



# in touch with MISSION



INE e-magazine

APRIL 2021

FOR INTERNAL CIRCULATION ONLY

VOL. 2 NO. 1

**Servant of God**  
**MARIAN**  
**ZELAZEK**

**The Vehicle of**  
**CREATIVITY and**  
**COMPASSION**  
**in MISSION**

INE MISSION SECRETARY  
INE PROVINCE, SHANTI BHAVAN  
Jharsuguda, Odisha, India

A SPECIAL ISSUE IN COMMEMORATION OF  
THE 15<sup>TH</sup> DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF  
FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK, SVD, ON APRIL 30.





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INE e-magazine

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## SERVANT OF GOD MARIAN ZELAZEK: THE VEHICLE OF CREATIVITY AND COMPASSION IN MISSION

Servant of God Marian Zelazek is a Religious Missionary Priest belonging to the Society of the Divine Word (SVD). He was born in Poland on 30 January 1918 and was ordained SVD Missionary Priest in Rome on 18 September 1948. As per his desire, he was appointed to the SVD Sambalpur Mission in Odisha, India and thus he landed in Odisha in March 1950.



His Priestly studies were interrupted by World War II and he was imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camp in Dachau in Germany from 1940 – 1945. In the concentration camp, he witnessed the death of his own companions due to hunger and torture and consequently vowed that if he comes out of the camp alive, he will do everything to make this world a better place, where there would be no one hungry and no one without human dignity. He emerged alive from the Nazi death camp on 29 April 1945, not with bitterness but with greater faith in God and in human person.

Servant of God Fr. Marian worked in Odisha for 56 long years, 25 years in Sambalpur Mission of the present Dioceses of Sambalpur and Rourkela and 31 years in the holy city of Puri in the Archdiocese of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar. In Sambalpur mission he toiled mainly among the tribals/indigenous people, trying to empower them through education; and in and around Puri he worked for the enhancement of the human dignity of the victims of leprosy, the unwanted, the poor, and the abandoned. When he breathed his last on 30 April 2006 in the arms of his leprosy friends, as he always wished, one of the leprosy colony inmates exclaimed: “Here is a great and holy man, truly a Man of God, who by his presence in Puri has made the holy city of Lord Jagannath a holier city and a better place to live in”.

The INE province continues to foster his memory and good work in Puri by continuing all the ministries he had started. He has become an inspiration to all of us in this modern world. As we have begun the process of his sainthood under the diocesan right, we have a greater responsibility to make him known to all people and also begin to pray at our respective communities, parishes and institutions for his beatification.

With the purpose of popularizing and to commemorate the 15th death anniversary (30<sup>th</sup> April) of **Servant of God Fr. Marian Zelazek**, the office of the INE Mission Secretary dedicates the third issue of the INE e-Magazine ‘*In Touch with Mission*’ to the **Servant of God Fr. Marian Zelazek**. My invitation to share your personal experiences with Fr. and write articles about him is well accepted and I received good number of articles and testimonies which are the contents of this issue of mission magazine.





I thank sincerely all the contributors of the articles and sharing of your testimonies for this issue of E-Magazine. My special appreciation to Fr. T. K. Kurian, SVD the postulator for the cause of Fr. Marian for showing lot of interest to bring out this issue of magazine and contributing substantially through his articles. I am grateful to Fr. Alexius Dungdung SVD and Fr. Anuranjan Dungdung, SVD for their meticulous correction of the language. I am grateful to Fr. Dixon D'Souza, SVD for the layout and designing this e-Magazine in a very professional way. I hope that this issue of INE mission magazine would help you to draw insights into the person of Servant of God Marian Zelazek and make him known in the places of your mission and pray for his beatification.

*-Fr. Luvis Ronald Pereira, SVD, INE Mission Secretary*







## TO LIVE OUR LIFE IN OPENNESS TO GOD

-Fr. Petrus Kullu, SVD, Provincial Superior, INE



“We live the culture of exclusion, the culture of discarding. We need to go out to meet those excluded brothers, abandoned to their fate, trampled by selfish interest... There you are also sent to make the spirit of the Beatitudes a reality through the works of mercy: listening and responding to the cries of those who ask for bread and justice; bringing peace and integral promotion to those who seek a more dignified life; comforting and offering reasons of hope to the sorrows and sufferings of so many men and women of our time...” says Pope Francis while addressing SVDs during the XVIII

General Chapter. One of those who were sent to make the spirit of the Beatitudes a reality through the words of mercy in India, especially in the place called Puri was Fr. Marian Zelazek, the servant of God.

Late Fr. Mathew Poovanpuzha, SVD, writes in the obituary, “When Fr. Marian died at the age of 88 on April 30, 2006, he had already become a full-blown philanthropist, a sage, a mystic and a guru, who believed that ‘God created human beings in his own image’ and that all human beings have a responsibility to do something to uphold and sustain that image of every human person. No wonder that someone paid this homage to him when he died: “Here is a great and holy man, who by his presence at Puri for the last 31 years has made the holy city of Lord Jagannath a holier city and a better place to live in”. We are proud and honoured to say that the INE Province is blessed with the one such holy person who truly lived his life for the sake of the Gospel values, bearing witness in everything he did. By his life we come to know that living the Gospel is difficult. Yet we are called to see the face of God in every person we meet, but when that person is deformed, or disabled, or unpleasant, it can be hard to reach out with charity. As we try to build a culture of life and instil pro-life values in our communities, families, places of ministry, etc. we make our sincere efforts to learn from the exemplary life of Fr. Marian who lived out the gospel of life despite trials and obstacles.

I take this opportunity to thank editorial team of ‘*In Touch with the Mission*’, the E-magazine and all those who have contributed their writings and life experiences with Fr. Marian Zelazek, for making known to the readers the holy and gifted person Fr. Marian. For Pope Francis in one of his general audience says, “Our world, and especially our young people, need models, people who show us how to bring out the best in ourselves, to use our God-given gifts and talents and, in doing so, to point the way to a better future for our communities.”





I wish and pray that the life of the Servant of God Marian Zelazek, shared through this e-magazine may help us to live our life in openness to God in good times and in bad. Thus, may we promote the cause of the beatification of Fr. Marian Zelazek. Through the intercession of the Servant of God Marian Zelazek I pray for God's abundant blessings upon all the readers and all those who work for the cause of Marian Zelazek. May God Bless You All!

**Yours in the Divine Word,  
*Fr. Petrus Kullu, SVD***





# CHRONOLOGY OF SERVANT OF GOD FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK'S LIFE

-Fr. T. K. Kurian, SVD, Postulator



- 30 Jan 1918 - Marian Zelazek was born of Stanislav and Stanislava as the seventh child in Paledzie near Poznan
- 10 Feb 1918 - little Marian is baptized in Skórzew
- 1925 - he starts education at a local elementary school
- 1926 - the Zelazek family moves into Poznan
- 1930 - Marian attends St. Mary Magdalene Gymnasium in Poznan
- 1932 - Joins the SVD Boys Gymnasium cum SVD minor seminary in Górna Grupa, Pomerania Region
- 8 Sept 1937 - Marian starts his novitiate in Chludowo near Poznan
- Sept 1938 - Starts philosophical studies, a requirement for priestly ordination
- 4 Sept 1939 - Professes First Religious Vows
- 20 May 1940 - Marian obtains Certificate of Completion of the Philosophy
- 22 May 1940 - Marian is taken into custody, detained in Fort VII in Poznan
- 25 May - Interned in the Dachau concentration camp
- Aug 1940 - transported to the Gusen concentration camp
- 8 Dec 1941 - brought back to the Dachau camp
- 29 April 1945- US Army liberates the Dachau camp. Marian freed.
- Nov 1946 - Begins his theological studies at Anselmianum University, Rome
- 12 March 1948 - took perpetual vows and got his assignment to Sambalpur mission
- 18 Sept 1948 - Ordination to priesthood in Rome
- 1949 - Completes his studies in Rome with a Licentiate in theology
- 1949 - visits Poland for a month (after nine years), celebrates his first Mass in Poznan
- 1949 - works among Polish refugees in Bagnoli near Naples
- 1 March 1950 - sets off from Genova on board a Dutch freight liner Laurenskerk to join the new SVD mission in Sambalpur in the Indian state of Orissa
- 21 March 1950 - Marian Zelazek arrives in Bombay, India, his promised land.
- 1 April 1950 - arrives in Kesramal, his new mission among the Adivasis;
- 1950 - learnt Sadri, Hindi and Oriya, three of the local languages
- 1951- Fr. Zelazek is appointed teacher and Headmaster of the only mission High School in Hamirpur, Rourkela (Sambalpur Diocese)
- 1953 – 1963 - Director of the Apostolic School (minor seminary)
- 1963 – 1975 - Secretary of the Catholic Board of Education – over all in-charge of all the Catholic schools, totaling 171, in the diocese of Sambalpur
- 1968 – 1975- Parish Priest of a new parish at Bondamunda which he built up
- 01 June 1975 - took up appointment as Parish Priest of Puri, and began his services to the people of Puri, the holy city of Lord Jagannath.







