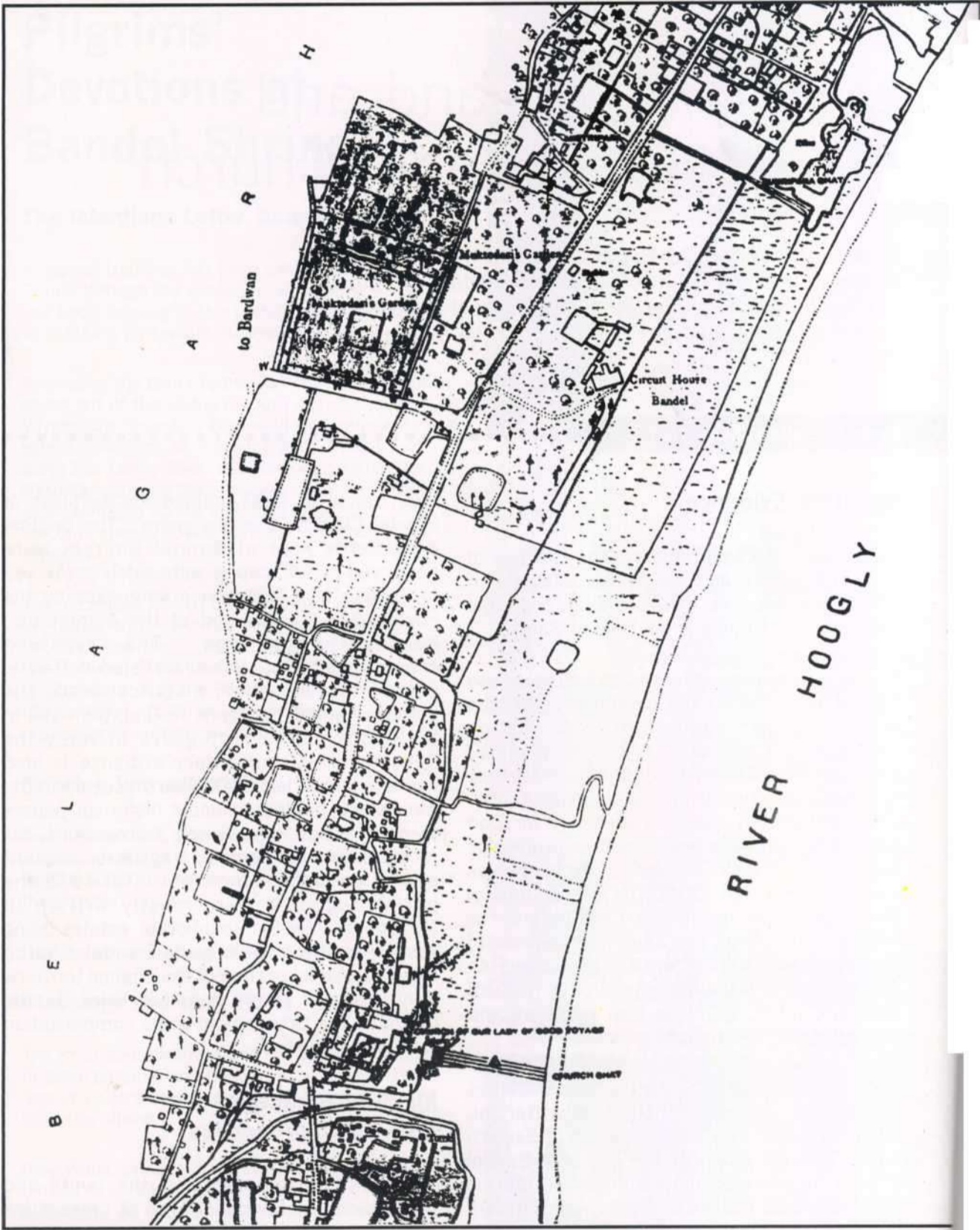
The Augustinians, called by the Portuguese settlers, arrived at Bandel in the year 1580. The first main church was built in 1599; later on the Padroado Diocese of Mylapore (Chennai) took over the administration. In 1928 they handed over church and properties to the Salesians of Don Bosco in exchange for Don Bosco Press (still existing) and other properties in Tanjur-Tamilnadu. The deed of exchange was signed on May 24, 1928, by the Bishop of Mylapore, the Archbishop of Calcutta and the Salesian Provincial. The Salesian Provincial of Calcutta Province (Northern India) and the R.C. Archbishop of Calcutta appoint the Prior of Bandel Church, granting him religious and ecclesiastical jurisdictions respectively.

The Priests in charge of the Catholic Churches of Calcutta Cathedral, hailed from Bandel, historically the first Catholic Church of Eastern India. The endowment of 777 bighas to Bandel Church that formed the zamindari estate, is an undisputed historical event. The Firman, containing 17 concessions, decreed by Emperor

Shah Jahan in 1633, guided the destinies of Bandel Church for many years. The original documents kept at Bandel Church, were destroyed by fire, copies were safely preserved in Persian and Portuguese languages by the Portuguese Viceroy and at the Augustinian headquarters in Goa. The seventeen concessions by Shah Jahan are listed in 'Bandel Church and Hooghly', historical book, the author of which had gone to Goa, then still in the hands of the Portuguese to verify the documents. Documentary evidence is also contained in at least 200 files preserved in the monastery, holding valuable historical papers of court cases, land deeds, transactions, tax receipts paid by tenants, registers, account books, correspondence, etc. Till 1928 the parish registers were mostly written in Portuguese. By the abolition of estates being vested in the government, Bandel Church retained a small portion of the original territory, duly recorded in the name of Prior Bandel Church. The Government gives compensation for the vested land.

Main documents of the Church properties

The claim to ownership of the lands and possessions by Bandel Church at present are based on the following documents:



Hooghly Survey Map of 1886, (sheet no.1., Sect. I., scale 16"=1mile)

Records of Rights from the cadestral to the present day, that is CR, RS, LR porchas, the Prior of Bandel Church is recorded as the sole owner of all the properties mentioned there: church, monastery, living quarters, roads and path, playgrounds, etc.

Land and municipal taxes are regularly paid and the receipts preserved by the Prior.

Land compensation rolls in which the vested lands are listed, and records of yearly payments by the Land Compensation Office, are duly kept. They are a proof of the concessions by Emperor Shah Jahan.

Court cases challenging boundaries and ownership of church's landed property through the years were all decided in favour of Bandel Church. One suit filed by the Municipality, claiming ownership of the private road open to visitors and pilgrims from Sarat Sarani to the Eastern entrance to the monastery and the Shrine, reveals the greediness by interested parties to grab church property. The proceedings of the said case in the 1st Munsif Court, No.581 of 1934, lasted more than two years, numerous witnesses deposed from both sides, it ended with a peremptory order of the Court stating that the road was undisputed property of the Church. The case and subsequent appeals were dismissed right away with costs.

Requisitioning and de-requisitioning by the Government of landed property of the church in the year 1980-1994 prove that the Prior of Bandel Church was the recorded owner.

By order of the Collector, Hooghly District (No12/438D of 1953-54) the ownership of the Bandel Church was recognised by the Govt. and directed the Tahasilder to realise rent regarding settlement Dag. No.1724/1737 under Khatian No.3 which is most relevant because it regards the ownership of the Plot of land lately contested in different proceedings, in the southern portion of the church grounds.

Other historical notes of interest

One Hooghly Survey Map of 1886, (sheet no.1., Sect. I., scale 16"=1mile,) shows in writing the position of the Church Ghat where the cross now stands, towards the riverbanks. A raised road-passage is also delineated through which goods were carried to the still existing ghat, closer to the entrance of the monastery. The ghat near the riverbanks and the raised passage through the grounds, were levelled down to provide St. John's School children, holding classes in the monastery, with a playground. It

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is recorded as such in the original Record of Rights (*Porchas*).

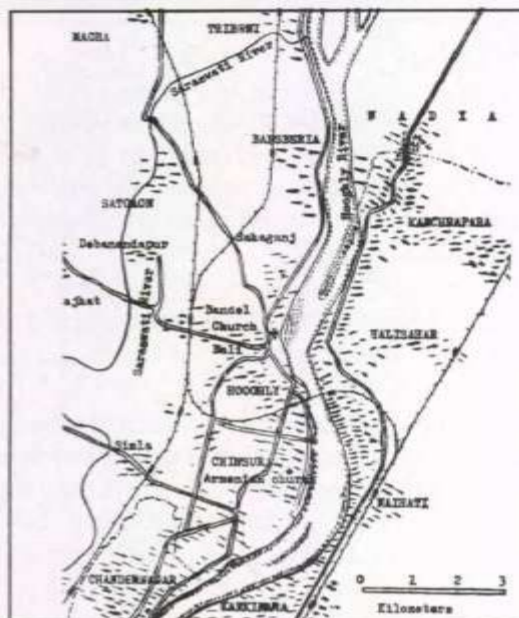
In 1936 and subsequent years, residing at or visiting Bandel, I saw the present church grounds protected by fence, having crosses raised on high posts at intervals. A ladder was placed over the fence, so that nobody might easily cross the compound to the riverside.

I worked during a full year to level and cultivate the uneven fields now enclosed in Don Bosco Seminary. Part of them became playgrounds and part vegetable gardens of that institution to the present day. **The claim that these playgrounds were originally, from time immemorial, open to the public is mere imagination.**

Extracts from Chapter XIV of the book entitled *Hooghly Past and Present*, written by Shumboo Chunder Dey, BH, Vakil, High Court, Calcutta report interesting events and descriptions of Bandel Church activities and properties. We quote a few.

In that chapter it is reported that: The French traveller Bernier, resident in India for 12 years (1657-69) states 'that Jehangir suffered the Portuguese in Hooghly upon account of traffic and of his having no aversion to Christians, as also because they promised to keep the Bay of Bengal clear from pirates'.

The siege and the capture of Hooghly took place in 1632. The fort was demolished so also the Churches, but it would seem that the Convent did not suffer much, if at all. The Governor and a large number of Christian captives were dragged to the Imperial residence at Agra...The five monks were more cruelly dealt with: four of them were immediately put to death and the fifth, John De Cruz, was reserved for severe punishment for which a day was appointed, when dragged at dawn, the Emperor, forgetting his usual good nature, ordered him, in the spirit of Nero, to be cast under the feet of a furious elephant. But wonderful to relate, the burly brute, moved at the sight of the holy man, lost his native ferocity and commenced cocking him gently with its Lithe proboscis...(We read in Asiaticus 1808 and interesting detail: "The petition was granted and while the Emperor thought that the spectacle would not last half and hour, the prodigy, to the great administration of all, lasted the whole afternoon. The elephant, instead of harming Father, continued all the time to turn around him, trumpeting fiercely, driving off with its trunk the crowds" end of quotation from Asiaticus). The Emperor seized with religious



As the Portuguese went on prospering in their settlement, the missionaries of the Order of St. Augustine came to Hooghly. The Convent of Bandel, the Church of Saint Paul and the Church of Misericordia to which was attached an orphanage of young ladies were founded. Merchants and others committed their maiden daughters, in their absence, to sacerdotal protection in the orphanage of the Church of Misericordia. These sacred edifices were frequented by a large number of worshippers and thus Hooghly became a place of great importance from a secular as well as from a religious point of view. (End of quotation from Chapter IV of *Hooghly Past and Present*).

Within the precincts of that small tract they were allowed to exercise all magisterial powers with regard to the Christians save and except the strictly royal prerogative of life and death.

awe at once offered to grant any reasonable request the father might make. The good Augustinian solicited his own liberty, that of the fellow prisoners and also to grant some rent-free land to Bandel Church. The grant the Emperor made in 1633 and confirmed in 1646 covered an area of 777 bighas of land.

From the documents and facts reported above, there can be no doubt about the ownership of the lands and properties of Bandel Church. After earlier attempts, a wall has been erected to protect the church grounds. Times have changed, the population has greatly increased, and undesirable activities were taking place: the Church has to protect the precious and sacred heritage of a glorious past and the holy places of the Shrine and Basilica.



About the Author

Rev. Fr. **L. Gobetti** SDB, is the former Prior of Bandel Basilica. He continues to serve as part of the Parish clergy.

Salesians at Bandel

The Salesians came to Bandel in 1928. The shrine of Our Lady with its adjacent properties was given to them in exchange for an institution they had at Tanjore in the diocese of Madras-Mylapore. The Salesians had come there in 1906. The "Padroado" Bishop of both Tanjore and Bandel decided to compensate them by giving them Bandel Church in exchange for Tanjore. In 1927, Rev. Fr. Peter Ricaldone, a Major Superior of the Salesians, who was then in India for an extraordinary visitation, accepted most willingly the shrine of Bandel.

On 24th May 1928 the final deed was drawn and the Salesians of Don Bosco became the guardians of the Shrine of Our Lady of Happy Voyage. On the same day Mgr. Louis Mathias SDB, the then provincial of the Salesians in India, appointed Fr. Henry Raygasse SDB, as the first Salesian Prior of Bandel Church. Accompanied by Fr. Marian Uguet SDB, (who was then the Salesian superior of the Catholic Orphan Press, at Portuguese Church Street, Calcutta,) Fr. Raygasse submitted his credentials as the parish priest and prior of Bandel to the then Goan parish priest, Fr. Rodrigues, who only after two years left Bandel for Goa.

Bandel was then, and for many years to come a malaria-infested area. The vicinity of the Church was covered with thick unhealthy jungle inhabited by wild animals, including leopards, jackals and hyenas. Most of the buildings around the church were crumbling: Bandel was no more the glamorous place of years past. Within six months Fr. Raygasse, was down with malaria. The very day of the Feast of the Holy Rosary found him



Lenten Procession: Old Portuguese custom, c. 1940



in such bad shape that two other Salesians had to run to his rescue, Fr. Uguet from Calcutta, and Mgr. Emmanuel Bars, the Apostolic Administrator of Krishnanagar, from the diocese. He experienced lots of trouble from land tenants.

In spite of difficulties Fr. Raygasse promoted the faith among the few Christians in the area and the devotion to Our Lady by organizing pilgrimages. Pilgrims began to flock especially in the two main Feasts of Bandel Church: Our Lady of Happy Voyage in May and Our Lady of the Rosary in November. On both celebrations the Archbishop of Calcutta would preside. The Catholic Association of Bengal began to have its annual pilgrimage at Bandel. In 1930 Fr. Raygasse initiated the publication of "Our Lady of Bandel" magazine starting with a few hundred copies; now it goes into thousands.

When Fr. Raygasse left Bandel, Rev. Fr. J. Mazzetti SDB, was appointed Prior. During his tenure of office, Archbishop Perier SJ, of Calcutta approved the flourishing Archconfraternity of the Holy Rosary on January 11th 1934. That same year Fr. Mazzetti left due to illness and his place was taken over by Fr. Hauber SDB, who soon was substituted by Fr. A. Cocco SDB, who being a lawyer, gave much of his attention to legal matters concerning the title to the properties of the Shrine.

The year 1936 saw several new developments in Bandel. A boarding house was opened for boys who could frequent St. John's High School. The Salesians started their Noviciate with Fr. O. Marengo SDB, as the Novice Master on 24th November. The previous year the Salesian Scholasticate was destroyed by fire in Shillong, and so the Salesian scholastics found their home in Bandel. They enlivened the old monastery with songs, cheerfulness and games with the local youngsters. Church services took more solemnity with Gregorian chant and polyphonic music. There were also frequent ordinations to the Orders and to Priesthood. But that was only for a brief time. In 1938 the novices and students of philosophy left for Sonada, Darjeeling District, and the students of theology left for Shillong.

On 15th January 1940 Our Lady of Bandel opened her mantle to house the first boys of the Apostolic School, aspiring to become Salesians, Fr. J. Bacchiarello SDB was the first Rector, and also Prior of Bandel. From now till 1986 the Rector would also be the Prior of Bandel Church. With the entry of Italy into World War II, many Salesians were interned in concentration camps and the boys of the Apostolic School had to be shifted to Sonada. It was only in 1951 that the Apostolic School was reopened. Fr. Leo Piasecki SDB, the Prior of Bandel from 1950, had prepared the place for the boys. The beginnings were difficult, but with the passing of time things improved. As new and more boys were coming, buildings had to be constructed. The boys would study up to class VIII and then go to Sonada to complete their matriculation studies. During the Chinese war with India in 1962, the boys from Sonada and Silliguri again took refuge at Bandel. Our Lady's Higher Secondary School was then shifted to Bandel for the benefit of the Apostolic Boys. It was only in 1978 that the High School of Bandel was thrown open to outside boys and named Don Bosco School, while the Apostolic School came to be named Don Bosco Seminary.

During this period well-known Rectors of the Apostolic School looked also after the Shrine of Our Lady as Priors. Among them Frs. J. Marchesi, P.J. Sheehy, R. Strosco, M. Baroi. In 1970 the Rectors were relieved of the responsibility of looking after the Shrine of Our Lady and of the Christian population of the area. Fr. J. Schilder was prior from 1970 — 1971; Fr. J. Dal Broi from 1971 — 1983; Fr. A. Kuriakose from 1983 — 1986; Fr. C.J. Sebastian from 1986 — 1988; from 1988 — 1997 Fr. L. Gobetti, and from May 1997 onward Fr. B. Fernandes.

The Photofeature attempts to capture some of those magical moments of the Salesian community in Bandel...





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Photo Feature



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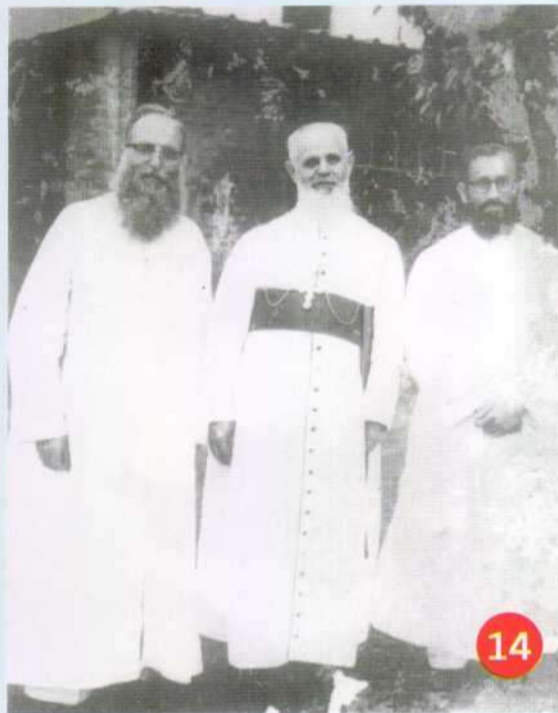
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- 1. Salesians at Bandel, 1939
- 2. Fr. P.J. Sheehy, Prior and Rector, with his "lads"
- 3. Fr. Bartholomew Varga, A great gardener of souls
- 4. Fr. Aloysius Ricceri, Rector Major, surrounded by eminent Salesians, and by the Aspirants of Bandel
- 5. Fr. Alessi, Fr. Paviotti, Fr. Marchesi and Fr. Sheehy with some aspirants, 1956.
- 6. Fr. Mariano Uguet, with some aspirants

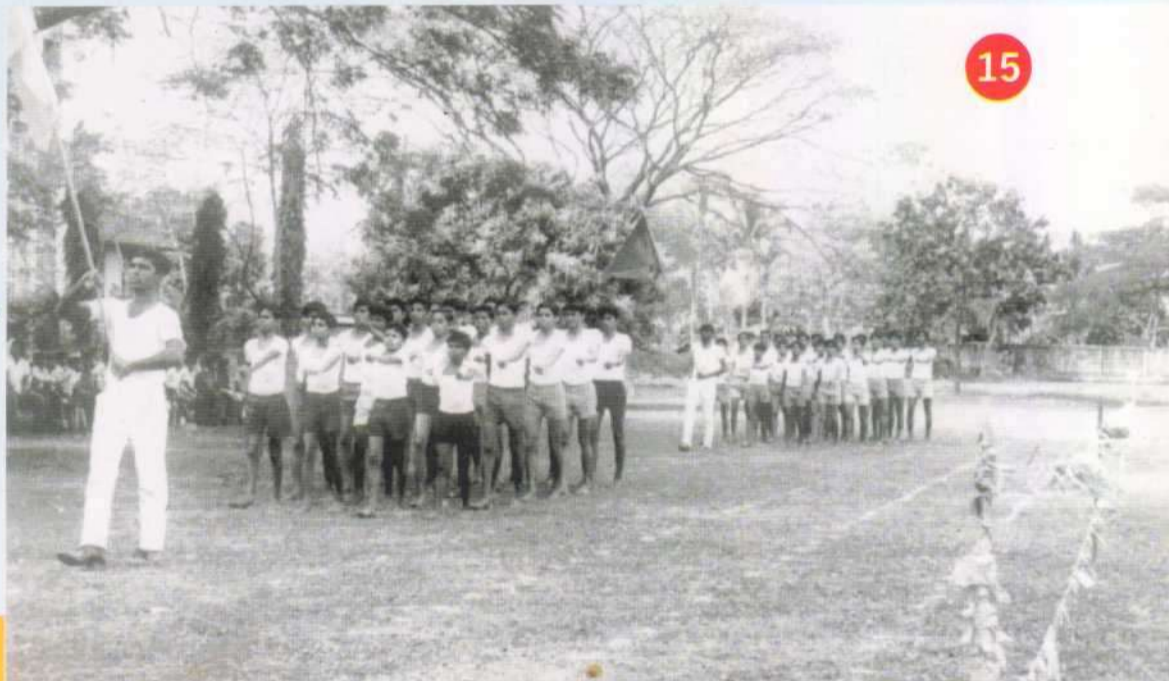


- 7. Fr. Leo Heriot with clerics in practical training
- 8. Fr. Brian Diamond, Rector, on Rector's Day at the Aspirantate
- 9. Decree of the erection of Sodalitas, by the Rector Major, 1954.
- 10. Members of the Provincial Chapter, 1983

• SALESIANS AT BANDEL •



- 11. Aspirants... Happy to work
- 12. Bishop Robert Kerketta visits Bandel in 1971
- 13. Fr. Rosario Stroschio, Rector and Prior, with young Salesians
- 14. Msgr. Marengo with Frs. Rappatti and Mathew Baroi
- 15. Sports Day march-past by the Aspirants





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17



18

- 16. Fr. Aloysius Ricceri, Rector Major and Aspirants at Bandel
- 17. Bishop Mathew Baroi, former Rector and Prior
- 18. Fr. A.J. Kurikose, Prior, with his "little flock"
- 19. Salesian Retreat Preacher's Seminar, 1982





- 20. First National Conference of Salesian Brothers, 1981
- 21. Fr. George Williams with Fr. P.P. Paul, Rector, and Frs. Joseph Gomes and C.T. Jose with Aspirants

**Salesian
Community
at the
Basilica**



Fr. Bertie
Fernandes

Fr. Louis
Gobetti



Fr. K.T. Thomas

Fr. Thomas
Pulickal





Beautification and Renovation at Bandel Basilica

By Fr. L. Gobetti, SDB

Many friends of Our Lady of Bandel may be happy to know what new developments have taken place at the Basilica. So I am writing a report about the works which have been completed in and around the Church.

I. Works executed within the Basilica

It must be mentioned that when His Grace Archbishop Henry D'Souza of Calcutta petitioned the Holy See to have Bandel Shrine declared "Basilica," one of the conditions was that the structure of the Church be "worthy" of such title. "It should bear a better look than that of an ordinary Church." Following these directions it was then decided to renew and remodel the Sanctuary, including the altar, the celebrants' seats, and the lectern, with marble and granite.

The new marble altar was consecrated during an impressive ceremony by His Grace Abp. Henry D'Souza on May 6th 1988. Yet the declaration of the Basilica was still to come.

Renovation of the Church by stages

1. The old Communion railing was removed and reconstructed in white marble leaving ample space for the distribution of the Eucharist and for performance of the religious rites. It matches the style of the altar and precludes access to undesirable trespassers.

2. The pedestals of the statues of St. Joseph and St. Anthony have been remodelled with marble and granite, removing the irregularly shaped stands which were adapted out of parts of the old pulpit of the Church. The pillars behind these two statues as also the two front columns on which are placed the niches of the Infant Jesus of Prague and St. Therese of the Child Jesus, have been adorned with marble, granite and figure tiles.

3. The main entrance doors from the veranda were found badly damaged and decaying, especially the big frames. New doors artistically engraved with Marian symbols, have replaced the old ones and the entrance has been beautified with slabs.

4. The base of the columns in the church has been dressed up with pink marbles from Rajasthan. The whole marble floor of the sanctuary and of the church had to be reset. As it had no brick soling it was giving way and some of the slabs were cracking up.

5. The choir loft has been cleared of the huge electric organ, unused for the past twenty years; the front windows with damaged and decaying wooden shutters have been replaced with artistic figure-glass. The whole area at the back of the church became thus immersed in light, pleasing the eye. The wooden and roughly shaped railing of the choir-loft has been replaced by an elegant metal-made artistic work.

6. The roof of the whole church has been repainted and the walls given a simple ivory colour coating to replace the old blue. Also the monumental wooden structures behind the three altars have been repainted bright in vivid colours.

7. The Baptistry kept hiding behind its big doors a beautiful marble font. It was decided to open it up to the view of the pilgrims. The whole place has been adorned with marbles and tiles and has become an attractive spot for all to see. A bass-relief of the baptism of Jesus by St. John Baptist has been replaced in it. The brass-cover of the font, which had a plain surface, has now been artistically engraved with father-mother-child, symbolised by three temple lamps.

8. The tomb of the body of Christ, an old relic of Portuguese devotion has been beautifully reshaped by marble and granite slabs and protected by a large front glass.



● Entrance of Basilica from the riverside, with newly installed statue of Our Lady of Bandel



● View of the new, larger balcony
Below: Verandah of the Monastery, leading to the church





● *The Coronation of Our Lady
— above the main door*

9. The whole church has been provided with new fans, covering the entire area. The pipes hanging from the roofs and hampering the clear view of the church hall have been substituted with horizontally placed supports, crossing through the pillars to hold fans on the central and side aisles.

10. The whole electrical lining and sound-system have been renewed and furnished with complete set of speakers, mikes and amplifiers; a new electric organ has been provided. The power supply has been made steady by two generating sets.



● *Crucifix on the main verandah*

11. The square in front of the church, at the graveyard site, has been rebuilt with chequered marble and tile pavement, supported by deep-laid brick soling. The base area of the mast has also been beautified.

12. On the front-wall of the church, two coat-of-arms have been placed. One is the papal emblem, a sign of the status of Basilica; the other is a newly designed ensign of the Basilica which includes Our Lady of Bandel and the ship with the Holy Rosary encircling it.

13. A most outstanding beautification to the Basilica has been provided by the newly installed pictures of the mysteries of the Rosary. They replace the colour-glass windows on the upper part of the church walls. The new pictures are on fibreglass (Crink-glass) from Jaipur. They are a marvel to admire and a true gift of Mary because it came to us in totally unforeseen and unexpected manner, which can be explained only by Mary's gracious intervention. For a long time we were looking for suitable pictures, or an artist, to paint them but we were totally disappointed. The best models in



● *Coats of Arms over the two aisle doors
of the Basilica*

the world were “casually discovered” in an old Bible. Their reproduction on glass, so beautifully done, was also out of our sight and knowledge as we came to know of the first factory of artwork on fibreglass in India, at Jaipur. We are grateful to Our Heavenly Mother for this great gift.

14. The two wooden altars of the Sacred Heart and St. John Bosco in the Basilica itself, as also the structure of the main altar have a new concrete base. Don Bosco's altar is still tilting at one side and the base of the main altar has been reconstructed with concrete and granite. In the process of repairing them the marble portions of the side altars were redesigned in the same style as the main one and of the new communion railing.



9 The excellent "Pieta" reproduction on one side of the graveyard

II. Work done outside the Basilica

In order to enhance the condition and beauty of the new Basilica, in conformity with the expressed directives of the Roman Curia, extensive repairs and remodelling have been done also on the external part of the building and surroundings.



The Graveyard

1. The site of the beautiful statue of Christ the King and Crucifix at the meeting of two verandas near the entrance to the Basilica has been renovated and remodelled; a pedestal for

Below: A sampling of the paintings on the walls of the Monastery verandah





● *Inscriptions in the church
Below: View of the Retreat House
and Garden*

the statue and decorations on the wall, in colour-granite and marble have been done.

2. The sacristy has been renovated on the pattern of the church hall. The old tiled floor, which had no brick soling, was sinking irregularly, and the walls were showing signs of damp and decay. The floor has been reconstructed with pink-coloured marble slabs and the sidewalls have been covered with granite and ceramic tiles. New furniture has been provided. The room adjacent to the sacristy has also been renewed and made suitable for washing, polishing vases, preparing flowers, etc. The whole lime plaster on the upper part of the walls, have been replaced with ceramic

tiles and new doors have been put up, beautifully carved with biblical symbols.

3. The old altar within the Grotto of Lourdes was made of white marble; the parts being joined with iron rods and wire, which became rusty, caused the marble pieces to start falling apart and cracking up. Because the altar facing the wall is no more used there was no point restoring the broken one. In its place a big Crucifix has been set up, known as "St. Francis of Assisi Crucifix". In the life of St. Francis we read that, as he was ecstatically praying before the Crucified Lord, Jesus detached one arm and lowered the hand on his shoulder. It represents humanity being redeemed by Christ. Devout people deeply impressed flock in great numbers to Jesus and Mary at the Grotto which opens out to view from the monastery veranda.

4. A new staircase to the balcony has been constructed, providing a double access for the pilgrims, especially on occasions when they visit the Shrine in large numbers. The decaying flower-pot shaped columns of old railing have been substituted with granite ones.

5. The open space and passage in front of the Grotto of Lourdes has been rebuilt with a chequered marble flooring; sitting accommodation has been provided in a wide semi-circle. The garden itself has been fenced with a beautifully designed railing.

6. For the convenience of pilgrims sanitary facilities have been expanded. A tube-well, operated by a motor-driven pump and an over-head tank, have been provided close to the monastery rooms.



Chairs, benches and tables, adapted and reconditioned from old church articles have been placed in the rooms and veranda for the convenience of the visitors. A second tube-well has been sunk at the side of Fatima garden, to cope with any failure of normal water supply. A reservoir for cool drinking water has been put up in the monastery premises and toilet facilities have been doubled.

7. The Chapel on the roof of the Basilica has been given a face-lift. The original paper pictures displayed on glass at the sides, have been replaced with paintings describing the whole history of the Basilica from its beginnings to the present day. Fibreglass has been used. The whole area around the chapel and the balcony itself has been enlarged by three times the original area.

8. The exterior walls of the Basilica, which were extensively damaged, have been cleared of the old lime and sand plaster, substituting it with granite tiles. Bandel Church remains the same, though in and around it beautification has been made in view of the status of Basilica.

9. Above the arch between the church hall and the sanctuary, a painting of the Last Supper on crink-Jaipur glass, measuring 16ft. x 8ft. was installed. It recalls the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the memory of which is offered on the altar below and is given in Holy Communion to the faithful.

10. In order to complete the marble work, the three main entrances in front of the church have been framed with marble and granite stone. It was found that the masonry, in certain places was about to fall off in chunks at any time.

11. A new place was prepared for the replica statue of Our Lady of Bandel in the Shrine. It had been placed at a window opening, in a temporary set up, causing inconvenience during functions. The new little chapel where Our Lady is placed on a marble pedestal is carved into the wall near the exit, opposite to the Baptismal font.

12. Three new bells have been brought from Italy. They are the gift of the friends of Our Lady of Bandel in that country. They are placed in the belfry and operated electronically. Their chimes add joy to the festivities and processions at the Basilica.

13. On the Balcony of the Basilica where a statue of Our Lady of Happy Voyage is placed, repairs were essential by replacing the railings which showed signs of breaking up. The floor and the small altar were also damaged and the marble was swelling up with cracks. Thin marble slabs which did not resist the heat were replaced with granite. The area of the balcony has been increased by two thirds and made to rest safely on two big pillars in front of the church. The walls, the altar of offerings, the railings and floors have all been reconstructed in granite.

14. A perfect copy of Michelangelo's Pieta, in white cement — Mother Mary holding the dead body of Christ, is placed in the graveyard in front of the church accessible to pious pilgrims.

A statue of Our Lady, taking souls to Jesus, is also placed on one side of the graveyard.



Hallowed Spots

A photo-tour of the Shrine's most important spots of religious and historic interest

In and Around the Bandel Basilica



Our Lady of the Holy Rosary
— Main altar



Sacred Heart of Jesus
— Left altar



St. John Bosco
— Right altar



Body of Jesus in the tomb
— within the church



St. Joseph



St. Anthony of Padua



Infant Jesus of Prague



Our Lady of Bandel and Relic



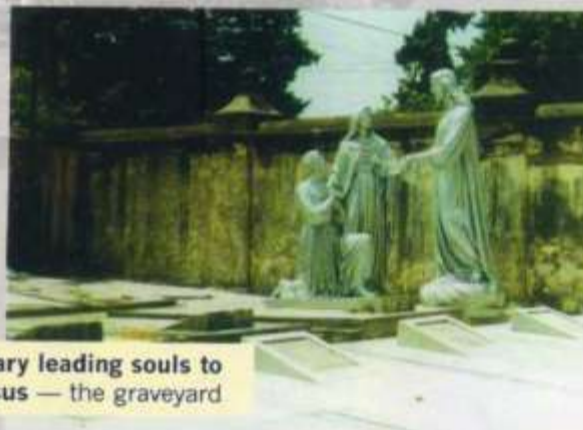
Jesus and Mary on the way to Calvary



St. Teresa of the Child Jesus



The Baptismal Font



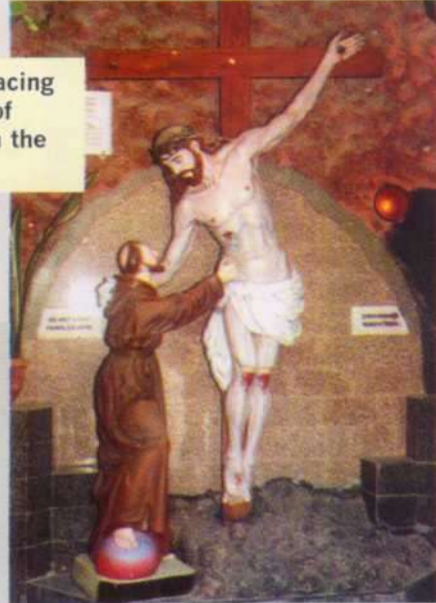
Mary leading souls to Jesus — the graveyard





The Captain's Votive mast

Jesus embracing St. Francis of Assisi from the cross



At the Balcony of Our Lady of Happy Voyage



The Grotto of Lourdes



St. Rock

Historical details, at the Balcony





Our Lady of Fatima
— the Garden



Christ the King



Our Lady over
the entrance of the
Monastery



Cross on the church
grounds



Mary Help of Christians
— Seminary

If you have not already
done so, we hope you will
have the opportunity to visit
the Shrine and pray at
these hallowed spots.