# CHRONOLOGY OF SERVANT OF GOD FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK'S LIFE

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1976 - starts working for the leprosy patients – providing health care, food, shelter etc.
- 1977 - Starts a 'school' under a tree for the children of the leprosy patients, which later became Beatrix School.
- 1983 - Opened a Dialogue Centre attached to the Church which includes a public library, a reading room, and a meeting/prayer room, open to all people
- Dec. 11, 1985 - Consecration of the new Parish-Church in Puri, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- Dec. 1989 - opened Karunalaya Leprosy hospital with 22 beds.
- June 1991 - Moves into Ishopanathi Ashram and dedicated his full time to Karunalaya Leprosy Care Centre and Beatrix school
- October 1998 - People of Puri and Poland celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Fr. Marian's priestly ordination and 80th Birthday with various programs like exhibitions on his mission and award giving ceremonies.
- 03 Oct. 2000 - received the Karol Marcinkiewicz Medal, awarded by Poznan Medical University for his contribution to the care of lepers.
- 26 May 2001 - the BBC broadcasts a 45-minute documentary 'New Face of Leprosy', featuring Fr. Marian Zelazek and his activity in Puri.
- 2002 - Polish National TV broadcasts a 20-minute documentary film entitled 'Aszimbado Ojca Mariana Zelazika' by Ms. Anna Pietraszek
- 2002 - Nominated for Nobel Peace Prize and he was the runners up candidate for it among 123 candidates.
- 15 June 2002 - A High School in Chludowo, near Poznan, is dedicated to Father Marian Zelazek, SVD
- 3 Aug 2002 - Fr. Marian is presented with an honorary diploma by the University of Poznan.
- 2 Sept 2002 - Fr. Marian is presented with a diploma "for outstanding merits for the promotion of Poland in the world in 2001" by the Foreign Ministry of Poland
- 2003 - Fr. Marian is awarded a diploma of National Institute of Social Work and Social Science for his outstanding merits in working with the youth of the Sundargarh district and the lepers of Puri.
- Jan 2003 - Rotary International District 3260 awards him a diploma of the Hope and Love Conference for his work with Hansen disease victims.
- 26 Jan 2003 - Bharati Foundation Trust at Bhubaneswar confers Bharati Samman to "Eminent Missionary Father Marian on Republic Day 2003 for his dedication to mission of charity and outstanding contributions to social service and care of leprosy patients at Puri for over 30 years."





## CHRONOLOGY OF SERVANT OF GOD FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK'S LIFE



- 28 Jan 2003 - Awarded Commemorative plaque of Silver City Award 2002.
- March 2003 - Fr. Marian is awarded the Sir Jahangir Gandhi Medal for Industrial and Social Peace for 2003 by XLRA, Jamshedpur, Jharkhand.
- 15 April 2003 - Polish National TV broadcasted the documentary 'Misjonarz' on Fr. Marian.
- 2004 - Work of The New Millennium Foundation announces that Father Marian Jolanta Agnieszka Dominiak, Metoda misyjna o. Mariana Zelazka w India-ch, master thesis, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, Warsaw
- 2005 - Father Zelazek receives the medal entitled The best of Polish Republic - The Highest Privilege, awarded by Polish Senate
- 29 June 2005 - Honorary citizenship of the City of Poznan. The document states: "The city of Poznan expresses its gratitude, appreciation and deep respect for outstandingly humanitarian activities subordinated to the value and dignity of human life and to aid lent to the sick, destitute, and lepers of India in particular."
- 29 June 2005 - The Neel chakra Socio-Cultural Organization Honored Fr. Marian with its prestigious award depicting a beautiful figure of the Neelachakra on top of Jagannath Temple, "for his well-recognized service to the leprosy affected people of Puri for the last 30 years".
- 6 Dec 2005 - Fr. Marian is awarded the prestigious Dr. Radanath Rath (Samaj, Oriya daily Editor) Seva Samman, award for his selfless and committed service to the leprosy patients. The award consisted of a Certificate and a sum of 10,000.
- 21 Jan 2006 - Inauguration of Arnold's Center of Spirituality, Puri.
- 22 Feb 2006 - The Polish Senate unanimously passed a resolution to recognize Fr. Marian Zelazek SVD as: "exemplary Pole who breaks down barriers among people in the spirit of Christian ecumenism and universalism."
- April 2006 - Fr. Marian Zelazek and the Chief Priest of Sri Jagannath Mandir, Bitarchha Madhusudhan Mahapatra jointly received 'The Prize of Brotherhood 2006'.
- 30 April 2006 - Fr. Marian died of a cardiac arrest after participating in a feast day celebration of the inmates of Karunalaya Leprosy care center.
- 2 May 2006 - Funeral Mass led by Archbishop Raphael Cheenath SVD of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar and burial in Jharsuguda.







# CHRONOLOGY OF SERVANT OF GOD FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK'S LIFE

## CHRONOLOGY

- 30 April 2007- First death anniversary celebrations in India and Poland:
  - Inmates of Karunalaya installs a statue of Fr. Marian and conducts pujas (sacrifices) and prayers according to the Hindu rites
  - Memorial service by the staff and students of Beatrix School in the presence of the Chief priest of Jagannath Temple, Gurus of neighboring Ashrams and city officials.
  - Marian Memorial Exhibition, Symposium, and memorial services jointly organized by the Bishops' Conference of Poland, State University of Warsaw and the SVD.
- 30 April 2008- second death anniversary celebrations by the people of Karunalaya, Beatrix school and city people.  
Opening of a Marian Memorial Museum by the Polish Ambassador to India. Thanksgiving Mass in Puri parish.
- 14 Sept 2008 -Paledzie-Sople-wo Commune unveils and blesses an obelisk and names a street after him, in his Birth place.
- 30 April 2011- celebration of the fifth death anniversary jointly by the people of Puri, Odisha and about 30 visitors from Poland.
- 2011- Publication of a book on Marian, 'Garden of Hope' in English and Polish.
- 30 January 2018- Birth centenary celebrations of Fr. Marian jointly organized by the people of Karunalaya, Beatrix school and Puri parish, participated by the citizens of Puri and many from Poland, including Bishop Jerzy Mazur of Elk, SVD Provincial Superior and others.
  - a. It was during the Birth Centennial celebrations that Father Marian Memorial was Inaugurated where the life-size statue of Fr. Marian was installed.
  - b. It was during the Birth Centennial that Fr. Marian's home turned Museum was blessed and inaugurated by Bishop Jerzy Mazur, SVD, the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Elk.
  - c. It was during the Birth Centennial that the Leprosy Colony with houses built by Fr. Marian were given the name FATHER MARIAN ASHRAYA.
  - d. As a commemoration of the Birth Centennial the Chapel where Fr. Marian prayed and celebrated the Eucharist was rededicated and blessed and a bust of Fr. Marian was installed.
- 25 August 2018 - The Decree of the starting of the Diocesan process of his beatification and official recognition of him as SERVANT OF GOD.