Important

Visitors

to Bandel Basilica

Photographs capturing some of the many important personages to visit the shrine in recent times...



Clockwise from top left:

1. Governor Dias and Mrs. Dias
2. Mother Theresa
3. Archbishop Marchisano, from the Vatican
4. Governor Nurul Hassan



Clockwise from top left.

- 1. Fr. Luciano Odorico, Councillor of Missions
- 2. Archbishop Raphael Cheenath SVD
- 3. Msgr. Francis Gomes, Vicar General
- 4. Fr. Joaquim D'Souza, Regional Superior, Australasia

Left:

- 1. Governor R. Kidwai

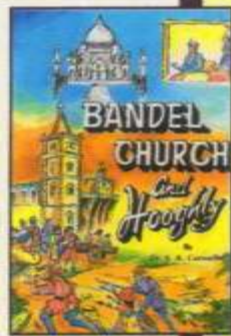


Our Lady's most important visitor is **you.**

Publications of the Basilica

Spreading the message of Our Lady of Bandel through print and visual media...

Bandel Church and Hooghly by Rev. Fr. S.A. Carvalho SDB is a historical study of the foundation of Hooghly, its golden days, its destruction and the miracle of Our Lady of Bandel. Late Lawrence T. Picachy sj, presenting the preface to the book wrote, "Fr. S.A. Carvalho, presents a stimulating account entitled "Bandel Church and Hooghly". The author who comes from Brazil had always cherished a great admiration for the pioneering work of the early Portuguese missionaries of Bengal. At his first visit to Bandel he decided to make a scientific research of the renowned pilgrim centre. Excellent books and manuscripts

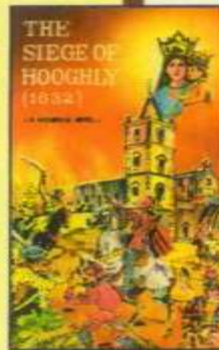


are available in the Asiatic Society Library and St. Xavier's College Library, both of which are housed in Calcutta. A penetrating research has paved the way for a fascinating description of the early days of Bandel. Fr. Carvalho's vivid account makes a valuable contribution to the history of the Catholic Church in West Bengal." The words of the late Archbishop of Calcutta are a fitting tribute to the work of the author of this historical book on Bandel Basilica and Hooghly.

The Siege of Hooghly, a historical novel by S.A. Carvalho SDB.

A description of the events by the author himself; "Every inch of ground that Mughals advanced the Portuguese

valiantly maintained. Their obstinate resistance showed the grief with which they yielded up Hooghly, which was to them a paradise on earth. Exerting all the strength of their arms, they embraced, as it were, that most beloved soil, from which neither wounds, nor defeat, nor death itself could part them."



"The Catechist" by Rev. Fr. Louis Gobetti sdb

Pope Pius XII wrote: "The catechist represents perhaps the most classical example of the lay apostolate, by the nature of his work and because he makes up for the lack of Priests." A useful booklet for training and formation of the lay catechist in the work of evangelisation and faith formation.

Pilgrim's Prayer Book by Rev. Fr. Louis Gobetti SDB

This little booklet of prayers is useful on pilgrimages and visits to Bandel and at home. One can find information about timings and celebrations during the year at the shrine, and the Novena prayers for each day. It can be a companion as one prays at each devotional place at the shrine.



Christian Life, Jesus the Way

Creed of Faith



"Our Lady of Bandel" A Monthly magazine

In the year 1930, Rev Fr. Ragasse, the first Salesian Prior of the Church initiated the publication of the monthly magazine with a view to spreading the devotion to Our Lady of Bandel. It had a humble beginning. For a number of years, the students of Salesian College, Sonada, contributed greatly to the publication of the magazine as it was edited from there. Rev. Fr. Louis Gobetti sdb, is the publisher and acting editor of the monthly. The English and Hindi editions of the magazine reach more than ten thousand homes and institutions all over, sustaining the faith and devotion of many.

The Father in Heaven speaks to man on Earth Three booklets, containing translations of articles by eminent spiritual writers, which are most valuable and useful for Christian life. Jesus calls each one and the response given to this call is the life of the Christian. It is through the ordinary events of life that the Father speaks to man of today, as He spoke to the prophets and men of old. Compiled by Fr. L. Gobetti SDB.

Historical Sketch edited by Dr. Jose Parapully sdb

This short historical sketch is prepared as a guide to the pilgrims and the numerous visitors who come to the ancient church.

400 Glorious Years of Bandel Church (Video documentary)

"This video presentation has been prepared with the intention of making known to all, the uniqueness and historicity of Bandel Church," said the Prior, Fr. Bertie Fernandes. The 32-minute video available in English and Bengali, produced by Fr. Fernandes, begins with the coming of the Portuguese who set up a trading centre at Hooghly in the year 1579. It moves on to show the establishment of the monastery and Church in 1599, and the destruction of Hooghly in 1632.

The miraculous story of Our Lady of Bandel is presented through stills of historical visuals and interviews. It narrates the rebirth and growth of the shrine into a popular pilgrim centre for people of every caste and creed, to its establishment as Minor Basilica by Pope John Paul II.

Story, Music and direction by Ashok Kumar Chattopadhyay, was re-edited for Doordarshan by Mrs. Jharna Das, Asst. Programme Director, Doordarshan, Calcutta.

Witnesses
Of Mercy

The Rosary In Families

A Hindu Brahmin, friend of Our Lady of Bandel, recently came to the Shrine to pray, with the intention of purchasing the best rosary-beads at the Souvenir Centre.

Meeting one of the Fathers at the Basilica, he said that five times before he had purchased Rosaries made of beautifully cut crystal pieces, as they are manufactured at Loreto in Italy. He intended to donate the Rosary to a niece who would soon get married at Calcutta. He went on explaining that the efficacy of Mary's protection had been proved in five families to whom he had offered the gift of a Rosary at their marriage. He emphatically explained that all of them were visibly blessed with happiness, good health and wellbeing.

This time the Rosary was for his niece, who was very dear to him. He was much disappointed because the crystal beads he used to buy were out of stock; he had to content himself with a second-best rosary. This gentleman also confessed that, led by his devotion to Mary, he was brought near to Jesus, having been deeply impressed seeing a picture of the Saviour on a cross shedding his blood to wash away the sins of humankind.

We, who have great devotion to Our Lady of Bandel, are filled with joy when we hear of so many beautiful examples of the love and favours she grants to devotees of all faiths, and especially of her concern for happiness and welfare in their families. ●

Mary and the Great Jubilee 2000

By Fr. Paul Puthanangady SDB

Mary invites us to a deeper sense of mission...

There is a feeling of expectation and joy filling the atmosphere as we draw near to the close of the second millennium and to the beginning of third millennium. In itself, the years 2000 and 2001 are not going to be different from any other calendar years. For us Christians, however, it can make a difference, if we look at these events from a perspective of faith. We are celebrating the presence of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world for the last 2000 years in our land. We are called to respond to this saving presence of the risen Lord at this particular moment of history, as it takes a new turn into the future. The Holy Father Pope John Paul II has described the specific meaning of this Jubilee situating it in a spirit of faith within the life and mission of the Church:

“The coming of the Third Millennium prompts the Christian community to lift its eyes of faith to embrace new horizons in proclaiming the Kingdom of God. It is imperative therefore at this special time to return more faithfully than ever to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which shed new light upon the missionary task of the Church in view of the demands of evangelization today” (*Incarnationis Mysterium* n.2)

This Jubilee year is, therefore, a call to reawaken the Church to its identity as a community in a state of mission. In other words, mission is not one of the many activities of the Church, but it is an essential constituent element of the Church. She is asked by the Spirit to realise that she came into existence in the world as a community of mission. As we are getting ready

to enter the Third Millennium with this renewed awareness of our identity, Mary, the Mother of Jesus stands out as a model and inspiration for the entire ecclesial community. Vatican II has been described by Pope John XXIII as a new Pentecost which revitalizes the whole Church and sends her into the world (*Gaudium et Spes*) with a renewed sense of mission. Every member of the Church is called by the Spirit to realize that he or she is not merely a member of an institution, but a person with a missionary mandate, irrespective of the state of life or position one occupies in the Church. This Pentecostal transformation is the ultimate goal of all the changes initiated by Vatican II. By virtue of the membership in the Church one commits oneself to be a missionary in the milieu. Just as Mary was present in the midst of the disciples at the first Pentecost, she is also present at this Pentecost at the beginning of the third millennium. In fact Vatican II places her right in the midst of the Church with its apostolic mandate:

“The Church, therefore, in her apostolic work too, rightly looks to her who gave birth to Christ, who thus conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, in order that through the Church he could be born and increase in the hearts of the faithful. In her life the Virgin has been a model of that motherly love with which all who join in the Church’s apostolic mission for the regeneration of mankind should be animated” (*Lumen Gentium* n.65)

In this article, I would like to present a portrait of Mary, as the model of our mission in the third millennium. In doing this, I hope to follow

the lines traced out by the Council which is the providential Pentecostal event which God has effected in our times in order to prepare the Christian community to a New Way of being Church, that is, a Church with its identity as a community in a state of mission. Mary is a missionary model for us not so much in the things that she did as in the quality of the response that she gave to God.

1. MARY RESPONDS TO THE WORD OF GOD

What makes Mary our model is not so much her virtues and qualities as her response to God's Work. This is very clear from the Annunciation scene. Before the Annunciation took place she is presented to us by the evangelist as an ordinary Jewish girl, getting ready to live the normal life of a Jewish woman. There is nothing extraordinary about her. What made the difference in her life is the response she gave to the angel. We can distinguish three characteristics in this response.

a) She believes in the love, which God has for her. The angel tells her "Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! (Lk. 1,28). She has to go through a struggle before she can accept these words of the angel: "She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting would mean" (Lk.1.29). We take this as the joyful proclamation of her Immaculate Conception, her being privileged to be born without the original sin, to be free from all types of alienation from God from the moment of her conception. But for Mary, it was a source of inner disturbance. She believes in the powerful love of God for her. She personalizes this privilege and makes it become effective in her life through her response of absolute faithfulness to this love of God in the midst of struggles and temptations. Being totally loved by God, her Immaculate Conception, thus becomes for her a challenge of fidelity. "Committing herself whole heartedly, and impeded by no sin, to God's saving will, she devoted herself totally, as a handmaid of the Lord, to the grace of the work of her Son, under and with him, serving the mystery of redemption, by the grace of the Almighty" (LG.56)

Our missionary commitment should be based on the sure foundation of a God who loves and sends us into the world. It was the deep conviction of the love which God has for her that made her face the world of sin. We have no other source of strength than the God who loves in the fulfilment of our mission. One who is not convinced of this should not go into mission because it is possible that we gradually replace the divine source of energy with our efficiency. Then it is no more the Kingdom of God that we build, but our own kingdom. In the case of Mary, due to the special role that she was called to play in the history of salvation, she was given the privilege of being freed from sin: but she had to struggle to respond to this privilege. In our case, we are not free from original sin, but we are redeemed by Christ and the love of God is within us. Therefore, following the example of Mary, we need to struggle constantly against the evil in us and in the world around us. We get this strength when we believe in a God who loves us. This God experience is the foundation of all our apostolic and missionary endeavours. Nay more, once this God experience is in us, we will become missionaries at every moment and in every situation.

b) She submits herself to the plan of God. The Annunciation scene presents us Mary in a confused state. She is betrothed to Joseph in marriage. Now, there is a demand from God to become mother without going through the normal married life. She cannot understand it. "How can this come about since I have no knowledge of man?" (Lk. 1,34). In the midst of this lack of clarity she finds a response: "You see before you, the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said (Lk. 1,38). The virginity of Mary is a consequence of the motherhood which she accepts. These two go together; the world cannot understand this because both are founded on one sure foundation: submission to the plan of God of which the world is not capable. The core element of virginity is the total and unconditional submission to the Word of God. Motherhood is the manifestation of the fruitfulness of this

virginal fidelity. Far from being opposed to one another, in the one who submits himself or herself to God's Word, they become expressions of genuine fruitfulness because the Spirit of God is fully operative here. Through virginity one dedicates oneself totally to God; through motherhood, God makes the person fully fruitful according to his plan. The complementarity of both is very clear.

All those who are called to continue the mission of Jesus need to submit themselves unconditionally to God's plan, following the pattern set by Mary, no matter in what state he or she finds himself or herself. Then only God can operate through them and build up His Kingdom. This unconditional dedication, which is at the core of Christian virginity, alone can open one to unconditional self-gift which is the essence of every apostolic activity. Such dedication will enable us to take initiative to love the other; thus our actions will be the manifestation of a God who loved the world first and gave His only Son for its salvation.

Virginal life understood as unconditional dedication should characterize every missionary and apostolic life in the Church. That is

the reason why all those who have given themselves exclusively and in a visible manner to apostolic life are generally men and women who live a life of virginity by which they also renounce married life. Their whole life becomes a total dedication in self-gift. It is precisely in this their consecration consists, that is, they are people whose lives are totally transformed by the love of God so that they can be God-like by their self-giving dedication. Like Mary, they too are virgins and mothers (fathers). A virginity that is not accompanied by such a dedication is sterility and it is far from being consecration. At times it can even be a sign of selfishness.

Virginal life understood as unconditional dedication should characterize every missionary and apostolic life in the Church

II. MARY RESPONDS TO THE WORLD

Anyone who wants to follow Jesus and share in his mission, necessarily has to learn to relate to the world because Jesus was sent into the world by the Father because He loved the world. The sense of mission is, therefore, expressed in terms of a commitment to the world with a view to transform it into the Kingdom of God, that is, a sign of God's love. We find that Mary is for us a model in the fulfilment of our mission also under this aspect.

Throughout the ministry of Jesus in Palestine, we do not find Mary with him at any moment of his glory. But we find her at the marriage feast of Cana. The incident is well known to all of us. She is very sensitive to the delicate and embarrassing situation in which the couple find themselves. She takes the initiative. She does not ask Jesus to work a miracle; but she just informs him of their need. What makes an apostolate different from any good action is precisely this: it is directed to the needs of the people; in other words, the apostolate is a people oriented action; it is an action in which

the action begins with compassion. We find this happening at almost all the miracles of Jesus. He has compassion and it is this feeling of

compassion that leads him to work the miracle. We find this also in Mary. This should be also our attitude. We enter into communion and solidarity with people; we share their feelings; whatever we do as a result of this solidarity is apostolate. At times we may not be able to do anything to solve the problem; but as long as we can have this feeling of solidarity, compassion, feeling together we have already started our mission. The divine character of our apostolate is precisely in this: our capacity to meet people in love and compassion.

Let us come to the context of the miracle of Cana. There are some significant expressions in the Bible that indicate the role that Mary plays in this miracle. In the first place, Jesus addresses her 'woman'. Jesus said, Woman, what do you want from me? (Jn.2,4) He will use

again the same term to address Mary at the foot of the cross: "Woman, this is your son" (Jn.19,26). The term 'woman' is equal to 'Eve', to the mother of all living beings. Mary is presented here as the new Eve. She is present at the beginning of the redemptive work of Christ as well as at its end. Jesus makes it still more explicit when he says to Mary at the marriage feast of Cana, "My hour has not come yet". Again the term 'hour' is an expression used by the evangelist to indicate the hour of redemption. In fact John refers to the passion and death of Christ as "the hour". All these reflections that we have made show clearly that Mary's role in the history of salvation is to collaborate with Jesus in his redemptive work. She is the new Eve who together with the new Adam gives origin to the new humanity. She does this in total submission to the will of Jesus. She does not insist or force Jesus to work the miracle. She only expresses her concern for the people in need; that is the role of the human person in the work of redemption. God is the saviour; we are only those who are called upon to express the redemptive love of Christ in signs of concern, and solidarity. Returning to the Gospel once again, we find Mary at the foot of the Cross. She is standing there, sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Here also she is the new Eve in the company of the new Adam, accepting the whole humanity as her heritage in the person of John with the responsibility to join with Christ in the pain and agony that is part and parcel of saving a world in sin. Her motherhood of humanity is very clearly presented here.

The apostles are like Mary ready to join with Christ in his sufferings. This is a consequence of loving a world in sin. We are sent into the world to continue the work of Jesus. We need to accept all the consequences of saving a sinful world. It will crucify us as it did Jesus. But with Mary, we have to remain steadfast and persevering in the face of all sufferings. This is another characteristic of apostolate: suffering is an inevitable aspect of any genuine apostolate.