# FATHER MARIAN ŻELAZEK HONOURED WITH AWARDS



THE HONOURED CITIZEN OF POZNAN



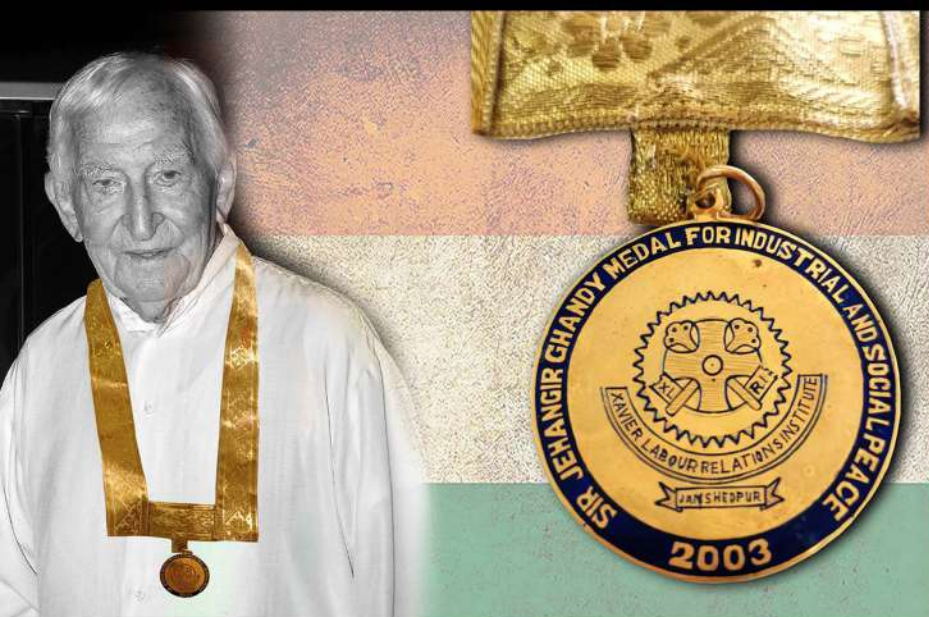
THE CHIVALRY CROSS OF ORDER OF THE REBIRTH OF POLAND



DR. RADHANATH RATH SEVA SAMMAN AWARD



THE ESTEEMED BRONZE MEDAL OF "NEELCHAKRA"

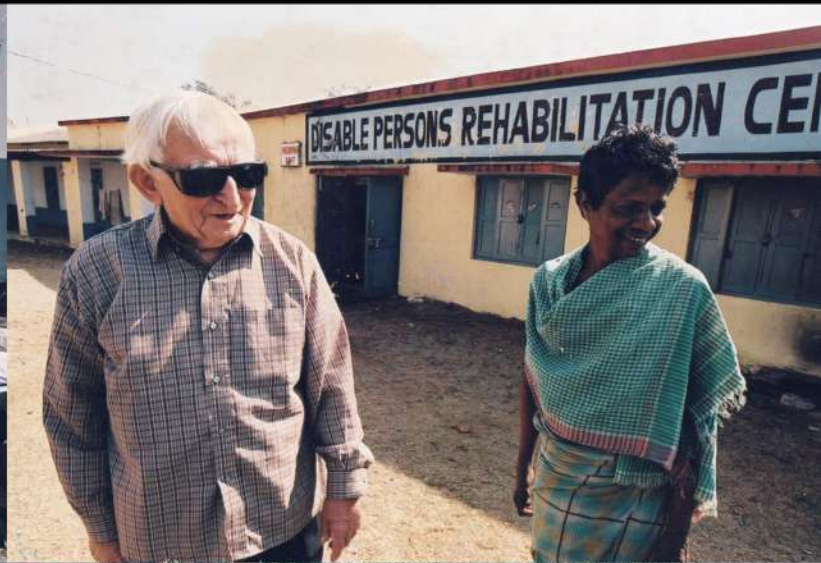


SIR JEANGIR GHANDY MEDAL FOR INDUSTRIAL AND SOCIAL PEACE (2003)





# FATHER MARIAN ŻELAZEK IN ACTION...







## ARCHDIOCESE OF CUTTACK-BHUBANESWAR DIOCESAN PROCESS

### SERVANT OF GOD FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK, SVD

-Fr. T. K. Kurian, SVD, Postulator

#### INTRODUCTION:

We, the India East province (INE), of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) and the Church in Odisha have just begun the process of publically affirming and announcing the holiness of the Servant of God, Fr. Marian Zelazek, SVD. In a way, it is a new experience both for us and for the Church in Odisha. In doing so, we are only affirming and accepting our call to holiness. The Church teaches us that all people are called to be holy, "Be you therefore perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt 5:48). Fr. Marian is providing us an opportunity to remind ourselves that we are all servants of God and servants of our people.



Pope Francis in '*Gaudete et exultate*', "Rejoice and Be Glad." (Mt 5:12), addresses the universal call to holiness as "the call to holiness in today's world, in a practical way for our own time". Fr. Marian's life and mission have been a response to holiness in today's world, in our own mission. With Joy and celebration, he responded to this call through his very life. He showed us that holiness is not only possible but exciting. Fr. Marian lived his mission with enthusiasm and energy.

As we join Fr. Marian in his life journey, as a response to the call to holiness, it may be in place to recall that he was very human like any of us and at the same time heroic in his trust in God and compassion to the needy. Let us be aware that it is not for nothing that so many people all over, who came in touch with him, found in him a saintly human being, a compassionate Father and a loving friend.

Beginning with his childhood in his family through the long five years of hard life in the concentration camp to the 56 years in Odisha, India, among all walks of people, especially the least and lost has been a remarkable faith journey of a Good Shepherd and a Good Samaritan. He was purified, like gold in fire, in the concentration camp and in his mission. He experienced pain of hunger and death and the joy of washing the feet and recognising life giving body of Christ in the Eucharist and in the wounded body of the lepers.

It is not difficult to be good, provided one wants to be so. He wanted to be good and so he made it easy. The people who came in contact with him, beginning with the leprosy patients in utter misery to the high officials in the Church and the Government (in Poland and India), all found him irresistibly good. So they called him, Father, (Bapa), felt confident to approach him anytime and anywhere, and revered him in their heart and homes, which ultimately lead them to nominate him for Noble Peace Prize and now for sainthood.



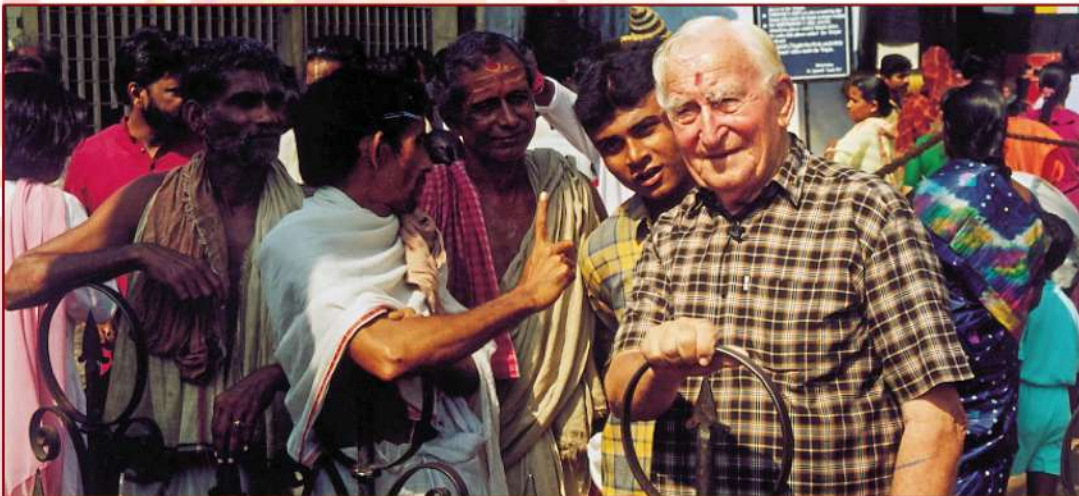


Fr. Marian was a man of unwavering hope and optimism. May be he knew, after his experiences in the concentration camp that things could only improve and they did. Fr. Marian was a genuine Divine Word Missionary, always ready to be sent anywhere. That readiness brought him to Puri at the age of 57 where he contributed to the holiness of the holy city for 31 years. With determination and enthusiasm, he entered into the fourfold dialogue, the Divine Word missionaries are committed to.

Fr. Marian was a good human being who acknowledged and respected his fellow humans with compassion and without any judgements against them. "We need to think of ourselves as an army of the forgiven. All of us have been looked upon with divine compassion." Fr. Marian believed: What is most important is, not to ignore the human being standing before in need." Pope Francis said: If it seems hard to find God in this world, it is because He chooses to be with the defeated and the dejected and in places where most people loath to go. Fr. Marian did find God among such people and such places.

He died a thousand times in the concentration camp. For him the Easter after the liberation from the camp was a very powerful experience of the Risen Lord. That gave him a new life, which he dedicated to giving life to others. He knew the value of life and so he protected it and promoted it, especially where it was most vulnerable. '*Father mothe manushya bonayile*': 'Father made me a human being' was the earnest feeling of many of Fr. Marian's people' who were losing their life and human dignity to social apathy and human prejudices. May be it is a happy coincidence that Fr. Marian was born on January 30, the day Gandhiji was martyred. In honour of Gandhiji the same date is observed as International Lepers' Day and a Day of Peace.

He is the only SVD who has ever been nominated for Noble Peace Prize, even twice. May be he is also the one who has received the highest number awards and recognitions from the civil society. Let us hope and pray that these were only preparations for what is to come, the official recognition of his holiness by the Church. He is one of the four 'Servants of God' whose Causes are being promoted and processed in the Society of the Divine Word.





**STEPS TAKEN TOWARDS FR. MARIAN'S BEATIFICATION:**

Taking note of the recognition given to Fr. Marian's heroic and holy life, during his life time and more so after his death, both in India and in Poland, the Society was prompted to take up Fr. Marian's Cause for beatification. Two of the provincial chapters of INE recommended that steps be taken to promote his Cause.

INE PROVINCIAL CHAPTER held in 2015 decided to take up the Cause of Fr. Marian Zelazek, SVD. The General Council approved this decision and then the Provincial Council, on June 8, 2017, set up a Secretariat for the promotion of the Cause of Fr. Marian.

At the DIRECTION OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL, on October 16, 2017 the INE Provincial, Luvis Ronald Pereira, as Petitioner, requested the **Archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar** to take up the Cause of Father Fr. Marian Zelazek, SVD for Beatification/Canonization.

Archbishop John Barwa, in response to the request asked the Petitioner to do the initial preparations like appointing a postulator and collection of the relevant documents. With the approval of the Archbishop, the Provincial appointed Fr. T.K. Kurian, SVD as **Postulator**, on November 10, 2017. Archbishop appointed two **Theological Censors** on December 15, 2017, to study and present a report on the published writings of Fr. Fr. Marian Zelazek.

The ODISHA REGIONAL CATHOLIC BISHOPS' COUNCIL (OCBC) held on March 2, 2018, the six members of the OCBC unanimously voted in favour of initiating the beatification process of Fr. Marian Zelazek.

**NIHIL OBSTAT:** Archbishop Barwa on March 15, 2018 requested the *Congregazione delle Causa dei Santi* for '*Nihil Obstat*' to initiate the Process. He received the '*Nihil Obstat*' on May 30, 2018.

**HISTORICAL COMMISSION:** Archbishop appointed a three-member Historical Commission for the process of collecting the documentary evidence and preparing a report.

**SUPPLEX LIBELLOUS:** The Postulator submitted the *supplex libellous* (written petition) to Archbishop John Barwa, SVD of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar on June 20, 2018, to officially initiate the beatification/canonization process of Servant of God Fr. Marian Zelazek, SVD.





# ARCHDIOCESE OF CUTTACK-BHUBANESWAR

## DIOCESAN PROCESS

### SERVANT OF GOD FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK, SVD

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**DECREE OF INITIATION:** Archbishop John Barwa, through a decree, on August 25, 2018 initiated the Diocesan Process of the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of Servant of God Fr. Marian Zelazek, SVD.

**DIOCESAN TRIBUNAL:** Archbishop Barwa appointed a Diocesan Tribunal on 30.8.2018. The Opening session of the same was held on December 14, 2018 during which the Oath taking ceremony of the Tribunal and other officials was also held. The Diocesan Tribunal has interviewed 29 witnesses from a list of 50.

**COURSE ON THE CANONIZATION PROCESS:** The postulator completed a course on the canonization process organized by the Congregation for the Cause of Saints from January 8 to May 20, 2020 at the Pontifical University Urbaniana, Rome.

#### **PROCESS IN PROGRESS IN POLAND:**

**RECOGNISED IN THE CHURCH AND THE NATION:** Fr. Marian has been recognised and honoured as an exemplary missionary and as a saintly person by the Church in Poland and the Country as a whole for many years. Polish SVD province has been actively promoting his Cause since a few years. Various promotional initiatives have been undertaken. Besides, an Archive and a Museum on Fr. Marin has also been set up.

**VICE-POSTULATOR:** Fr. Henryk Kaluza, SVD of Poland is appointed as the Vice-Postulator on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2018. He and the Mission Secretary, Fr. Andrzej Danilewicz, SVD are following up the Cause of Fr. Marian and are planning and organizing further steps. They have been getting the important documents on Fr. Marian in Polish translated into English.

**DIOCESAN INQUIRY:** At the official request of Archbishop Barwa SVD, the Archbishop of Poznan has instituted a Diocesan Inquiry in the Archdiocese of Poznan for Poland. The vice-postulator organised the first session of this tribunal on December 8, 2019 at the Parish of Chludowo, Poznan. There after the Diocesan Tribunal have interviewed, about 20 witnesses.



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APRIL 2021



ARCHDIOCESE OF CUTTACK-BHUBANESWAR  
DIOCESAN PROCESS  
SERVANT OF GOD FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK, SVD



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**PROMOTION OF THE CAUSE:**

Although the Covid related lockdown has slowed down the process, concerted efforts are going on, both in India and in Poland, towards the promotion of the Cause of Servant of God Fr. Marian Zelazek. These include publication of booklets and pamphlets, production of documentaries and other audio-visuals, conducting pilgrimages, seminars and inter-religious prayer services, photo-exhibitions on the occasion of the birth and death anniversaries of Fr. Marian. Above all, his fourfold dialogue and the compassionate services rendered by him are kept up and multiplied.

**MAIN TASKS TO BE COMPLETED:**

- ✿ The Report of the Historical Commission is to be finalized.
- ✿ Completion of the interviews of the witnesses in India and Poland
- ✿ Preparation and arrangement of the Acts of the Diocesan Inquiry
- ✿ Presentation and approval of the 'Acts' of the Diocesan Inquiry
- ✿ Closing the Diocesan Inquiry and sending the Documents to Rome

The Society, as a whole, particularly in the Polish province and INE province, the confreres and faithful are making committed efforts and are supporting the promotional efforts. We appreciate and thank the Archbishops of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar and Poznan, Poland, for initiating and guiding the Diocesan Process. We are grateful to the SVD Generalate team, Provincial superiors and all of you for your interest and the whole hearted support to complete the Diocesan process of the Servant of God Fr. Marian Zelazek, SVD.







## FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK, SVD (1918 – 2006) A MAN OF VISION, MISSION & ACTION

*+John Barwa, SVD  
Archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar*



REMEMBRANCE

It is not hard to be good, you just need to want ... were the words of the man who survived 5 years in Nazi's concentration Camp, witnessing harrowing sufferings from hunger, physical torture, hard and forced physical labour and witnessing the death of his companions.

The simple and humble beginning of this great visionary-missionary was on 30 January 1918 in Paledzie, Poznan, Poland to Mr. Stanislaw and Mrs. Stanislaw. He joined the Society of the Divine Word in 1937 and made his first profession on 4 September 1939. He completed his philosophy studies in Poland and wanted to pursue his Theology studies from Pontifical Athenaeum of Saint Anselmo, Rome. But during World War II, his priestly formation was interrupted for five years from 1940-1945 as he was forcibly trapped in Nazi's concentration Camp in Dachau, Germany. After his liberation from the concentration camp at Dachau, he pursued his theology studies at the same Pontifical University of Saint Anselm from 1945 to 1949 and made his final profession in the Society of the Divine Word on September 8, 1948. Ten days later, on September 18, he was ordained a priest.

After emerging from the struggles of death and life at the concentration camp, his faith in God and his commitment to give every person his/her dignity became the sole motto of his life's journey. He decided to be a better human person himself to accomplish this great mission.

As a human being, Fr. Marian was a very compassionate person and he had an enormous zeal to serve people, especially those who were helpless, powerless, unaided, vulnerable, grieved, and suffering. The dream of this great missionary began in 1951 with his appointment to the Catholic Diocese

APRIL 2021





of Sambalpur in Odisha, India which lasted till 1975. He worked mostly with the illiterate, poor Adivasi people (tribal people), who were suffering from economical exclusion and unfair social system. He started schools, skill building programs and many others to make the life of this lost, least and the last people better. He worked as a teacher, an administrator of the schools, inspector of education, personally visiting to every school started and run by the diocese.

As a young boy, I knew Father Marian as ‘cinema father’ as he was going around the different parishes showing ‘cinema’ mostly on the life of Jesus with his old film projector which would stop several times during the show. But we walked miles to watch the ‘cinema’; we would wait with much patience. I knew him as a loving father though I never met him personally.

By pioneering education for the tribal people he was able to break the social segregation and poverty cycle to become a part of normal society and human interaction. I am proud to say that “I am one of the beneficiaries of his dedicated education efforts”. He was also much involved in charity work, which brought him respect and sympathy of people of all faiths.