The lessons of apostolic involvement that we learn from Mary are the basic ones because they truly differentiate apostolate from any good work. It is oriented to persons: hence the need

of involvement. It is to be accomplished in a world of sin; hence the readiness to suffer. Perhaps in our apostolate in India, these two aspects have not been always very prominent perhaps because our apostolic activities have been so highly institutionalized that we can fulfil all our institutional demands using techniques that free us from suffering and personal contact. As a result, it might happen and it may be happening that we are no more building God's Kingdom, but our own kingdom. Mary's example of apostolic involvement, based on compassion and suffering, should once again characterize our apostolic activities. This will happen only when we become more and more people-oriented and less and less institution-oriented.

III. MARY, THE ANSWER TO A PEOPLE IN SEARCH OF A NEW HOPE

In the course of our missionary activities, perhaps we have been over preoccupied about truths that concern God and His inner life; perhaps we have been more concerned about the affirmation of doctrine than the transformation of the world. While there is no doubt that truths must be safeguarded, it is important to note that these truths have value in the present economy of salvation in as much as they help us to build God's Kingdom in the world. Christianity is not a philosophical system to be defended, but a life to be propagated. He came that they may have life and have it abundantly. He is the truth that leads people to the Father, that is, the truth that makes the people experience the Fatherhood of God and thus gives them a deep sense of belonging. Hence, our ultimate missionary goal is to answer the hope of mankind for a meaningful future, for a life that is illumined by a hope that can answer all their problems of existence. We need to begin our apostolic activities from hope; then go to faith which will illumine the journey towards the realization of that hope.

When we look at Mary, we find this perfectly realized. The Assumption of Mary is an answer to humanity's search for life and happiness. We should not look at it merely as a personal privilege conferred on her, but also as a paradigm of salvation. Mary becomes through her bodily assumption an answer to the vexing

problems of life. Her fidelity to God's work and her faithful collaboration with Christ in the mission entrusted to her made her become such a paradigm. In our apostolic activities we should free our people from the utopias created by an uncommitted world around us; we should instill into them the conviction that the realization of a happy future is going to be the result of our commitment today. This is how hope becomes operative in our apostolate and contributes to the building up of the Kingdom. Today's world needs this type of education of hope. It needs to be trained to live this hope day after day in the midst of its struggles. Mary can serve as a beautiful paradigm for this as we too join our people in their struggle.

Besides the Jubilee 2000, we are also celebrating the centenary of the presence of Mary in Bandel for the last 400 years. We have come to this shrine of Mary to proclaim the role that she has played in the life of the Church and in our lives. As we are beginning the third millennium of Christian Era and the 4th centenary of the Bandel Church, Mary is asking us for a new way of expressing our devotion to her. She is asking us to help her make her presence in Bandel an active presence of evangelization. She wants to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ through us to the men and women of our country. Let our celebration of the presence of Mary make us become more committed to our mission of evangelization. We are going to face perhaps difficult times in the life and mission of the Church in India. Mary assisted the early Church and as she continued her loving care and protection of the people of God throughout the centuries, may she give to all the devotees of Bandel her help and assistance in fulfilling their mission of true evangelizers of Jesus Christ. Then the presence of Mary in Bandel will become truly a redemptive presence and our devotion to her will make us become a people committed to the proclamation of Gospel at all times and in all circumstances: a Gospel of life and hope for all peoples of the world. ●



About the Author

Fr. **Paul Puthanangady** SDB, is a Salesian professor at Kristu Joyti College, Bangalore. He is also Secretary, National Committee For Yesu Krist Jayanti 2000.

Witnesses
Of Mercy

Rescue At Sea

On June 1, 1995 a group of three persons set out to Gorai Beach, Mumbai. At 11:30 a.m. we floated on the sea waters 500 yards from the shore on 3 tyre tubes tied together. We did not perceive that the waves had drifted us quite far into the sea. At 1:00 p.m. we realized that not one of us was able to touch sand with the feet. We became panicky, desperately trying to turn the course back to the shore. Instead, we were drifting farther into the high seas.

At a distance of 2 k.m. away from the beach our cries for help could not be heard. We then started praying to Our Lady of Happy Voyage as we were still struggling for life in vain. We had lost all hope to be rescued but through her help.

Suddenly we saw two men swimming towards us. They took us to safety at 2.30 p.m.

Later we came to know that my mother-in-law had heard our cry for help within our lodging place in spite of the noisy waves. At the same time my 8-year old son too, was telling everybody aloud in the house that we were drowning at sea.

Two men were found and sent to our rescue. It is our firm belief that Our Lady of Bandel saved our lives at sea. ●

The Marian Dimension of Formation

By Angelo Amato SDB

Translated from the Italian by Fr. Jose Chunkapura SDB

1. Mary, the Teacher of Christian Spirituality

Pope Paul VI in *Marialis Cultus* calls Mary *Pietatis Magistra Singulis Cristianis*, that is, "the Teacher of spiritual life for every Christian" (MC n.21). In fact all of Christian spirituality, especially Catholic spirituality has been called a *Marianische Grundexistenz* of a fundamentally Marian reality (W. Wicket). Thus, we notice that all popular piety has a strikingly Marian dimension and we see also the truly flourishing Marian devotion of youth groups and contemporary ecclesial movements.

We present below some reflections and propositions for promoting Marian piety among the numerous religious families of women and men, who live their specific consecration to Christ expressly looking to Mary as their guide. There is indeed deep consonance between religious life and the mystery of Mary:

"The evangelical counsels that the religious freely take on, have the capacity to conform the Christian in a greater way to that way of life that is virginal and poor that Christ the Lord chose for himself and which his virgin mother embraced" (LG, n.46). There exists, therefore, a very close relationship between the evangelical essence of religious life and some fundamental elements of the 'life of the Virgin', that is attested by the Gospels. This explains the age-old and cordial relationship between 'Marian piety' and 'Consecrated Life.' Since they are living essentially the same type of life as that of Mary, the religious are in a position to understand more promptly certain qualities/values of the Personage that Mary is, and to have an existential grasp of nuances that at first escape the notice of others."

We could, in fact, assert "that wherever there is commitment to live the Gospel propositions of religious life, there flowers a genuine devotion

to the Mother of Jesus, and vice versa, that wherever there is true devotion to the Blessed Virgin, there we also find conditions favourable for the germination of consecrated life."

Fr. Egidio Vigano, while presenting a recent study about Mary in the constitutions of the salesians of Don Bosco, after dwelling on the presence of the Virgin Mother and Help of the Church as the distinctive teacher, guide and inspiration of the Salesian vocation and mission, states:

"Taking greater cognizance of how intimately she is present in the inner fabric of our personal life from the time of our initial formation till our death...can not but result in a strengthening of our charism in the Church."

Mary holds a privileged position in Spirituality and exercises a role that goes beyond the purely personal and historical, to extend itself towards the universal aspect of divine salvific activity.

Mary appears as "one of the greatest symbols of Christianity, a symbol intended to mean a historical reality, which, incarnating itself in an ensemble of ideal attitudes, does not exhaust itself within the confines of some short-lived chronicle, but which in the economy of grace holds out its saving function to all generation; which mystery while being susceptible to being ever better unravelled, will be fully revealed only at the end of time.

2. Mary, the Most Perfectly Consecrated one

In the document on formation, *Potissimum Institutionis* (1990), there is presented, a basic/essential Mariological synthesis with regard to the formation of the religious. Only three numbers (20, 41 and 110) concern the Blessed Virgin, but these are sufficient to offer a table of precise references about the role of Mary as

model and mother of women and men religious (P.I. n.20). In its last paragraph, the document points out the reason: "A Marian atmosphere, sustained by an authentic theology, will guarantee to religious formation, authenticity, solidity and joy without which their mission in the world can not be fully realized" (P.I.n.110).

The fundamental affirmation contained in n.20 of *Potissimum Institutionis* - "Mary, the most perfectly consecrated one" is taken up again by an assertion of Pope John Paul II. In the apostolic exhortation *Redemptionis Donum* addressed to religious men and women, the Pope states, "Among all the persons consecrated without reserve to God, she is the first. She, the

Virgin of Nazareth, is also the more fully consecrated to God, consecrated

in the most perfect way. She, who as mother, carries Christ in her arms, realizes at the same time in the most perfect way His call, 'Follow me.' And she, the mother, follows Him as her teacher in chastity, poverty and obedience... If the whole Church finds in Mary its primary model, how much more should you find her so, as individuals and communities consecrated at the heart of the Church" (*Redemptionis Donum*, n.17).

Mary presents herself as the model for every religious who finds in her the full realization of the being, vocation and sanctification proper to each one.

The Blessed Virgin is the most perfectly consecrated one, because she is the full realization of what it means to be a religious: to welcome the Son in the obedience of faith and to give oneself to Him with all the powers of a human person.

3. Mary, Educator and Companion for the way, for Men and Women Religious

An interesting incident is narrated about Mother Teresa of Calcutta. One day, she received as a gift from a priest in Berhampore, a big statue

of the Blessed Virgin which had the hands extended downwards, and the arms open as if to distribute generously the graces and blessings of her divine Son to all. Mother Teresa liked this statue very much. So she packed the statue in a large case and brought it to the railway station. To the ticket examiner she showed two tickets which she had been offered by someone, saying one was for herself and the other for a companion travelling with her. The ticket examiner, finding no Sister accompanying Mother Teresa, but only a large box, wanted to make her pay for the luggage. But Mother Teresa simply answered that, that day her companion for the journey was the statue of the Madonna which was in the box.

"See, there is my companion, the statue of Mother Mary who is travelling with me as my companion." The officer gave her the permission to carry the statue without paying luggage charges for it. From that day Mother Teresa called the

Madonna her 'companion of the way'. When she travelled, she was never alone.

Also the religious, like the rest of all the baptized, are in the same situation as Mother Teresa. They never travel alone. Religious life can be called a journey with Mary. The Madonna is the true companion of our earthly pilgrimage to Jesus. If Mary is our companion for the way, we can ask ourselves: how is Mary present in the various stages of formation to religious life? What is the Marian attitude that can be imitated, for example, at the novitiate stage, during the juniorate or after perpetual profession?

I propose a few lines for reflection. We shall divide the route taken by consecrated life into seven stages: aspirantate, postulancy, novitiate, first profession, juniorate, perpetual profession and on-going formation. Seven is a perfect number and represents well the path of perfection of consecrated life.

4. Marian Aspects of Formation

1. For the aspirants, for those young people who find themselves still within families, but who feel, often indistinctly, a call to

religious life, Mary is the *Virgo Audiens*, the virgin listening to the word of God, attentive to a prospective call from above. The young aspirant becomes 'listener of the word'. He is like the very young Mary who remains attentive to the annunciation of the angel, 'Ave Maria.' This is the 'Good Morning' of God to His future consecrated ones, a morning greeting full of joy and rich in promises.

2. For the young postulants to the religious life, Mary is the *Virgo Orans*, the virgin who prays, who enters into dialogue with God for discerning the significance of her vocation. This is what Mary did in her conversation with the angel: "At these words she was troubled and asked herself what could be the meaning of such a greeting" (Lk, 1 29). It is a dialogue to be able to discern God's will and one's own consecrated way of being. Mary asks again to the angel, "How can that be possible?" (Lk, 1,34). Like the Blessed Virgin, also the postulant poses questions about the call of God, about His invitation to follow and about his/her own inadequate and always poor human and religious qualities to be able to respond.

3. For the novices, Mary is the *Virgo Credens*, the virgin who believes in the word of God and in the vocation that God entrusts to her and gives her 'fiat.' After the 'fiat' has been pronounced, what the angel announced is realized: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" (Lk, 1,25). There takes place in Mary, an anticipation of Pentecost. It is the first Pentecost - entirely Marian. The novitiate then, is the time for the 'fiat.' Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word" (Lk, 1,38). It is the time for a wonderful personal Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is closer to these young novices to religious life, to enrich them with graces and with the ability to respond to the divine gifts. The novitiate is the time of a positive response, of handing oneself over decisively to God and to His plan of salvation, not only in words, but by one's way of life. It is a convinced and joyous 'Yes' to the will of the Father in the following of Christ, chaste,

poor and obedient. The generosity of the offering to the Lord is rewarded by the Holy Spirit by an extraordinarily abundant shower of fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, benevolence, goodness, fidelity, meekness and mastery over self (Gal: 5,22)

The spiritual location of these first three stages is Nazareth: the aspirants, the postulants and the novices find themselves at Nazareth, just like Mary. In the simplicity of their daily existence as young people, they listen to the word of God, have recourse to adequate discernment, and utter their 'fiat'.

4. Thus we come to the fourth stage: the first profession. For those who make the first profession, Mary is the *Virgo Offerens*, the virgin who offers herself to God in the following of Christ through a life of chastity, poverty and obedience. The first profession is the beginning of a new life. It is a new birth of Jesus in us. The place is not Nazareth any more, but Bethlehem. We are reborn in Jesus and Jesus is reborn in us and we enjoy the joy of his intimacy. The first profession stage is precisely this period of intimacy with Jesus. Like Mary, also we hold Him in our arms, dress Him, take care of Him, and place Him gently in the cradle. We feel as if we were mothers of our Lord. In this period, it is He who wants to be petted by us, and we have to provide all the care/attention that young mothers give to their first-born. The first profession is a time of spiritual infancy, of the joy of living, of doing, of serving our Lord enthusiastically and imaginatively. It is the time for the song, "My soul glorifies the Lord...because He has seen the lowliness of His servant" (Lk, 1, 46-47)

5. For the young religious doing their juniorate Mary is the *Virgo Clemens*, the virgin who prays to Our Lord and who powerfully intercedes for humanity. Also here, we do not find ourselves any more at Nazareth or Bethlehem. The spiritual location is Cana, where Mary says to the attendants, "Do what He tells you" (Jn, 2,5). It is the time in which, like Mary, the religious participates in a wedding banquet

with Jesus. Especially the religious women are His spouses and therefore they ask Him with gentleness and insistence, favours to which their divine spouse can not and will not say 'no'. This is a most beautiful period. The joy of Bethlehem continues at Cana. Cana is the place of Mary's apostolate. At Cana there is need for help, and Mary intercedes with her Son. This is the time of the first concrete apostolate of the religious, a time of enthusiasm for the mission carried out with the youthful energies still intact.

6. Now comes the phase of the perpetual profession. For the perpetually professed, Mary is the *Virgo Fidelis*, the virgin faithful to her first and unique love: her beloved Son. It is a Mary who always follows Jesus, not only in the joyful moment of His infancy at Bethlehem and at Nazareth, not only in the triumph of His apostolate at Cana, but also in the

redemptive suffering of the passion and death of her Son. The place now is Calvary, near to the cross, where Jesus entrusts

the disciple to Mary as her son. At the climactic moment of the passion, Mary receives a wider and more universal vocation. She becomes the mother also of the disciples of Jesus, and therefore, the mother of the whole Church (cf. Jn, 19,25-27). As Mary is with Jesus, also the religious in his/her perpetual profession is a companion to Jesus on the cross. Also he/she goes up to Calvary, cries near to the cross and receives the dead body of Jesus. But like Mary, also the religious receives on Calvary the gift of spiritual maternity. Jesus entrusts His disciples to the religious. In a sense they are rendered spiritual mothers of all Christians. The pain of the passion becomes for the religious the source of their spiritual maternity. It is the most precious moment of spiritual fruitfulness.

7. After the perpetual profession, we have the period of on-going formation. After Calvary comes the resurrection and the Pentecost. For the perpetually professed religious, Mary is the *Virgo Pietatis Magistra* (M.C.n.21), Mary is the teacher of spiritual life, that is to say, Mary teaches how to live always in the Holy Spirit. Here the location is the Cenacle—the place of the descent of the Holy Spirit. It is the time of life according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. It is the phase of the fullest experience of the life of communion with God in the ecclesial service to brothers and sisters. It is the time in which Mary truly becomes the model and example of the apostles. This is the most precious and decisive stage of our life. This is the time of religious maturity. It is the period of our own Pentecost that results in a double expansion — a spiritual one and an apostolic one, that is, our personal holiness

and our community apostolate. The following of Christ, therefore, does not end at Cana or at Calvary. It carries on and completes itself at Pentecost, in a life lived fully in the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost is not just the final stage of the journey of our life of consecration. Pentecost represents the sum-total of the previous stages and combines all of them...

But is only the period of on-going formation Pentecost? Pentecost is not just the final stage of the journey of our life of consecration. Pentecost represents the sum-total of the previous stages and combines all of them. The Cenacle contains Nazareth, Bethlehem, Cana and Calvary. In the Cenacle the religious lives simultaneously the situation of the Virgin Mary who listens, prays, believes, offers herself—Mary the merciful and faithful Virgin, the teacher of piety. In the Cenacle is present the enthusiasm of Nazareth, the maternal joy of Bethlehem, the apostolic impetus of Cana, the pain of Calvary and the glory of the resurrection. In the full maturing of the life in the Spirit, these situations co-exist in the life of the religious. This is the time of a wise synthesis of one's own life. The religious persons, mature in the Spirit, reviews the great things that the Lord has accomplished in him/her. And they do this like Mary, who "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk, 2,19) ●

Feast of the Holy Rosary at Bandel

Bandel Basilica was born with the name of Church of the Holy Rosary. That name remains till the present day. The second title of Our Lady of Happy Voyage, came to exist when her icon wonderfully re-appeared from the waters of the river Hooghly in which it had gone down during the siege of Hooghly by the Moguls in the year 1632. It is a statue that had journeyed from Portugal over high seas and oceans; finally it landed at Bandel as a gift from the crew of a ship. Mysteriously the statue was found on the banks of the river, in front of the Church.

The Feast of the Holy Rosary is celebrated at Bandel for the past four hundred years in the month of November. Posters and

programmes of this feast are preserved in the archives of the Basilica. The icon of Mary is being carried in procession along the streets, the gardens and the grounds of the Church.

The universal feast of the Holy Rosary in the Catholic Church was instituted by Pope St.

Pius V in 1571, when a great naval battle in which hundreds of ships were employed, was fought and won in the defence of Christendom, on the seas of Lepanto, South of Greece. Besides the name of the Holy Rosary, it was also called Feast of the Holy Mary of Victories, acknowledging the protection to the Catholic Church by Mary in many battles, heresies, plagues and natural calamities.

At the time of St. Pius V, the Holy Mary of Victories was with Christian Armies, fighting real battles with weapons to save Christendom, but today she fights for the Church, to overcome the forces of evil. The Rosary is the real spiritual weapon, holy and strong, against error, ignorance, fanaticism and intolerance. In the Middle Ages, Our Lady of the Rosary inspired

heroism to armed forces in battles, today she assists the messengers of the Lord who evangelise the nations. She teaches how to proceed with humility,

obedience to God and service in love, as she did at the Annunciation.

In the History of Bandel Church we read the narration of battles and of houses of mercy. Around the Basilica educational and charitable institutions, homes

for the homeless and other services have been established by her inspiration.

In the Fourth Centenary Celebration of Bandel Basilica we fondly and gratefully recall the blessings the Mother Mary has poured on her children. Holding the Rosary beads they have been praying before her image or walking in procession on the streets or ascending the stairs that lead to the Balcony or visiting the garden of Our Lady of Fatima or going to the Church Grounds to pray as far as the Altar of the Cross where her statue was found in the year 1634. Many of her children have taken the name and the devotion to Our Lady of Bandel to distant shores to be present in their families in times of joys and sorrows. ●



Parish

ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

A vibrant and diverse Bandel Parish in pictures...



1



2



3



4



5



6



7

1. Feast of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary
2. Inauguration of the 4th Centenary Celebrations
3. Christmas Get-together
- 4 & 5. Activities organised by Parish youth
6. Fr. Gobetti with some Parish children
7. Archbishop Marchisano from the Vatican, during Fatima pilgrimage

Parish

ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS



8. Youth Retreat
9. Parish Youth Picnic
10. Priestly Ordination of Fr. Alfred Paul SDB
11. Archbishop Henry with children at First Communion and Confirmation.
12. Perpetual profession of young Salesians
13. Sunday School Day
14. May Feast Procession

Parish

ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS



- 15. Parish Day
- 16. New Priests from Krishnagar diocese
- 17. Programme for Senior parishioners
- 18. Santhal pilgrimage: Bps. Julius Marandi & Cyprian Monis
- 19. Fr. Gobetti's return from Italy

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Bandel Basilica has been blessed with a thriving Catholic community, who are active in a number of parish groups and movements. With the 400th Year of the Church and parish, no doubt there are great things to come.

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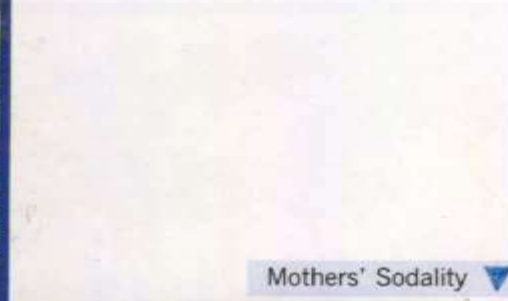
Parish

GROUPS & MOVEMENTS

The people who make the parish alive...



Parish Council



Mothers' Sodality



St. Joseph's Society



St. Vincent de Paul Society



AICUF

Salesian Cooperators



Parish

GROUPS & MOVEMENTS



▲ Parish Staff



Don Bosco Youth ▲



◀ Children of Mary

Sunday School ▼



Witnesses *Of* Mercy

Answered Prayers

In the year 1979, probably on March 25th, a family composed of the parents, son and daughter, came to Bandel on pilgrimage, from Asansol, West Bengal. They all ascended the steps to the Balcony and knelt in prayer before the statue of Our Lady of Happy Voyage.

The father of the family was physically disabled, and unable to kneel, he was standing by. The wife and children were praying for his recovery, with faith and hope, though so many years he had passed in this pitiful condition. With Mary, time is not taken into account.

Suddenly the girl staring at her father shouted out, "Look, mummy, look at daddy, he too is praying on his knees!" Ten years had passed since the father, due to a bad accident, could not bend his legs and move his limbs freely. He was unable to kneel. Nobody could explain how, suddenly he felt the impulse to kneel, and was able to do so!

Overwhelmed with wonder and excitement all the members of the family rushed down to the Prior's office and narrated the event.

• *Rev. Fr. Joseph Gomes, Rector of Don Bosco School, Krishnanagar, has recounted this event. He was then acting Prior of Bandel Shrine.*

INSTITUTIONS AROUND THE BASILICA

THE RETREAT HOUSE

One of the additions at Bandel since the Salesians took charge of the place is the Retreat House. Bandel with its calm and serene surroundings and the hallowed presence of the Virgin has a quiet attraction for those looking for some moments of tranquillity and encounters in the realm of the Spirit. Even before the Retreat House was established groups of people used to come to Bandel to make their annual Retreats.

Organisation and animation of spiritual retreats, especially for young people is an important aspect of the apostolate of the Salesians. Finding Bandel such an agreeable ambient for retreats, the Salesians naturally thought of turning Bandel into a Retreat Centre. Their intentions were strengthened with XIX General Chapter of the Salesians exhorted them to promote Retreat Centres more earnestly.

Accordingly a decision was made by the Provincial Council of the Salesians of Calcutta to construct a Retreat House at Bandel. They received personal encouragement from the Rector Major of the Society, Rev. Fr. Aloysius Ricceri. The Rector Major himself visited Bandel and blessed the Retreat House on 14th November 1968.



The Retreat House stands at the back of the Church at Bandel. It is a three-storey building and can accommodate up to eighty people. It has a beautiful Chapel besides the church at the Shrine, an Auditorium and a Spacious-dining hall. Audiovisual aids, especially slides, videocassettes and super 8 films on Religious themes are available. The sprawling and tree lined campus provides a pleasant ambient for meditation and quiet relaxation. Priests at the Shrine and the adjacent Seminary are available when ever needed for spiritual counselling and Confessions.

The marble tablet commemorating the blessing of the Retreat House has these words inscribed on it: "Come away by yourself and rest a while" (Mk.6, 31). In the garden in front of the Retreat House stands a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with arms outstretched inviting all to come and experience peace and rest under the loving gaze of his Mother- the Lady of Happy Voyage.

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DON BOSCO SCHOOL

In the beginning it was an apostolic school for aspirants. It started in the year 1951. The boys who numbered few then, remained till class VII. After the completion of Class VII, they were sent to Siliguri to join Our Lady's Higher Secondary School.

Towards the close of 1962, the Chinese invaded north-east India, and that event had important repercussions on Bandel. The Chinese invasion made Siliguri, the hot-bed of military activities. The Indian army took over the existing structure. Later they gifted another plot and on it stands the present Don Bosco complex. This taking over forced the students to come to Bandel. 'Our Lady's Higher Secondary School' was shifted to Bandel. From now on the boys would remain in Bandel till they completed their High school studies. In 1967, a beautiful new wing was added. Till 1978, only the seminarians studied in the school.

INSTITUTIONS AROUND THE BASILICA

In 1978, the doors of the school opened to the day scholars in the present new building. It started with 48 boys in class V. Today the school has more than thousand students. In April 1999, the Primary Section of Don Bosco School was opened.

The school has been affiliated to the ICSE and ISC boards from 1984. The old name of 'Our Lady's Higher Secondary School' was changed into

'Don Bosco School'. Today the school caters to the needs of the neighbourhood and the seminarians. A good number of boys from the Basilica parish have benefited from the school and some of them are well established in different walks of life.



The school has spread its activities through various groups and movements. Every year the Science Club brings together local schools for the annual Science Fiesta. The Scouts and YCS groups are very active. The 'Friends' movement is growing. Through the values that the school imparts, the neighbourhood is transformed for the better. The economic viability of the area has increased due to the inflow of outsiders. The school offers its facilities to the Basilica parish to conduct Sunday classes and special coaching for students in the evenings.

A Don Bosco school is more than a building with a name. There flows between the staff and the students the spirit of Don Bosco. This is visibly symbolised, by the statue of Don Bosco, gifted by the late Bishop of Krishnanagar and installed on 5th December 1983, and which stands in front of the school, looking at us and pointing our gaze upward to noble aspirations.

AUXILIUM CONVENT AND SCHOOL

Enclosed within the historical stretch of land under the loving gaze of Our Lady of Happy Voyage commonly known as Our Lady of Bandel, lie 777 bighas of land donated to Rev. Fr. Joao Da Cruz by Emperor Shah Jahan. The Salesian Sisters took possession of part of this place in 1951. The building we see now definitely existed in the mind of God, but when Sr. Clotilde Appiano, Sr. Eugenia Cazzuli, Sr. Angela Daglio and Sr. Alice Correa, the pioneers arrived, there was only a ground floor



INSTITUTIONS AROUND THE BASILICA

structure in good masonry but somewhat neglected having been in disuse for a long time. It consisted of a few small rooms, a large hall with a broad veranda and a dark and dilapidated worker's quarters. Jackals, monkeys and large venomous snakes were seen everywhere. Hardly could a sister take a few steps on the grounds even in broad daylight, without running the danger of stamping on a poisonous snake.

The four sisters had to scrub and rub for days on end before the house looked fit for living. The first classes were attended by only one pupil. The number of pupils increased in such a short time that almost all the available places had to be used as classrooms. Consequently, the sisters had to change those classrooms into dormitories at night. This necessitated the erection of a new building large enough for the need of the hour, and also to house a few aspirants to religious life.

Mother Catherine Mania, the then Provincial, took the task in hand with the help of Fr. Provincial of the Salesian Fathers who lent her the funds necessary to make a start. The work went ahead so very fast and so well that we would only kneel down in astonishment and say "THANK YOU, MOTHER MARY". The house was blessed on 20th January 1955. Meanwhile the first aspirants came. Today Auxilium Bandel, runs a full fledged English Medium High School. The school prepares the students for the ICSE (Class X) examinations. The school invariably secures remarkably good results each year. There are 1,700 students in school at present and forty-seven teachers.

The aspirants are no longer at Auxilium Bandel. They now have their training at Barasat in the diocese of Calcutta.

A boarding is conducted for young girls who are belonging to the different parishes of Calcutta. At present there are 63 girls.

The Salesian Cooperators are engaged in many works of mercy both corporal and spiritual. The Past Pupil's Association is well organised and active in its work.

Auxilium Convent and School is situated just across the road from Bandel Church and faces St. John's School. A huge concrete statue of Mary, Help of Christians, stands on top of the building watching over all under her maternal gaze.

ST. JOHN'S SCHOOL

St. John's High School, Bandel was formerly called St. John's Middle English School and was opened on the 10th July, 1870, by Rev. Fr. A.C. Rodriques, Prior of Bandel Church, for the education of the poor boys in the locality. It was supported by Bandel Church with a Government grant-in-aid.

In 1920 on the occasion of the golden jubilee celebration of the school, His Lordship the Bishop of Mylapore, presiding over the prize distribution ceremony of the school raised it to the status of a High School. Accordingly Rev. Fr. Menezes, the then Prior of Bandel Church, made the necessary arrangements, repairing the house known as "Orellas Home", and on the 2nd of January 1920, before a large gathering of the leading men of Hooghly, Mr. A.V. Moberley, Collector-Magistrate of Hooghly District, declared the High School open.



INSTITUTIONS AROUND THE BASILICA

The school building was considerably extended by the Salesians. In 1964, Fr. Charles Niznansky, the then Headmaster, built the ground floor on the Southern side of the school and in 1968 Fr. A. Doro and Fr. E.V. Chacko completed the first floor over the same building. In 1977-78, a two-storied Western wing was added to the school building by Fr. K.A. Thomas and Fr. M.C. Mathew financed through a donation from Fr. A. Doro and the Salesian Provincial. In 1970, the school completed its 100 years of service. Every year almost a hundred boys from the school appear for the Madhyamik (ClassX) Examination. It is the pride of the staff and students of the school to have maintained this status from the starting of the Madhyamik Examination in 1976. Prior to 1976 the students appeared for the Higher Secondary Examination, School Final Examination and the Matriculation Examinations. The medium of instruction is Bengali.

The school completes 129 years of educational service this year. It is a matter of pride that the school has achieved 100% success in this year's Madhyamik Examinations. Besides academic success, the school caters to the all-round development of the students through a variety of co-curricular activities. All this the school has been able to achieve through the dedicated service of the staff, and the support of the well wishers.

SISTERS ADORERS IN BANDEL

July 16th, 1992, is an important day for us, Sisters Adorers, as we reached Bandel to begin a Community so as to extend our services to the people of this locality, especially to the Santal Community. This was the long cherished dream of our Province in India: to have a House in Bandel. Now this dream has become a reality. We are deeply grateful to the Salesian Fathers especially Fr. Louis Gobetti and the Parish Community of Bandel, for inviting us and providing us with all facilities, and the minute details for our stay here.

According to the objectives of this House, our main apostolate is the pastoral work among the Santals. Village tour is a regular feature of our pastoral work. Special care is taken through frequent visits, catechism classes and moral support. We also carry on the healing ministry of Christ by taking care of the sick.

The boarding we started with eight children on December 8, 1992, accommodates today over 140 Santal girls of different age groups. The majority of these girls are studying in St. John's Primary School, which is headed by one of our sisters. About 10 are school dropouts who attend non-formal school, learn tailoring, knitting, etc.

If these girls are able to cope with formal schooling we get them admitted in the local Government school. The different skills the girls learn in our boarding have enabled them to produce beautiful marketable items. They are a source of income and are well appreciated.

Besides these, they are enriched by various classes like Bible, moral, health and hygiene, music and dance. We also run the Lady Brabourne Centre for young girls of the locality. It conducts 3-year Diploma courses in Tailoring and Embroidery.



INSTITUTIONS AROUND THE BASILICA

FERRANDO CONVENT

Ferrando Convent took its origin at Bandel on 8th August 1995. The Sisters belong to the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, the first indigenous Congregation in North East India. It was founded by His Grace Stephen Ferrando SDB, the then Bishop of Shillong, on 24th October 1942, at Guwahati, Assam. They are called 'Ferrandine' from the name of their Founder, Rt. Rev. Msgr. Stephen Ferrando SDB.



Started by eight local girls, the congregation has now 700 professed sisters, working in 113 centres, of which 108 are spread in 27 dioceses in India and 5 in 3 dioceses in Italy. The aim of the Congregation is first and foremost, Missionary Apostolate - Evangelisation and Catechetical instruction, especially of women folk and children in the villages. Schools, boardings, dispensaries, mobile clinics, homes for the aged, orphans and street children, vocational training centres and care and education of the handicapped are the other main activities through which the MSMHC serve the Church always with a missionary ideal.

At Bandel, the Sisters do family apostolate, besides helping in the Basilica and the Parish, in many ways. They intend to open a house of formation for candidates of their institute in the future. The foundation marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of their Founder

MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY

We the Missionaries of Charity Contemplatives, reside in Chinsurah. We were founded by Mother Theresa in the year 1976, in New York, USA, with Sr. Nirmala as the first Superior and in charge of the branch. We were founded for helping the spiritually poorest of the poor.

Our house here at 22 Khirki Lane, Chinsurah, was opened on the 19th of March 1987 with Sister Ancy MC as the first Superior. Our main apostolate is prayer, therefore, we have Eucharistic Adoration everyday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. to quench the Thirst of Jesus. All are invited, and many non-Christians drop in for silent prayer and thus come to know Jesus. Besides this, we go out to the streets and families, seeking souls who are hungry for God, and for whom God hungers so much. We pray with them and listen to their problems.

Our Regional House is at St. John's, Sealdah, Calcutta. Sr. Fatima is the regional Superior and incharge of the Contemplative branch, while Sr. Nirmala MC is our Superior General of both the active and contemplative branches.



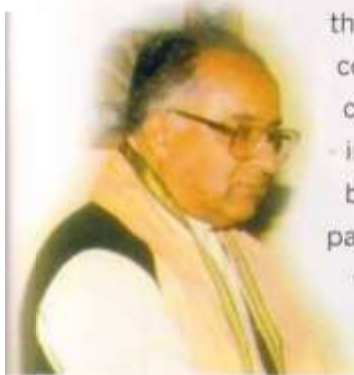
What Bandel means to me...

I came to Bandel way back on 11th February, 1951, when I was part of 60 or so other boys straight from Kerala to start the aspirantate there. Not that there were no aspirants there before. Our beginning was a second or a third of its kind but on a smaller scale. But this time there was a sense of finality to the determination of the Superiors to make it a "permanent" part of the Bandel landscape.