In 1975 father Marian moved to Puri, land of Jagannath, where he had to learn new language Odiya together with new living culture and rules in the holy city of Hinduism. From 1975 to 1991, he was appointed as the parish priest of the Catholic Church, Puri. It was during this period that he built up the parish church complex at Ramchandi Sahi with a beautiful boat-shaped church, a presbytery, a multi-purpose hall, a dialogue center cum library and a dispensary.

The institutions that he set up in the parish church complex were indicative of his broad-minded vision-mission for Puri and his non-judgmental attitude towards the people of other religions. The dialogue center cum library was a place where people of all religions could gather to read study and pray. The dispensary catered to the sick and the infirm, especially the leprosy affected people. Dr. Kishore Chandra Mohapatra, devout Brahmin and a specialist on leprosy therapy and cure became a very close associate of Fr. Marian in his work for the rehabilitation of leprosy affected people. Dr. Mohapatra resigned his job as leprosy specialist at the district general hospital, Puri and joined Fr. Marian in 1976 and worked at the dispensary in the parish complex for over 15 years, until his death in 1991. In 1991 Fr. Marian moved to a nearby place close to the temple to start a centre for the lepers and care for them.

It is in this place that he discovered his future mission work as a compassionate missionary full of enormous enthusiasm, dedication and zeal to work among the lepers who lived as beggars in the periphery of the Temple of Jagannath (Lord of

Universe) and the holy city of Puri. They were the people despised, rejected, ignored and neglected by everyone in the society. His dream to help these poor and rejected people moved him to start the Karunalaya (the house of compassion). Today Karunalaya has grown into a 20 bedded hospital, a well-





equipped dental clinic, one mercy kitchen for the patients not able to care for themselves, tailoring, bandage making, rope making, mini shoe manufacturing unit where rubber and leather sandals, slippers and shoes specially designed for lepers are made. Karunalaya has become a life promoting and value providing centre. Father Marian started a separate school for the children of the lepers 'Beatrix School'. There is big competition today to get admission in Beatrix school and the larger numbers of students studying in the school are children of healthy and non leprosy affected people. Father Marian's vision was not only for those people to receive care but also for them to find strength, their lost potential to start new normal and dignified life and give their children education. Testimonies of this heart touching experiences echo in every person and every corner of Karunalaya and everyone at Karunalaya called him with much love 'Daddy (Bappa)'. The revolution of life giving and life changing transformation was possible because of the Vision, Mission, and Action of Fr. Marian Zelazek SVD.

"Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them", wrote William Shakespeare. Fr. Marian Zelazek, SVD, who died of a massive heart attack on Sunday, April 30, 2006, at Puri in Odisha, the day I ordained Fr. Simon Lakra SVD, belongs to the category of people who "achieved" greatness during his life-time. He was 88 and he was the last expatriate SVD working in the SVD Province of India East (INE). Fr. Simon Lakra SVD is presently "the Head Master of Beatrix School" started by Fr. Marian.

In the last few years of Fr. Marian's life, several local, national, and international organizations and media institutions began to recognize his humanitarian services and honored him with awards, citations and cash prizes. In August 2000, the Polish Government conferred on him one of its highest national civilian awards titled "The Chivalry Cross of Order of the Rebirth of Poland". On June 29, 2005, the City Council of Poznan, the native city of Fr. Marian, awarded him the tribute of "The Honored Citizen of Poznan".

On March 5, 2003, the Xavier Labor Institute of Jamshedpur, Bihar, Awarded Fr. Marian the "The Sir Jehangir Ghandy Medal" for industrial and social peace with a gold medal and a citation. In 2005, the Neelachakra socio-cultural organization of Odisha honored him with the esteemed bronze medal of "Neelachakra" and a citation. On December 6, 2005, the Oriya daily newspaper Samaj presented him with the much-valued "Dr. Radhanath Rath Seva Samman Award" with a shawl, a certificate and a cash prize of Rs. 10,000.00.

Fr. Marian was nominated for the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize in the year 2001 and 2003. In 2001, his name was short listed to be one of the three top contenders for the prize. When he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, newspapers in Odisha wrote elaborately about his life and work, and some of them brought out special supplements to cover the event of his nomination. Thus Father Marian's vision-mission-action is well recognized. As a provincial superior during those days, I had opportunities to be part of the award giving ceremonies.







# REMEMBRANCE

When Fr. Marian died at the age of 88 on April 30, 2006, he had already become a full-blown philanthropist, a sage, a mystic and a guru, who believed that “God created human beings in his own image” and that all human beings have a responsibility to do something to uphold and sustain that image of every other human

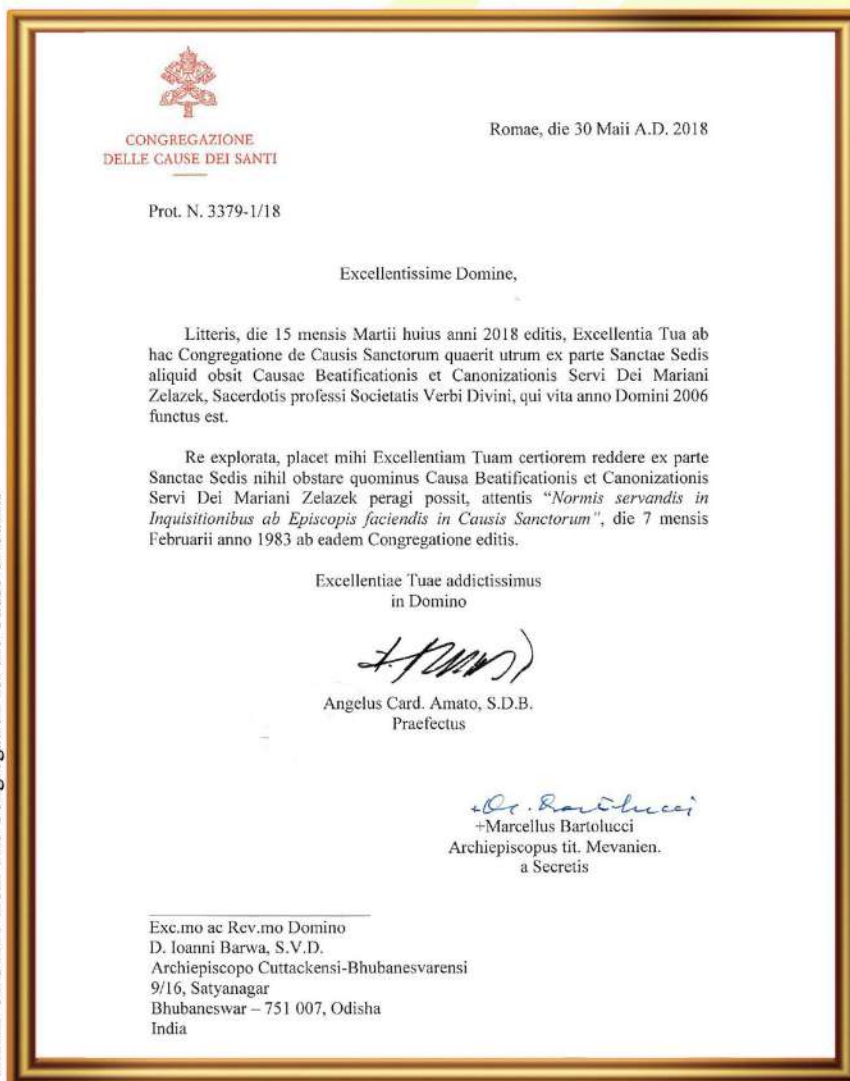
human person. No wonder that someone paid this homage to this great soul when he died: “Here is a great and holy man, who by his presence at Puri for the 31 years made the holy city of Lord Jagannath a holier city and a better place to live”.

When asked by some about the simple but incredible life of Father Marian, the answer always was his “Vision-Mission-Action” in his life. He was strengthened and motivated by the Words by “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with you your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lk. 10: 27).

On 25 August 2018, I, John Barwa SVD, Archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar declared Father Marian, “Servant of God”, and hence the process of his Canonization. In the name of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) Fr. Thazhathuveetil Kurian SVD was appointed as postulator by Luvis Ronald Pereira, the Provincial Superior of the SVD, INE.