The real factor that made the Superiors decide on Bandel as the place of an aspirantate was the closeness of the Marian Shrine. No sooner than we had established ourselves there, the FMAs too, decided to set up their formation house there. Eventually in these recent years other two congregations of Sisters came over to take shelter under the shadow of the shrine.

The felicitous choice of Bandel for a formation house has had its really good outcomes. Unknowingly we imbibed a deep Marian devotion. It was as if we were at home where our Mother was. Every perfect drama has a beginning, a middle and an end. It was there we began our Salesian pilgrimage. Several of us came back to work there as Salesians. And with the decision to have also the Salesian cemetery there, we even come to rest there awaiting the day of the resurrection. It is a full cycle of Salesian Life. So our devotion to our Blessed Mother had a natural growth. In Calcutta province now when a very sick confrere in ripe old age starts to speak of "going to Bandel" we know what it means.

Coming to Bandel always means for me, I guess for most of us, coming back home. This devotion is tended by all that happens there from day to day. The feasts, the annual solemn ceremonies, pilgrimages and not the least the many tales of graces that our Blessed Mother pours on anyone irrespective of the religion of the devotee. Actually the majority of the pilgrims who come there, are those who do not share our faith. They too, feel a certain homely attraction to the shrine. I remember several incidents. Let me share just a tiny one. The miraculous statue in the balcony was taken down for repainting. It took some time to get the painter to do a decent job of it. It meant that the niche on the balcony was empty. Several of those who were secret devotees of our Lady noticed the absence and soon began to ask what happened to the 'Ma' up there! We had not calculated that several passing by the



What Bandel means to me...

shrine would have a word of **“Pronam”** for the Ma up there! **She is their Ma too.**
“Bandier Ma” is everyone’s Ma.

Sharing of such incidents in good night talks by the Prior or the Rector nourished our love for our Ma. But as the community of the shrine found a different identity, this sharing became rarer and rarer. DB School came up in the campus. It is gradually gobbling up the space of the aspirantate. Will there be a time when the aspirantate will become a nuisance and so will have to be relocated? The vision of future Salesians having a solid Marian devotion nourished at the lap of our Mother there would also become a thing of the past. God forbid.

● Fr. Thomas Polackal sdb

Bandel Basilica my **Alma Mater!**

It was ‘here’ that I was sent on my first apostolate, early January 1945. Of course, I had been ‘here’ earlier as a young student from Calcutta, on pilgrim tours, as it was ‘here’ that I came to know the Salesians of Don Bosco. In the years that I served ‘here’, there was only the church, the Prior and his assistant and ‘Rex’ the Alsatian. What happy years they were! I was then a veritable ‘factotum’, doing all things to the best of my ability for God and for Virgin Mother “Our Lady of Happy Voyage” - sacristan, organist, accompanying pilgrims and visitors around the precincts, relating to all the many miracles worked by Our Lady of Bandel... and I loved to call myself the “Secretary” of Our Lady of Bandel.

Right through the years, I have cultivated a very special devotion to Our Lady of Bandel, and I have always returned ‘here’ for peace, comfort, solace and encouragement. And how consoling it is that I have returned ‘here’ to spend perhaps my last days, close to Mary, Our Lady of Happy Voyage.

● Br. Nicholson Maurice sdb



Memories of Bandel

It was 33 years ago that I first fixed my gaze on the Lady in the balcony. Thirteenth May 1966! I was 13 years old. Leaving my native village in Kerala, life under her gaze was full of fun, adventure and romance. Not that growing up pains were not lacking!

I remember the hectic preparations beginning with the noonday exercise plucking wild grass from the playground under the scorching October sun, to the general cleaning of the Church compound, choir practices, laying out the little earthen lamps with creative Marian designs were indeed thrilling.

My first assignment in the aspirantate, packing and sticking stamps for *Our Lady of Bandel* magazine, I guess, sowed the seeds of print journalism in me. Not inclined to a pietism of the sentimental type, I settled down for a pragmatic Marian devotion... often scurrying for help when in mortal fear of exams or for winning a competition....

In the later part of the years 1966-71 spent in Bandel as a student I enjoyed doing some outreach programme in the neighbouring Jelepura (fisher-folk's village). A small group of students under the leadership of Br. Thomas Pulickal (currently Assistant Headmaster of St. John's Bandel,) used to visit the Jelepura School and help prepare a small playground, adjacent to advocate Karthik Babu's house. On my return to Bandel as teacher 1974-77, I continued the Jelepura activities and started spoken English classes every evening in a basement room at the entrance to the shrine. I also remember helping in the organisation of a three day inter-religious festival in Jelepura when Fr. Lucas Sirkar (present Bishop of Krishnagar) spoke on Christianity, a group of aspirants sang Christian devotionals in Bengali and Mr. Profullo from Krishnagar screened "King of Kings" (16 mm).



I've made no significant contribution to the shrine to crow about. However, I once did a

What Bandel means to me...

I've made no significant contribution to the shrine to crow about. However, I once did a script for the first major Marian audiovisual project we put together from Nitika, 15 years ago. Consisting of 48 slides and an audio commentary it is entitled: *A Mother in Life's Journey* (CR 19). While on a shooting assignment for the project, we had a narrow escape when a truck backed into our jeep while negotiating a curve on the highway. Except for a dent on the side of the jeep nothing happened to the crew or the equipment on board.

● Fr. C.M. Paul SDB

BANDEL! It means a lot to me!

Of the 38 years I am away from home
Bandel has been Home to me for 20 years and more
More Home to me than my home itself.
Year after year for five memorable years from 1962 to 1967
Bandel nourished and nurtured me
in its poverty of comforts and luxuries
Yet more in its richness and variety -
Of Ideals of vocation and missions,
Of Devotions and pilgrimages,
Of its people and cultures, its institutions and services.



Who can forget?

If I commenced the childhood of my Salesianity in Bandel from 1962, at Bandel there began again from 1978 the teenage years of my Salesian Priestly Life, opening out from within me the basic gifts of priestly life hidden in seed form.

Bandel with its Holy Shrine, River, its Religious and Educational institutions put me in contact with people of many types.

Through the fifteen years under the mantle of our Blessed Mother of Bandel the Grace of God taught me to put in service many a hidden talent.

The presence of Our Lady so keenly felt in the ambient of Bandel with its Basilica and the Miraculous Statue, and its stream of visitors and pilgrims has imprinted an affectionate Marian Devotion in me.

It goes to the credit of Bandel and of the Congregation with its Salesians and Missionaries from so many states and countries, whom we met and who walked and worked along with us, for having engraved in our hearts a sense of the Great Church of all people.

At Bandel as Salesians, we began our formative phase. At Bandel we have seen quite a few concluding their life under the direct gaze of the Mother of Bandel. Every burial of a Salesian close to Mary deepened our determination to be faithful and persevering in our commitment unto the end.

The retinue of Hindu devotees moving to the meandering Holy Ganges for ritual cleansing and the stream of curious visitors and sincere pilgrims climbing up the high flight of stairs have impressed me with the spirit of life as a journey and an eternal search.

And there is much more to tell of Bandel.

Oh, when shall "her image" fade from our memories?

● Fr. Michael Peedikayil SDB

Cradle of my vocation

“The hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world.” That is the best summary statement that I have heard about the influence of the mother in the life of a human person. When I came to Bandel in 1967 as an aspirant, a twelve year old boy was literally being placed in the cradle of Salesian life. Oh I missed my mother so much...! But then, true to Don Bosco's promise, there was a mother in Bandel, whom we all referred to affectionately as Our Lady of Bandel.



This is what Bandel means to me: the hand of our Heavenly Mother, the Lady of Bandel, who rocked the cradle of my Salesian priestly life, still rules my life with a combination of that gentleness and firmness, that nearness and distance, that understanding yet demanding presence, that makes the Lady of Bandel the irreplaceable mother and guide of so

What Bandel means to me...

many. True mother that she is, Our Lady of Bandel watches over each and all of her children from the vantage point of the Balcony. She does this not only in all the years of busy service. I know that she is there to watch over me when my eyes will close in the sleep of death, so that I may wake up in the land of unending peace and joy, to behold the face of her Son, Jesus, through Mary...

In more ways than one may expect, Bandel provides religious experience with a clear Marian dimension. Lourdes is there, Fatima is there, the Lady of the Holy Rosary is there. So is Mary Help of Christians, and of course, we have the Lady of Happy Voyage · Mary is so much there to lead us to Jesus.

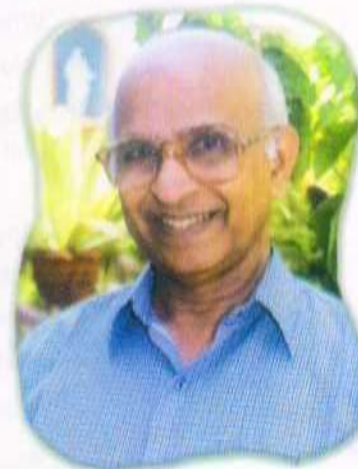
Going up to the Balcony is symbolic of raising our minds and hearts to heaven in search of assistance. Coming down from the Balcony is symbolic of returning from prayer to life's tasks, strengthened and comforted, no more alone, but having Jesus and Mary with us along the way, on our journey to God. What more could Bandel mean to any one, dear friends, what more!

● Fr. **C.M. Jose Chunkapura SDB**

My Mother at Bandel

When I got the obedience to go to Bandel seminary in 1978, my joy was immense, because I was going to look after the seminarians and particularly because I could be very close to my Mother there. Although I am an old man now, I still feel the need to be near my Mother, in whom I can confide all my worries and difficulties, joys and sorrows, and all my particular needs.

Now although I am at Mirpara, my mind often goes back to Bandel, and to the balcony. Why? Because I know there is a Mother up there who cares for everybody, who listens to the prayers of all, in whom we can trust and confide now and always. Throughout my 17 years in Bandel, I have felt and seen the benevolence of Our Lady of Bandel in abundance.



● Bro. **Joseph Kallunkal sdb**

Being with my mother...

I have never worked in Bandel. But I have always had a fascination for Bandel and a great desire to visit and pray at the shrine. There are two points of importance as I reflect on what Bandel means to me. When I visit Bandel and pray to Our Lady, I get the same feeling I had when I went to see my mother before leaving Italy. The same emotional experience of being with my own mother, is what I feel when I am in Bandel. I never miss going to the balcony, to entrust all my work to Our Lady of Happy Voyage.



Practically, all my life has been spent in the formation of Salesians. At every stage of their formation, I could feel the impact of the devotion they had to Our Lady of Bandel. Many Salesians of the Northern provinces started their early formation in Bandel.

During those years they developed a strong devotion to Our Lady of Bandel. When I came in contact with them, I came to realize the important part this devotion had in their formation and perseverance in vocation.

● Rev. Fr. **Nicholas LoGroi sdb**



Under the Mantle of Mary

Bandel for me is a synonym for Our Blessed Mother. I am lucky to have spent so many years there as a boy, cleric and priest. As an aspirant I learned the basics of religious life, lived under the mantle of Our Blessed Mother and experienced her loving care in so many ways. As a cleric I had the first experience of practical training in the seminary. My first five years of priesthood too, were in Bandel. Now a trip to Bandel is a going home to be with my dear Mother, to relax and be rejuvenated by Her Loving care.

● Fr. **Jose Pellissery SDB**

What *Bandel* means to me...

O beautiful Shrine of Bandel

The only time I was in Bandel was during my aspirantate and I do have some very fond memories of those days. It has always been a point of arrival and of centring.



If I can describe my experience in you, O beautiful Shrine of Bandel, I could use just one word — “Sacred”. Somehow, just entering your premises O Lovely Shrine of My Mother and climbing to your serene Balcony, gave me a deep experience of the sacred. To go to work in your shrine, O Mother and polish its floors; to work on your Balcony and keep it clean, was a real privilege that I longed for. The whole work time spent in your hallowed presence, was a beautiful encounter with the Lord’s Sacred Presence and your loving sweet presence, O Mary. Somehow, the words of our Father Don Bosco concerning your presence, O Mary, in our Houses seemed to be so real at Your Shrine. Your presence still moves me and strengthens me, O Mary!

As I move in my Voyage through Life, may the Centring on Your Shrine build me up, O Lovely Lady of Happy Voyage!

● Fr. John Berger sdb

Under the Care of Our Lady of Bandel

It was on 24th November 1974, Fr. Antony Doro, Fr. Sushil Hira and myself with some 6 aspirants went to Krishnagar for the Eucharistic procession.

I happened to drive the matador van as there was no driver on that day. Sad to say that a few kilometres away from Krishnagar, I happened to close my eyes a little and our vehicle went against a stationary truck which was parked on our right side. You can imagine the result of the impact. I did not realize anything. The first thing that I remember is that after 10 days in a nursing home, I was carried on a stretcher to a vehicle, to take me to Don Bosco School Park Circus, where I remained for about three months. Then I became quite normal and started my life again in the aspirantate in Bandel under the care of Our Lady of Bandel. I want to thank our Blessed Mother for the miraculous way she gave me another lease of life.



● Br. V.D. Varkey sdb

Clippings from my boyhood memories

I always considered it a privilege to have belonged to the first batch of aspirants (seminarians) who landed in Bandel on 11th February 1951 to start off what eventually became a unique Salesian aspirantate for North India. Though my stay there was only for a year, that campus, the Shrine and the aspirantate life have left unforgettable memories.

As Bandel today recalls its history of 400 years, I am journeying down memory lane to my beautiful days in Bandel 50 years ago. One of the most striking personal stories is related to how I got closer to our Heavenly Mother at Bandel. The first little work I was given as part of the chores of seminary days was to sweep the stairway leading up to the Balcony of our Lady, specially on Saturday evening. A job, otherwise considered ordinary and unimportant, became a great experience for me. I knew I was doing it for Mary. The special love I had for our Heavenly Mother prompted me to add a 'Hail Mary' as I swept every step. They became so many 'Hail Marys', and my work time became a long moment of prayer. Gradually, I began to feel the steps were too few because I would have loved to say more 'Hail Marys' in the quiet of the evening, under the colourful twilight sky, with Mary looking down upon me from her niche on the balcony.

Then my boyhood journey took another turn. I began to feel that I was sweeping the steps along which the pilgrims would climb up on the morrow to pray to Mary. I soon grew to believe that I was part of that pilgrimage. Rarely have I discovered and experienced such feelings of joy in a work that otherwise would have been a drudgery. I still recall how sad I felt when, after sometime, a different job was given to me and another "privileged one" was given my job of sweeping Mary's stairways!

From this and from other forms of little devotions to Mary, which I learned from the Marian climate of Bandel, a solid foundation was laid for a Marian interpretation of my life, which has always remained. Today the 'Balcony of Bandel' keeps hovering over me wherever I go.



● Fr. Joseph Kezhakkekara sdb

What Bandel means to me

Mary has never disappointed me

I cannot forget Bandel in my life. I can still remember very vividly that I reached Bandel on the 29th of March 1957. I found my separation from home and my mother too much to bear up. But then I found another Mother waiting for me at Bandel.

At the start of my studies to priesthood at Bandel, I found the studies very difficult since I was not able to follow the English language. With trust I placed this problem in the hands of Mary, the mother of Jesus. *And since then, I can certainly say that Mary has never disappointed me for the last forty-two years.*

Even now, whenever I am faced with a problem of choice in my life, I run to Bandel and pray before the statue of Mary, Our Lady of Bandel. Immediately, I become calm and serene, able to see very clearly what is best for me. Not a single time has Mary left me in the lurch without inspiring me as to what is best for me. For this reason I cannot forget Bandel as long as I live here on earth.

● Fr. Mathew Chiriankandath sdb



Her Holy Balcony of Bandel

I am a Salesian and a Priest. That is what I am today. But how did it all happen? My vocation was nurtured in the cradle of a good Christian family. I was led in my vocation lovingly from the home-cradle to the Bandel-cradle. Nostalgic memories of real nurturing of my vocation come to my mind — in Our Lady's House at Bandel. With deep sentiments of love and gratitude, I turn to my Mother and kneeling at Her feet at Her holy balcony of Bandel I say:

I leave all to You, O sweet Mother, in the name of the Father,
I leave all to you, O sweet Mother, in the name of the Son,
I leave all to you, O sweet Mother, in the name of the Holy Spirit,
I leave all to you, O sweet Mother, in Your own sweet name,
As God left all to You in Jesus.
O Mary, my most dear Mother, remember that I am Your own,
Keep me and guard me as Your own property, as Your own possession, Amen.



● Fr. Mathew Pulingathil sdb

Bandel is like an Oasis

A traveller in a desert can think of the *Oasis* as the most comforting place. He finds water, shade and rest for which he has been longing in the course of his journey in the desert sands.

Though it would be inappropriate to compare life's journey to a desert, the thought of Bandel is like an oasis. This is the first place I would like to go for relaxation, to find strength and enthusiasm in my Salesian and priestly life. In my Salesian life, I have worked in Bandel only for two months, as a substitute *Assistant*. However, my numerous trips to Bandel have been comforting experiences. The thought of a mother awaiting me, and the nostalgic attachments to the majestic Church, the grotto and the balcony can find no expression in words. Just walking around the grace-filled atmosphere does me more good than, may be, a day spent in retreat! And there is always the challenge to reach a degree of perfection and of being faithful till the day I am brought back to Bandel for the eternal rest. Yes, Bandel is an oasis of grace, joy and peace for me.