NIHIL OBSTAT from The Congregation for the Cause of Saints





# FATHER MARIAN ŻELAZEK'S LOVE FOR CHILDREN





# A MULTI-FACETED FATHER MARIAN ŻELAZEK







# “FATHER MARIAN ZELAZEK – GOD’S LOVE WALKING ACROSS THE WORLD”

+Jerzy Mazur, SVD  
Catholic Diocese of Elk

LOVE  
WALKING



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1. **IN THE YEAR OF ST. JOSEPH**, it is worthwhile mentioning the great devotion of the Servant of God, Father Marian Żelazek, to the Guardian of the Holy Family. When he spoke about St. Joseph, he always returned to his experiences in the German concentration camp of Dachau. He would give testimony concerning the way his life and the lives of his fellow prisoners were saved from death. For the most part, those prisoners were priests and seminarians. It had already been planned as Father Marian related that two German regiments stationed near the camp would pour out some kind of a flammable liquid on the camp grounds and burn up thousands of people. They strongly believed that St. Joseph would come to their aid, because he would always rescue the Holy Family in difficult situations. And as we know, the camp was liberated three hours before its planned liquidation. This was accomplished by 22 American soldiers who providentially happened to appear on the camp’s grounds, although they planned to rescue the prisoners on the following day. The prisoners had just finished a novena to St. Joseph. They had been saying it for nine days, asking for a miracle. The miracle took place and all prisoners were saved. Among them, there were 830 priests from Poland, including Father Marian. It is there that prisoners, especially priests and seminarians, made a vow that if they get out of the camp alive, they would do all in their power to spread devotion to St. Joseph, the guardian of the Holy Family. Father Marian spread this devotion throughout India most of his life. He would often repeat that, “It was evident to all prisoners that through the intercession of St. Joseph, God answered the trusting prayers of His imprisoned children.”





We can say about Father Marian that in his missionary activity he imitated St. Joseph who, as Pope Francis noted, made his life an offering of himself “in a love placed at the service of the Messiah.” Father Marian, like St. Joseph, made his life a gift of service, offering a total gift of himself, his life, his work, his heart and all talents, in an act of love offered in service to Christ, the only Savior of the world, and to those, to whom he was sent.

Father Marian tried to be like St. Joseph: a beloved father, affectionate, obedient, a father with creative courage, a father who was a working man, “a father in the shade.” He imitated St. Joseph as a just man; that’s why he tried to be faithful and obedient to God, trusting in Him in all things and carrying out His will.

While fulfilling the mission entrusted to him, Father Marian was aware that God expected a “creative courage” of him; a courageous creativeness which overcomes fear and anxiety, and in difficult moments stirs up an unexpected potential and strength in a person. Thanks to this creative courage he overcame various obstacles and difficulties and would get involved in any possible endeavor, as God willed it, regardless of personal discomfort.



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**2. MEETINGS WITH FATHER MARIAN.** I met Father Marian numerous times. Usually, it was on the occasion when missionaries would be on vacation, when he, too, would come to Poland for his own vacation to Pieniężno. As seminarians, we would then attend organized meetings with him. In those years, there were few missionaries in Poland, because our missionaries could not go abroad. Father Marian was one of the few who went to the missions. We listened to and absorbed his accounts on missionary work in India. He would speak about all cultural assets of people in that country. As young

seminarians, we all wanted to go there. Father Marian talked about the missions very realistically, but with great enthusiasm and a desire for service. In later times, I met Father Marian in Rome, where I was staying during my studies, and where he had been on a halt during his vacation, as well as in Poland.





One of our last meetings took place shortly before his death. During his last stay in Poland, we were together in one of our Divine Word houses, in Michałowice near Warsaw. We talked until late. He was very much interested in issues pertaining to the Church in Poland and Siberia.

He then recalled that he should still visit his friend, Archbishop Kazimierz Majdański, who was staying in Warsaw and who had been with him in the concentration camp in Dachau. In spite of the late hour, he went to see him, although he had to be at the airport early in the morning. In situations like that, it was evident how much he valued a fellow human being, how much he valued friendship. In such situations, time had no importance to him. Another human being with whom he wanted to spend time and talk to—that was more important at that moment than anything else. Every meeting with him brought to the fore his great sanctity. And this was what uplifted us as his brothers in religious life.

**3. A MISSIONARY OF GOODNESS AND NOT EASY TO IMITATE.** As Divine Word Missionaries, we were always proud to have such a brother-missionary in religious life, who was a holy missionary and not easy to imitate in what he was doing. He was twice nominated for the Nobel Prize. This was an exceptional honor and to a certain extent, a sign of appreciation for his work. Fr. Marian always emphasized that he is a Pole and felt like a Pole, but he also felt like a Hindu. On one occasion, he said, “My heart is fifty percent Polish and fifty percent Hindu”. But he shortly corrected himself and said, “My heart is one hundred percent Polish and one hundred percent Hindu”. That’s why the universal Church needs such a missionary icon as Fr. Marian. We can thank God for the gift of his life and service at times so close to us.

It was a great joy for me to be able to participate in the celebrations on account of the initiation of the beatification process at Puri on February 11, 2018. It was a great honor for me to be there at a time when the path of our brother and fellow Pole to beatification had just begun. We need such missionary witnesses, holy witnesses, of whom Fr. Marian was one.

He spoke about his ministry as a fulfillment of God’s will. In Dachau, when Fr. Marian saw his dying colleagues, he asked God to give him the strength to discern and fulfill the mission which they were to fulfill, because of their internment and death. He prayed for the grace to be able to take their unfulfilled mission upon himself. Observing his life, one could conclude that through his priestly ministry, he succeeded in doing that. He dedicated his life entirely to the service of God and his fellowmen. He devoted his life to lepers. He was a father to them. He reached out to those who were abandoned by everyone. All by himself – he was a doctor and a nurse to them. When bandaging their wounds, he never used gloves. This way, he showed that he did it out of love for them. We can say about him—using the words of Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta—that he was *the love of God walking across the world*.

**4. A MISSIONARY OF ENTRUSTMENT.** While looking for a key for us to understand this man of dialogue, it seems to me that he can be characterized by love and trustful confidence. He totally loved God and human beings, just as Jesus has loved us. Fr. Marian truly loved those people, to whom he was sent, to







whom he proclaimed the Gospel. In all he did, he imitated the love of God for us. These characteristics of his works of merciful love are distinct. Many people are afraid of any contacts with persons of other beliefs and representatives of other religions. Fr. Marian taught us that we should not fear others, but rather love them. When we love others, it is easier to dialogue on religious issues with those who “believe differently”. The spirit of dialogue also inspired him to establish a spirituality centre precisely at Puri, which he named “*Ishopanathi Ashram*” (Ashram of the Disciples of Jesus). He did not name it a Centre (Ashram) of Christians, but a Centre of Disciples, that is, those who follow Jesus, imitate Jesus, and not necessarily those who have become Christians. Fr. Marian was aware that the journey leading to the recognition of Christ as one’s Savior and Redeemer may be long. Nevertheless, many, without being Christian, can still imitate the Master from Nazareth. At the same time, Fr. Marian was a man of trust who put all his confidence in God. He often repeated the words of St. Arnold Janssen: “The more difficulties, the more necessary it is to trust in God”. For him, nothing was impossible. Whenever he knew what God wants, he would dedicate himself totally to the endeavor and would put his trust in the Lord. He was convinced that if it is God’s work, then people would come and assist. All over the world, he had benefactors who cooperated with him in this great missionary work. He never claimed to have accomplished or established anything on his own.



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Today, Fr. Marian wants to remind the world of the love of God for mankind. Today, he speaks to us as follows: “Let us be witnesses of merciful love, and let us entrust everything to God”. When we act this way, we will be able to do great things, such as those which Fr. Marian accomplished. He said clearly: “It is not hard to be good, one has only to will it...”. What’s most necessary for us is not to abandon a man who stands before us as a person in need.



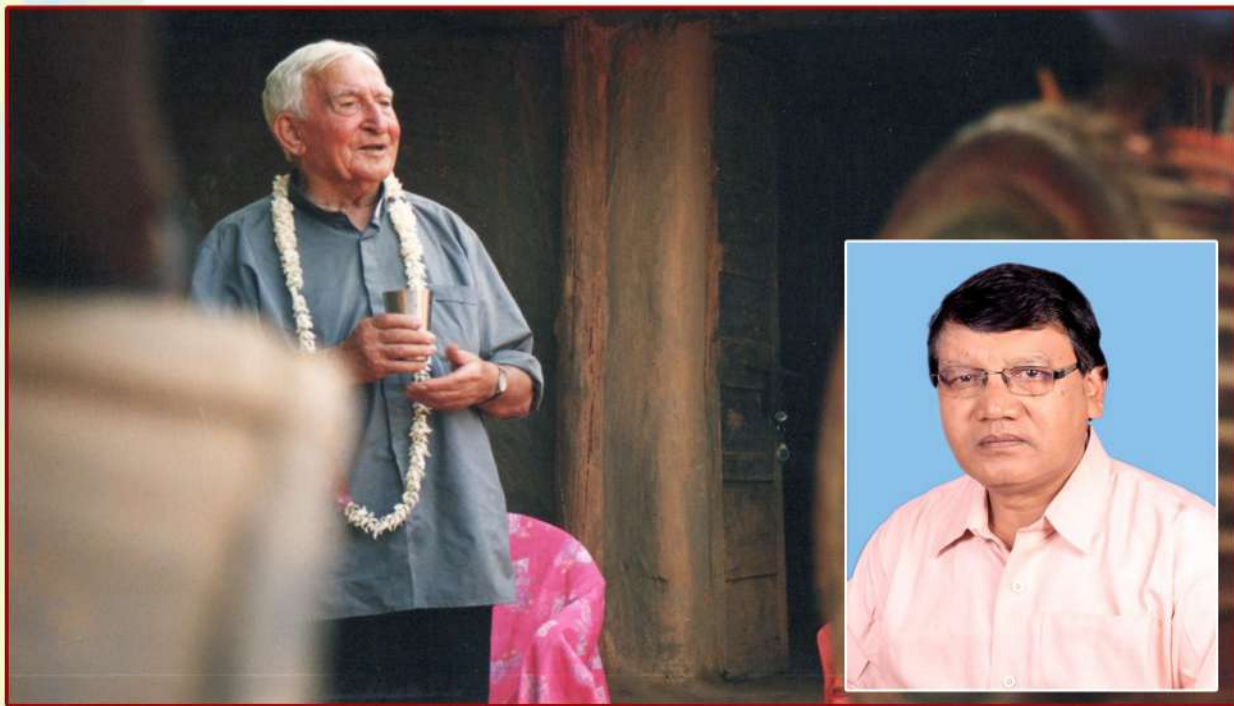




# MULTIPLE MISSIONARY DIMENSIONS OF FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK, SVD

-Fr. Ignatius Soreng, SVD

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Fr. Marian Zelazek, SVD, never lacked in vision, creativity, courage and zeal for any missionary enterprise. Despite being the Headmaster of Hamirpur High School cum Director of Hamirpur Apostolic School (1952-63), in-charge of schools of Sambalpur Mission (1963-1965), Secretary of the Catholic Schools Committee of Sambalpur Mission 1965-1975, and the Parish Priest of Bondamunda (1968-75), his missionary concerns stretched all around benefitting all alike. In this short article I would like to highlight two important aspects of his life and mission – his involvement in Communication Media, and two major Popular Devotions, especially while he was in the Gangpur Mission.

## **THE PIONEER OF COMMUNICATION MEDIA IN THE MISSION**

Archbishop Raphael Cheenath, SVD, Archdiocese of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar, was firm in saying that original concept for a Regional Catholic Communication Media Centre for Odisha should be credited to Fr. Marian. Though his media apostolate flourished prominently while he was in the Gangpur Mission, and took a completely different form when he went to Puri, this was an indelible landmark in the mission in Odisha. Communication Media deepens the impact of any public venture—Father Marian knew it and was convinced about it. So, as he was involved in the field of education, formation and pastoral care in the Gangpur Mission; he used media in all these fields and reaped maximum benefit from the endeavor.

Making use of motion-pictures was his first passion in his efforts to use of media. While in Hamirpur, he got a 16mm movie projector from Poland, prepared a good set up for it in the school hall, which, at that time was the





biggest hall in the entire district; and he acquired appropriate sound system for the purpose. Fr. John Valentine, SVD, the in-charge of the technical school attached to the high school, opted to import a powerful generator from England for DC power supply for night-study of the hostel students, and Fr. Marian used it for film shows too.

Obtaining educational movies, war movies and documentaries on various subjects from the Polish as well as other Embassies took some effort. He also obtained from CARAVS (Christian Association for Radio and Audio-Visual Service), Jabalpur, some documentaries and feature films including Hindi feature films. All these he showed in the hall in turn—to students and the lay people on Saturdays and Sundays. Fortunate were the students of Hamirpur School to have such a facility, and the people of Hamirpur parish, which, at that time spanned from Barilapta to Bonai and Kantapali.

He did not restrict his media venture to Hamirpur School alone. Kesramal girls' school being the nearest major school to Hamirpur those days; he invited Kesramal school girls to Hamirpur on Saturdays, Sundays and organized shows for them. These girls would walk all the way from Kesramal to Hamirpur about 35 kilometers, and Father Marian would receive them generously, arrange their stay and show them his motion pictures. Most of the time he himself operated the machines, but he also had trained two teachers of the technical school and some smart hostel students to operate them.



While he was at Hamirpur, he had well set up facility for the film shows, but when he left as the Headmaster to take up as the in-charge of schools of Sambalpur Mission 1963-1965, and the Secretary of the Catholic Schools Committee of Sambalpur Mission in 1965, before he moved to Bondamunda 1968 pioneering the parish mission still holding the post of the Secretary of the Catholic Schools Committee, he made alternative arrangement for his media front. For this he had to make some practical adjustments. Well set up auditorium would not be possible in any way because he had to take the media activity much beyond the school campus.





He had his own van to move around, so he arranged his own generator, another 16mm and 8mm movie projectors and slides projector that he took around from parish to parish and school to school showing motion pictures and slides shows. This effort was such remarkable for the people that he eventually came to be known as the *Cinema Father*.

**THE DRUMMER CORPS OR THE HIGH SCHOOL BAND:** In the media front, perhaps the other attractive initiative of Fr. Marian was the Hamirpur High School Band named as the DRUMMER CORPS. This band was not just for the High School, it was rather used in so many places and on so various occasions all around that it was one of the most visible spectacle for the school, church, town and the area, achieving great purposes of media venture.

Fr. Marian imported trumpet bugles, clarinet, flute, drums side-drums, and cymbals all the way from Poland and chose sixteen talented and diligent students to play them. He maintained this number batch after batch until he left Hamirpur. He showed great patience and persistence to teach the students those instruments, especially difficult instruments like trumpet bugles, flute and clarinet until they perfected them. Needless to say that he knew how to play them so as to teach. The band with its own impressive uniform and well-rehearsed movements was a treat to watch. Songs taken up for melody were hit songs composed by Fr. George Prochs, SVD, and popular Marian hymns that were commonly sung in the church. For some other common occasions there were also a few songs that were nationally popular.

No school in Odisha had such a band that time. Therefore, the High School Band was indeed the pride of the school, having high demand in and around Rourkela for any major celebration. Kesramal Marian Rally, Hamirpur Christ the King Procession, Independence Day, Republic Day, Gandhi Jayanti, Subas Chandra Bose Jayanti, Guru Nanak Jayanti, and occasionally some important marriages, etc., were some of the important occasions where the band performed all around in the town. To cap it all were some solemn receptions of dignitaries like Mr. Karl Heinrich Lubke, the President of West Germany who visited the Rourkela Steel Plant, Pandit Jawahar Nehru, the Prime Minister of India who visited Rourkela twice, Mr. U. Nu, the Prime Minister of Burma who came along with Pandit Nehru, and the Chief Ministers of Odisha Mr. Biren Mitra, Mr. Biju Patnaik, and Mr. Harekrushna Mahatab who visited Rourkela on various occasions; they witnessed the grand performance of the band.

Hamirpur High School Band, the sole band in Rourkela, was unique in all respects. It was widely known and appreciated. It had a tremendous impact on all levels of people including State, National and International dignitaries. The band, playing mostly Marian hymns and Christian devotional hymns along with some nationally popular songs for all such occasions was a remarkable way to project inner faith to the outside world, too.

**“ROURKELA ONE”–THE SCOUT GROUP:** Just like the High School Band, the Scout Group named as “Rourkela ONE” was another visionary extravaganza of Fr. Marian in students’ organization in the Hamirpur High School. It was the first and perhaps the only one in this field in Odisha, and by







its very look and its activities, it was quite simply the pride of the High School. Though the scout group, numbering about fifty, was a group meant for disciplined education and leadership formation; the way this group was utilized for public purposes, it achieved remarkable media purpose in and around Rourkela. Mind you, this was apart from A.C.C. (Auxiliary Cadet Corps) started in the High School in 1958, replaced by N.C.C. (National Cadet Corps) in 1962.