● Fr. **Dominic Kachira** sdb

The loving, powerful presence

Being brought up in a devout family, I was initiated into Marian devotion from childhood, which matured as I began my Salesian life at Bandel. The loving and powerful presence of our Blessed Mother was experienced by me while in Bandel aspirantate and later on in my Salesian priestly life. During my ministry at Calcutta I went to Bandel on and off to pay my filial homage to Our Blessed Mother and beg her motherly protection. I have kept up that practice whenever I visit Calcutta. May she continue to protect and guide me.



● Fr. **Antony Kodiyan** sdb

What *Bandel* means to me...

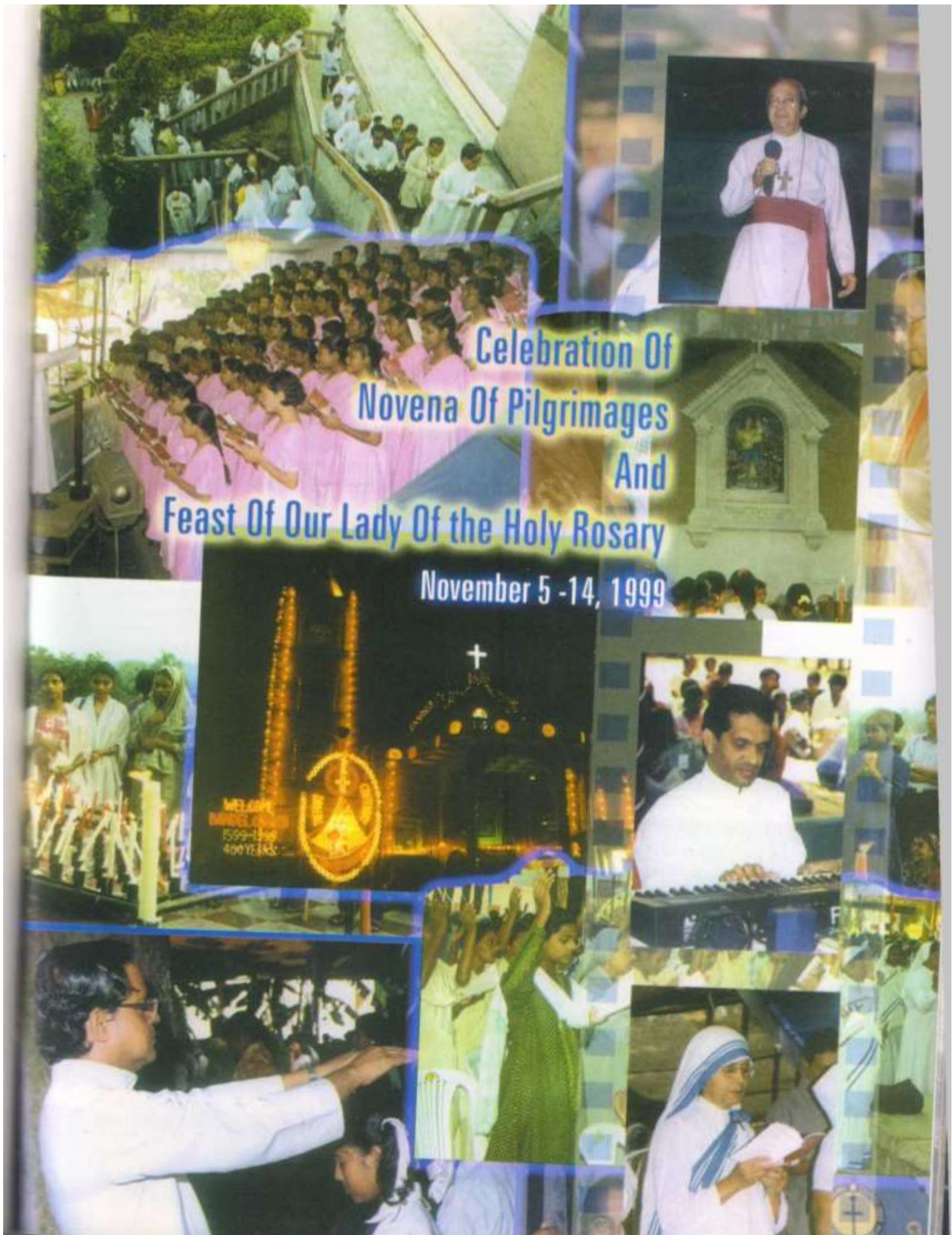
**DIOCESAN COMMITTEE
FOR THE
FOURTH CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS OF BANDEL BASILICA**

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

1. Archbishop Henry D'Souza, **President**
2. Mgr. Francis Gomes, V.G.
3. Fr. Francis Alancherry SDB, Provincial of Calcutta Province
4. Fr. Louis Gobetti SDB, Administrator, Bandel Basilica
5. Fr. Franklin Menezes, P.P. Infant Jesus Church, Behala; Theologian
6. Fr. Sebastian Kuzhipala SDB
7. Fr. Francis Vadakken SDB
8. Fr. Vincent Lobo P.P. St. Thomas' Church, Middleton Row
9. Fr. C.M. Paul SDB, Director, Nitika, Catechetics and Media Centre
10. Fr. Bertie Fernandes SDB, Prior, Bandel Basilica

LOCAL ORGANISING COMMITTEE

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Rev. Fr. Bertie Fernandes sdb
Prior Bandel Church, President | 7. Rev. Sr. Nancy Augustine
Superior, Ferrando Convent |
| 2. Rev. Fr. Thomas Gomes sdb
Rector, Don Bosco Bandel | 8. Rev. Fr. Louis Gobetti SDB
Administrator, Bandel Basilica |
| 3. Rev. Sr. Genevieve FMA
Superior, Auxilium Convent | 9. Rev. Fr. K.T. Thomas SDB
Headmaster, St. John's School |
| 4. Rev. Sr. George
Superior St. Joseph's Chandennagore | 10. Mr. Silanand Kandulna
Secretary, Parish Council |
| 5. Rev. Fr. Tapan Khan
Parish Priest, Sacred Heart Heart
Church, Chandennagore | 11. Rev. Fr. Thomas Pulickal SDB,
Secretary |
| 6. Rev. Sr. Rose V.
Superior, Sisters Adorers Convent | |



PREPARATIONS FOR THE QUATERCENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

MARY DOES IT IN HER OWN WAY !



By Fr. K.T. Thomas SDB

Ever since the first church in northern India was established at Bandel in 1599, Mary has reigned here as the loving mother and powerful protectress of all who have called on her with faith and trust. She has effectively intervened in times of danger and need as amply testified by the 400 glorious years of the history of Bandel Church. Even the mighty Moghuls could not obliterate people's devotion to this "Lady of Happy Voyage", and her statue was miraculously returned by the sacred waters of the Ganges, ushering in a new dawn of calm and peace after the ravages of war and persecution. More than three centuries have rolled by since the "Lady of Happy Voyage" had graciously heard the prayers of a captain and his crew and saved them from certain shipwreck in the turbulent waters of river Hooghly.

In the course of years Bandel Church had practically lost all the 777 bighas of land originally gifted by emperor Shah Jahan and was left with only the little compounds of its three educational institutions, namely, St. John's Bengali medium school, Don Bosco and Auxilium English medium schools, and the church premises with its only open ground on the eastern side along the river Hooghly. St. John's school was established in 1870 by Rev. Fr. A.C. Rodrigues the then Prior of Bandel Church. Part of the school was housed in the ground floor rooms of the ancient "Casa Misericordia", later known as the Augustinian Hall, adjacent to the open grounds which naturally were used then as play grounds for the students of this church school.

With the arrival of the Salesians in 1928, Bandel Church and St. John's school came under the management of the Salesians of Don Bosco. Soon St. John's school was shifted to a plot of land belonging to the church, situated on the western side of the old G.T. Road, and provided it with proper buildings and play grounds. However, even after the shifting of the school, the church grounds were left open without proper boundary walls. Initially there was no problem as the people around were far too few in number and extremely respectful and friendly. But, with the inflow of more and more people from neighbouring Bangladesh and even from the congested and over crowded city of Calcutta, the once deserted "jungles" of Bandel were soon studded with houses and colonies. The church too began to

grow in importance as a centre of pilgrimages and an attractive tourist spot of great historical value. More Christian educational institutions came up around the church and more and more Christian families began to settle in the area. In 1988 the Vatican recognised the national and international importance of Bandel Church as a Marian centre of pilgrimage and raised it to the status of a Minor Basilica.

...antisocial groups who indulged in all sorts of nefarious activities both by day and night. Stealing, gambling, trafficking in illicit liquor, drugs and immoral activities became rampant...

Meanwhile, the Church grounds which were long left without any boundary walls and with easy access from the river, gradually became a virtual hunting ground for antisocial groups who indulged in all sorts of nefarious activities both by day and night. Stealing, gambling, trafficking in illicit liquor, drugs and immoral activities became rampant. Unauthorised playing of games, systematic harassment and forceful collection of money from pilgrims who parked their vehicles in the church area, and even

from casual visitors to this holy place became a serious problem that had to be firmly dealt with. Some even took pride in desecrating the holy cross and altar erected at the very spot where the lost statue of Mary was miraculously found. It became imperative for the church authorities to take effective steps to protect and safeguard the sanctity and safety of this holy place for the greater interest of the general public and of the numerous pilgrims and visitors whose number may well exceed 25 to 30 lakhs a year. In stead of isolating, identifying and bringing to book the antisocial elements, some people with vested interests supported them and thus deprived the general public of the greater benefits of a more secure, peaceful and beautiful environment and better facilities proposed by the church. Under the guise of championing the apparently noble cause of promoting games, they kept insisting that the church authorities relinquish their ownership of the land and leave the church grounds as a public thoroughfare without any boundary wall, gates or restrictions.

Trouble started when in 1987 the church made its first real attempt to enclose its grounds with a proper boundary wall. At the last moment when the work was nearly completed, violence erupted and two wide openings had to be left unsealed along the river side, thus frustrating the very purpose of a boundary wall.

Later, conceding to the repeated requests of the district magistrate and the municipal authorities, the church agreed to provide sufficient space from its land for a passage to the river along the southern side of its grounds and the municipality had agreed to rebuild the wall on the southern end accordingly and seal the two openings along the river side. And gradually the church, with the backing of the district administration, began to exercise more control over the grounds in the early nineties.

But the year 1995 saw the outbreak of a new and terrible storm in the river Hooghly that

seemed to engulf the Church and its feeble little flock. On July 19th the church was dragged into a civil case and its right over the grounds was contested. But, after months of harassment and tension, Mary intervened again in defence of the church, and on 20.03.96 the Court of the Sub-Divisional Executive Magistrate, Hooghly, passed a clear and strong verdict in favour of the church.

It was hoped that finally with this Court Order, all disputes would end! But worse was yet to come! And how could it have been otherwise? Such a long-standing and complicated problem of control over the church grounds could not have been solved except through an equally complex, arduous and painful process. Mary knew it all. She knew best how she would prepare for the grand celebration of the **4th Centenary of her maternal presence at Bandel. And all she demanded was greater faith and trust in her powerful protection.**

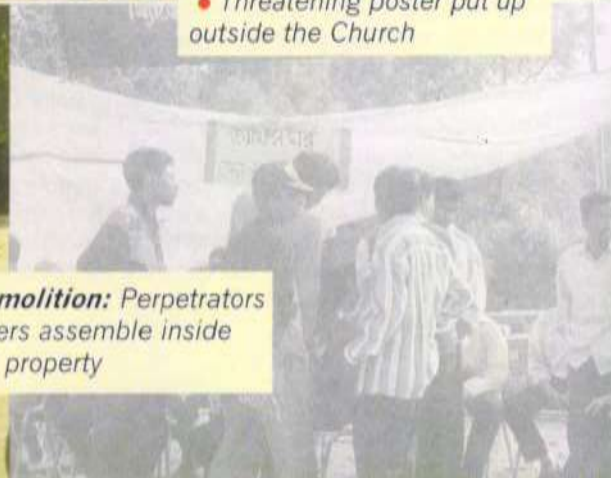
In the evening of 27th March 1996, soon after copies of the said court order were served to all concerned parties, some persons began to go round with loud speakers, in utter violation of court's order, making all types of false accusations against the church and the district administration, instigating the public



• **Wall Demolition:** Perpetrators and onlookers assemble inside the Church property



• Threatening poster put up outside the Church



against the church and intentionally suppressing the truth regarding the S.D.E.M's order. Thereafter they continued in various ways to mislead the general public and to malign the church through all sorts of false propaganda.

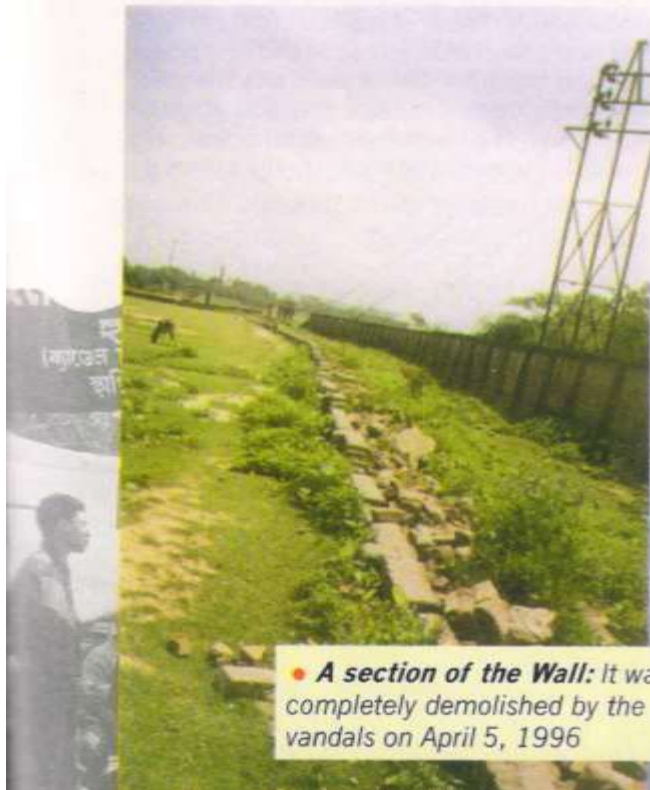
On receiving the clear order of the court upholding the church's absolute and indefeasible ownership of the grounds in question, on 27.03.96 the church authorities informed the District Magistrate and all concerned authorities of their intention to complete the boundary walls of the grounds. As per agreement with the district authorities, sufficient space was left from the church land for a 25 feet wide approach road to the Hooghly along the southern end of the grounds. The police and the district authorities extended full protection and the construction of the boundary wall was nearing completion when, on Good Friday 1996, tragedy struck Bandel once again.

All attempts by the opposite parties to obtain an interim stay of the court order were rejected by the lower and higher courts. Having utterly failed in their legal battle, they resorted to sheer violence and vandalism that culminated in extensive damage and destruction of the church property, total demolition of the entire 10 feet high compound wall of nearly 1200 feet length, desecration of the holy place of worship, threats, abuses and attacks on the Priests, Nuns and Christians of Bandel Church. The shocking devastation took nearly 2½ hours. The few police who were at the site could do nothing when a small group of 20-30 antisocials began breaking the wall close to the main gate at about 11.30 A.M. Having met

with no resistance, they called out to others of the locality to join in the vandalism. After repeated SOS messages from the church, a small group of additional force from the near by police station arrived at the spot only at about 1.00 P.M. when more than half the destruction was already done. Even after their arrival the devastation continued unabated and unhindered until the last brick fell. The perpetrators of this terrible crime then celebrated bursting crackers and hurling more threats and abuses against the church.

Later in the afternoon, the local Christian community that had come to church for the Good Friday Services were overwhelmed by shock and grief at the horrifying sight. At the conclusion of the sacred services, they made a unanimous request that, instead of the traditional procession to the church grounds with the statue of the dead body of Christ, they would like to take out a peaceful procession to the District Magistrate and the local police station to make known to the district authorities their deep anguish and shock at the outrages committed against the minority community and to express their terrible sense of fear and insecurity. Accordingly, with prior permission and police escort, the procession started from the church at about 5.30 P.M. **Even as this peaceful procession was returning to the church, at around 8.00 PM they were suddenly halted by the police near Devi Park, less than a kilometre from Bandel Church, because the perpetrators of the shocking vandalism had collected in front of the church with brickbats and weapons to attack the innocent Christians for no other crime than that of having courageously exercised their democratic right of making a representation to the constituted authorities as true and peace-loving citizens of India.** The priests, nuns, men, ladies and children, who were on Good Friday fast, were all held up on the road for over six long hours before they were able to return to the church! All the while the violent mob kept hurling brickbats at the church causing serious damage to its stained glass windows, lights etc. and to the convents and educational institutions around. Some of the houses of the Christians were also damaged. The Prior, who was the only priest left in the church, stood praying before the miraculous statue of the Lady of Happy Voyage up in the balcony until all his flock had safely returned.

Mounting tension and threats of murder and bomb attacks forced the church authorities even to cancel their most sacred Easter Vigil celebrations and prayers on the night of 6th April 96. Yes indeed, Good Friday 1996 (5th April) will go down in the annals of Bandel Church as the saddest day since the siege of Hooghly and the destruction of the church by the Moghuls way back in 1632. But that was Mary's own way of preparing for the celebration of the 4th

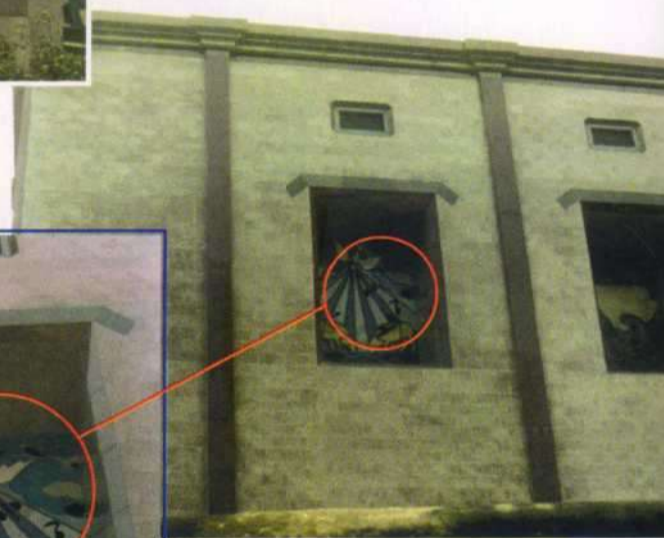
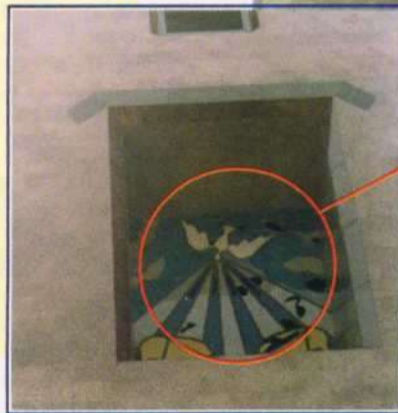


• **A section of the Wall:** It was completely demolished by the vandals on April 5, 1996



- **After the Vandalism:**
(clockwise from left)

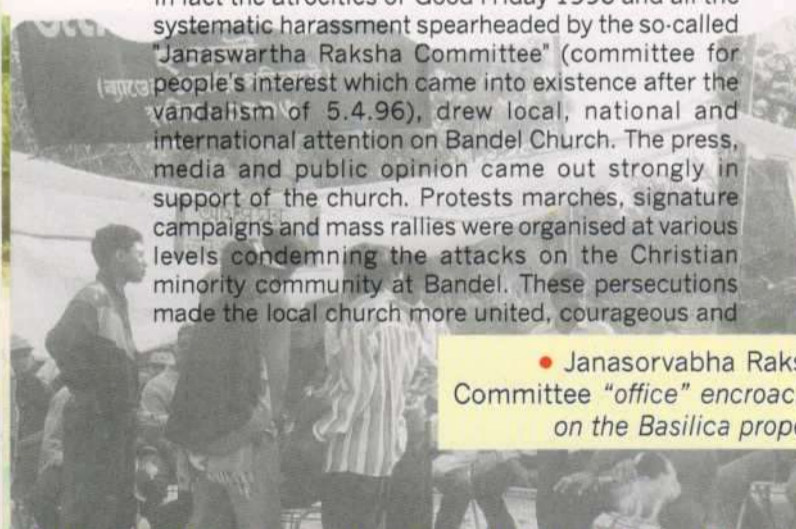
 1. Auxilium School vandalised,
 2. Stained glass window of the Church smashed (magnified in inset),
 3. Another shattered window.



Centenary of the Foundation of Bandel Church (1599-1999) and of reaffirming her unflinching protection and powerful presence in Bandel. And just as the ignominy of the first Good Friday led to the glorious triumph of the Resurrection, so the sad events of Good Friday 1996 have been slowly but surely leading the local church through 3 long years of tension and harassment, threats and intimidation, and never-ending court cases towards a permanent and peaceful solution of a long-standing problem.

strong. Many national and international organisations and eminent personalities like Mother Teresa, Sri K. R. Narayanan, then Vice-President of India, and others intervened in favour of the church. With major changes in the district administration and with strong support from the state government and the West Bengal Minority Commission, timely and effective steps were taken to prevent fresh attacks, maintain peace and restore confidence of the minority community.

In fact the atrocities of Good Friday 1996 and all the systematic harassment spearheaded by the so-called "Janaswartha Raksha Committee" (committee for people's interest which came into existence after the vandalism of 5.4.96), drew local, national and international attention on Bandel Church. The press, media and public opinion came out strongly in support of the church. Protests marches, signature campaigns and mass rallies were organised at various levels condemning the attacks on the Christian minority community at Bandel. These persecutions made the local church more united, courageous and



- Janasorbabha Raksha Committee "office" encroaches on the Basilica property





• The old monastery...
now being rebuilt

So far, every verdict of the Lower as well as of the Higher Courts, have clearly been in favour of the church. And, although the opposite parties have been intentionally trying to drag and delay the judicial process, the Calcutta High Court's strong directive to the district court to expedite the pending suits and its latest Interim Order dated 24.03.1999 permitting the church to encircle its grounds with boundary wall and rebuild its old monastery has brightened the hopes of having the final disposal of the crucial title suit before the great Jubilee Year 2000.

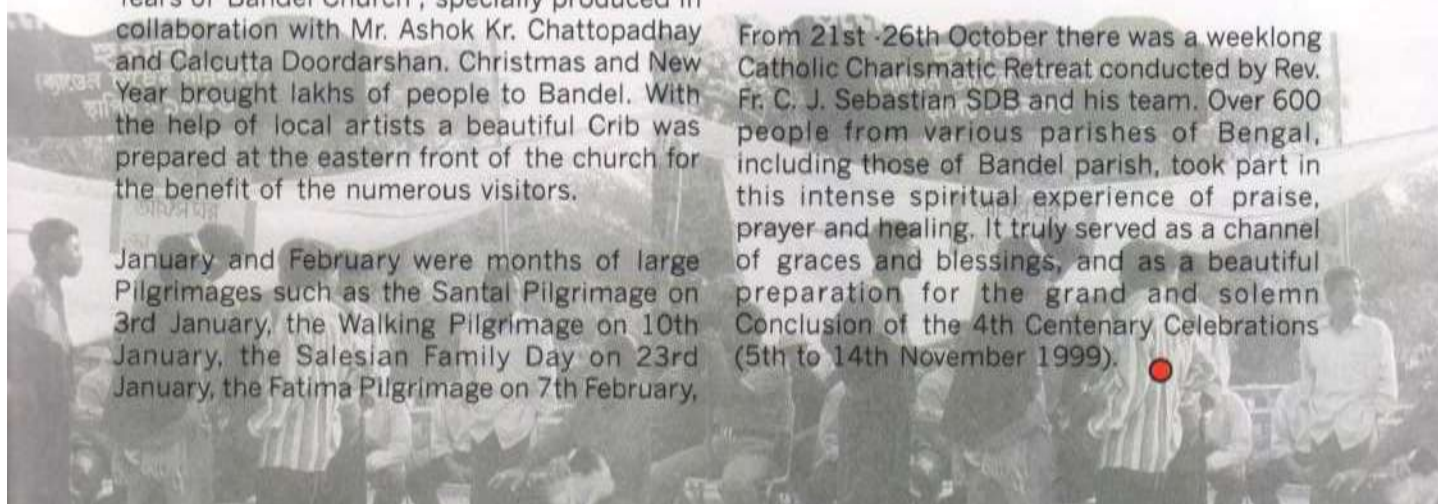


With the gradual return of peace and normalcy in the region, on 7th November 1998 the church was able to solemnly inaugurate the yearlong celebrations of the 4th Centenary of Bandel Church on the occasion of the annual procession for the Feast of the Holy Rosary. After the procession and Benediction, there was a beautiful cultural programme and the screening of a video documentary entitled, "400 Glorious Years of Bandel Church", specially produced in collaboration with Mr. Ashok Kr. Chattopadhyay and Calcutta Doordarshan. Christmas and New Year brought lakhs of people to Bandel. With the help of local artists a beautiful Crib was prepared at the eastern front of the church for the benefit of the numerous visitors.

January and February were months of large Pilgrimages such as the Santal Pilgrimage on 3rd January, the Walking Pilgrimage on 10th January, the Salesian Family Day on 23rd January, the Fatima Pilgrimage on 7th February,

and the Lenten Procession on 21st February. Besides the Holy Week and Easter Solemnities, March and April witnessed the celebration of Vocation Day on 18th April and Perpetual Profession of seven young Salesians on 25th April. In May the Feast of Our Lady of Bandel was specially solemnised on 2nd May preceded by a grand procession on the 1st. On different occasions throughout the year special care was taken to solemnise the celebration of each of the sacraments and to bring home to the parishioners their meaning and relevance. The jubilee year also gifted the church with its first Priest from Bandel Parish when on 16th January Rt. Rev. Henry D'Souza, archbishop of Calcutta, ordained Fr. Alfred Paul SDB. The sick and the senior parishioners were specially honoured on 18th July while the children had a grand Catechetical Day on 8th August and the teenagers had their Youth Fest on 26th September. Very colourful celebrations were held on 15th August, Independence Day of the nation and Feast of Mary's Assumption into Heaven.

From 21st -26th October there was a weeklong Catholic Charismatic Retreat conducted by Rev. Fr. C. J. Sebastian SDB and his team. Over 600 people from various parishes of Bengal, including those of Bandel parish, took part in this intense spiritual experience of praise, prayer and healing. It truly served as a channel of graces and blessings, and as a beautiful preparation for the grand and solemn Conclusion of the 4th Centenary Celebrations (5th to 14th November 1999).





400 Glorious Years

Day One **5th November**

The Novena of Pilgrimages began on 5th November, with nearly 1200 children and many parishioners joining in the day long celebration. Fr. **Francis Alencherry** sdb, the provincial of the Salesians, was the main celebrant for the Eucharist and Chief Guest for the other functions of the day.

The day began with Praise and Worship. Rev. Fr. **Robin Gomes** led the children through an activity to discover the various historically important locations in the Basilica complex. Before the Holy Mass, the Papal flag and the Basilica flag were ceremoniously hoisted on the historic mast standing in front of the Basilica.





Day Two
6th November

400 *Glorious Years*

Saturday, 6th November was set aside for the parishioners of Bandel and Chandennagore. Bishop **Lucas Sircar** of Krishnagar presided over the functions. During the mass there were 182 confirmations and 82 children received First Holy communion. The children of the Basilica Parish prepared the cultural programme, the highlight of which was Rabindranath Tagore's Dance drama, 'Tasher Desh'.



*400
Glorious
Years*

**Day Three
7th November**

Fr. **Vincent Lobo**, the coordinator of the day had contacted many pilgrims from Calcutta and neighbouring parishes. The main pilgrim group of the day was English speaking pilgrims, groups and Associations. The response of the pilgrims was overwhelming. Msgr. **Francis Gomes**, VG of Calcutta Archdiocese was the main celebrant of the Mass in which 18 priests concelebrated.

The powerful praise and worship led the congregation to a penitential service and the sacrament of reconciliation. Like other days, the pilgrimage ended with the procession to the balcony and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in the historic church.







400 Glorious Years

Day Four **8th November**

The Santhal pilgrims started arriving from early hours of the morning and by the time the programme of the day started, they numbered nearly five thousand. Bishop **Julius Marandi** of Dumka and Bishop **Cyprian Monis** of Asansol were the main celebrants to lead the community for the different programmes of the day which ended only by about 11.30 PM. The candle lit procession was indeed a very moving experience for all. Fr. **Valerian Fernandes** was the coordinator of the day.



400 Glorious Years

Day Five 9th November

About two thousand youth converged on Bandel Basilica on the fifth day of the novena. Nearly half of this number came from the diocese of Krishnagar, under the leadership of Fr. **Samuel**, the Diocesan Youth director. The various programmes of the day were designed for the benefit of the young people.

Bishop **Salvadore Lobo** of Baruipur and 15 priests celebrated the Eucharist with the young people gathered for the pilgrimage. A short cultural programme was put up by the students of Auxilium Bandel. The whole atmosphere of the pilgrimage was one of devotion and prayer which helped the youth to experience God and the maternal help and presence of Our Lady of Bandel.





*400
Glorious
Years*

**Day Six
10th November**

Many priests and religious have visited Bandel, but this pilgrimage was of a different kind. It was a day of prayer for more than nine hundred priests, seminarians and sisters who came for the pilgrimage. Archbishop **Alan de Lastic** of Delhi enlivened the day with his first hand account of the visit of the Holy Father Pope **John Paul II** to Delhi. At the beginning of the Eucharist, the seven foot tall statue of Our Lady of Happy Voyage, prepared specially for the centenary celebrations, was blessed and crowned by His Grace Archbishop Alan de Lastic. The pilgrimage ended in the historic Basilica after a devotional procession to the balcony.





*400
Glorious
Years*

**Day Seven
11th November**

The Salesian family comprising members of the SDB, FMA, Salesian Cooperators, Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, the Sisters of Mary Immaculate, and Salesian Past Pupils, made their pilgrimage on the seventh day of the novena. After a brief period of praise and worship, there were two sessions by Rev. Fr. **Joaquim D'Souza** SDB and Sr. **Celine D'Cunha** FMA.

In the afternoon, the beautifully prepared liturgy and devout procession ending in the historic church brought the pilgrimage to a close. All the members gathered together, made an act of entrustment to Our Lady of Happy Voyage and thanked Her for all the blessings and graces received in the past four hundred years.

Fr. **John Berger**, the coordinator of the day, organised the various details of this memorable pilgrimage.






*400
Glorious
Years*

Day Eight
12th November

Day Eight of the Novena was set aside mostly for the Hindi-speaking pilgrims from different parts of West Bengal, Bihar and other states.

Archbishop **Telesphore P. Toppo** of Ranchi, who had arrived the previous day concelebrated the Mass along with many the priests who had accompanied the pilgrims. Fr. **Jose Pellissery**, the coordinator of the pilgrimage had elaborately planned the various activities of the day and the pilgrims responded with great faith and devotion. About three thousand faithful took part in the day's pilgrimage.



400
*Glorious
Years*

Day Nine
13th November

The last day of the novena was unique in solemnity and expression of faith. The number of pilgrims exceeded that of all other days. The largest organised groups came from the Diocese of Krishnagar, under the leadership of Fr. **K.K. Sebastian**, the coordinator of the day.

In addition to the usual programmes of the novena, the special feature of the day was the traditional candle lit procession through the Christian settlements and the neighbouring areas of the Basilica. The Blessed Sacrament and the statue of Our Lady of Bandel were carried in two beautifully decorated floats. The entire route of the procession was decorated with arches and brightly coloured lights. While the pilgrims prayed and sang together, the people of the locality joined them in silent prayer. Bishop **Lucas Sircar** of Krishnagar Diocese was the main celebrant for this concluding day of the novena.





*400
Glorious
Years*

**Feast of
Our Lady of the
Holy Rosary
14th November**

The Feast of Our Lady was celebrated with great solemnity and fervour this year as conclusion to the year-long celebration of the 4th Centenary of Bandel Basilica. The Novena of Pilgrimages attended by thousands of people was a spontaneous expression of Marian devotion and piety. The Holy Father, Pope **John Paul II**, recognized the importance of the occasion by appointing a Papal commission for the conclusion of the 4th Centenary Celebrations. Most Rev. **Henry D'Souza**, Archbishop of Calcutta, was the 'Papal Special Envoy'. He was accompanied by Rev. Fr. **George Pereira**, Deputy-Secretary General CBCI and Rev. Fr. **Savarimuthu Arulsamy**, Deputy-Secretary General CCBI-LR.





For the concluding Eucharistic celebration and the cultural function there were present eight bishops, H.E. Mr. **M.M. Jacob**, Governor of Meghalaya, H.E. Mr. **Manuel Marcelo Curto**, the Ambassador of Portugal, more than thirty major superiors of religious congregations of West Bengal, many dignitaries from near and far. In his homily, His Grace Archbishop Henry D'Souza spoke on the historical and religious importance of the Basilica at Bandel. The whole celebration was a solemn moment of thanksgiving to Our Blessed Mother of Happy Voyage.

During the cultural function, the 'Papal Special Envoy' released the 4th Centenary Souvenir, "400 Glorious Years. Bandel Basilica 1599-1999". The day was concluded with a series of music and dance programmes to which were invited the people of the locality and the parishioners of Bandel. Pilgrims who came to the Basilica for the Novena and the feast could experience a special atmosphere of devotion and solemnity. Much of this was created by the 130-strong centenary choir, conducted by Rev. Fr. **V.C. Jose** and Rev. Fr. **I.C. Jacob**, who had meticulously prepared each day's liturgy and 'Praise and Worship'. The Liturgical committee had prepared with great care various parts of the liturgical functions so as to add solemnity and devotion. The work of all the other committees contributed greatly towards the smooth conduct of the ten days' programmes, to the great satisfaction and benefit of the thousands of pilgrims who came to the feet of Our Lady of Happy Voyage to celebrate the 4th Centenary of Her presence in Bandel.

"To Jesus Through Mary".