Father Marian says, “No civilian or church function was celebrated without our scouts”. Just like the High School Band, the scouts were required in all the important events in Rourkela to maintain discipline and perform honorable tasks. It was they who formed disciplined line for reception of Dr. Lubke, the Prime Minister of West Germany, and lead him from the Rourkela Railway Station to the German Club in Sector 2, marching. It was they who received all the dignitaries—International, National and State, and led them to their destination. When Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru came the second time, it was they who made pyramid both sides of the road, and from the top of the pyramid they garlanded him as he passed by on an open vehicle. Seeing the unique gesture, Pandit Nehru halted there and talked to the group and the people, and the all-important question asked there was, “who was more happy—the scouts, the people, or Pandit Nehru himself?” Knowing that they were all adivasi boys, the joy of Pandit Nehru knew no bound. Father Marian always excelled in such flamboyant showmanship in order to raise the spirit and image of the adivasi students.

In big public events like Independence Day, Republic Day and many others, church celebrations like parish feast, May processions, Palm Sunday procession, and major church festivals like the Marian Rally at Kesramal, Christ the King feast in Hamirpur, etc., it was the scout that glamorized the events. Due to their efficient service, discipline in public celebrations was never an issue wherever they were taken.

### **FR. MARIAN'S INVOLVEMENT IN POPULAR DEVOTIONS:**

Of all religious practices, popular devotion attracted the simple adivasis the most. During the Jesuit period i.e., 1908-1948 popular devotion, especially the Marian devotion in the Gangpur Mission was as per the practices of Chhotanagpur Mission. But after the solemn entry of Fatima Mary in the Mission in 1950, when no less than 30,000 Catholics assembled at Kesramal to receive her, the devotion took a new turn. Thus, Marian rally, known also as Sodality Rally, celebrated in the month of March, and normal Marian devotion in the month of May became very popular. Then there was the feast of Christ the King which was solemnized in all parishes. For Hamirpur, however, it was special because the Hamirpur High School was named as Rejeshwar High School (Christ the King High School) for a purpose. Later this was renamed as Hamirpur High School due to the objection of the Government to the original name.

The Marian Rally was the biggest event in the mission attracting fifty to sixty thousand people creating an unforgettable spectacle. Kesramal being the central venue for the entire Gangpur Mission always hosted this event. On 9<sup>th</sup> March (sometimes on the previous or following Saturday) people would assemble in thousands from all over the mission walking, carrying their own provision for three days. A tumultuous procession in the evening followed by adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was the main event on the opening day. Next morning there was a solemn Holy Mass,





followed by day-long discussion and deliberation on various topics in groups like boy youth, girl youth, men and women. They were well guided by priests and Sisters who were appointed for each group. Scintillating evening program with songs, dance and short plays would make the day memorable. Next morning, after the so called *Black Mass* offered for all the dead of the mission, people would return home.

Fr. Marian used to have a strong presence in the Rally with his well-trained group of Scouts, Band, and Altar-boys. Serving during the Procession and Adoration and Holy Mass at Rally had become the prerogative of the students of the Hamirpur Apostolic School, who were well coached and instructed by Fr. Marian himself. Ten to fifteen pairs of servers dressed in clean uniform performing various duties during the service created impressive show. Scout Group of Hamirpur would be fully deployed for maintaining order and discipline. This they accomplished so well that despite the presence of thousands of people, there used to be no report of indiscipline anywhere. Sad, that this great festival came to a dead end after the tragic event of 1965 where no less than 44 people coming for the Rally from Jhunmur corner died after their boat capsized in river Sankh, up-stream Mandira Dam.



Fr. Marian, being a Polish, was a natural devotee of Black Madonna (Our Lady of Czestochowa) of Poland, but he was overjoyed by the overwhelming influence of the Fatima Mary who had occupied powerful place in the hearts of the people of Gangpur Mission. After the solemn arrival of her image in 1950, it was taken to the length and breadth of the Gangpur Mission village to village and parish to parish with pomp and solemnity. This raised tremendous devotion among the people, and after that, most of the Marian devotions in the mission were centered around Fatima Mary. Only after he came to

Bondamunda in 1968, Fr. Marian made a beautiful grotto, placed the image of Black Madonna that he brought from Poland, and started her devotion there.

For Fr. Marian, Our Lady was just his personal mother, and he related with her and talked to her in the same way. The fact that he was not confined to any particular attribute or manifestation of Our Lady is visible in his dedicating the beautiful church at Puri to Our Lady of Immaculate Conception. Though he did have an honored place for Black Madonna in his room, he imported all precious pieces of ceramic sculpture depicting the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady to decorate the Puri church in such a way that now it is a *de facto* monument of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception.

**THE FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING** in Hamirpur was the other eye-catching spectacle in Gangpur Mission. Just as the Marian Rally of Kesramal was huge in crowd participation and solemnity, so was the celebration of the feast of Christ the King in Hamirpur. Thousands of people would assemble at Hamirpur for the feast, and thousands of oil-lamps would be lit on the church, presbytery, school and the school hall. Solemn procession of the Blessed Sacrament in the







evening, followed by confessions, cultural dance, and solemn Holy Mass on the next morning would be the normal course of events every year. The Christ the King procession that made a big round through sectors amid loud clamor of singing, drumming, praying and acclamation was gorgeous.

Fr. Marian had a big role to play in the success of all these popular devotions at Hamirpur. Serving during the procession, adoration and Holy Mass by the boys of Apostolic School, and order and discipline maintained by the scouts were too familiar scenes year after year. Then there was the Hamirpur School Band that accompanied the processions or performed on the stage with well-rehearsed Marian hymns like Kunwari Maa, Salam Salam Maria, He Bedag Kunwari and other hit devotional compositions. During the free times Fr. Marian would play Fr. Prochs' songs and other songs on the gramophone. Those days when there were no record songs to play, the gramophone songs played through a sound-system was a huge novelty.

Apart from these activities Fr. Marian himself was required to do more serious duties during the festival. Such big occasions required more appealing personality as the main celebrant, and most of the time, because of his deep resonant and melodious voice and very good sermons, it was he who was selected as the main celebrant for Holy Mass. Quite simply; Fr. Marian was conspicuous everywhere due to his quality, creativity and dynamism.

Christ the King feast of Hamirpur was unforgettable for another thing—the magnificent show of drumming of huge *nagadas* (large drums) brought from Joketa and Harunda villages. They were so huge that two strong young men had to carry one nagada with a strong pole while the third would beat it from one side. Fr. Marian used to be the chief motivator behind, and sometimes he himself



would carry a middle-size *nagada* on his shoulder and play it in the middle of the circle of dancers. The Adivasis simply couldn't appreciate it more. This is how he promoted the tribal cultural heritage with open mind and personal involvement. Fr. Marian always loved to put a cultural flavor to life and celebration of faith, because he was convinced that the cultural flavor not only deepened faith, but it filled the heart of the faithful with joy.

Fr. Marian was always vibrant due to his multi-faceted personality and ability. Those who had seen him and talked to him personally have a vivid memory of him. As he left for Puri to take up a new challenge, the Gangpur Mission lost that much vibrancy of activity, and many of those things that he had raised to a supernatural level gradually came down to a normal plain, and eventually disappeared.







## PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK TRANSFORMED MY LIFE

*-Kriegsch Giorgio (Swami Nirvanananda Saraswati)*

ENCOUNTER



When I came to Puri for the first time in late 1986, I never expected that it could have changed my life so drastically. I was introduced to Father Marian by an Italian nun, sister Amelia. I was very surprised to hear that Father was speaking fluently Italian, German, Spanish and so many other languages that I couldn't recognize. He was so enthusiastic showing me the lepers' colony. Frankly speaking, for me, coming from the West, everything was very shocking. All the same, after some time, I could realize how happy all the people of the colony were, when Father was visiting them. You would expect a very heavy atmosphere in a place of suffering, but instead I felt a very profound love. He was bringing so much hope and joy to them, that you could see his love and their love coming together, joining with smiles and sparkling eyes. They all felt secure and cared for, like babies in the arms of their mother, protected and looked after, like children in the presence of their father. Unforgettable.

At that time, I didn't know much about Father Marian's life. However, everything became clearer when I learned of the concentration camp of Dachau, where he spent 5 long years, of the horror of the WW2 and the cruelty of the Nazis, that he lived and had to go through. Anyhow, all these terrible events had the power to awaken in him a very deep sense of mercy, forgiveness and a profound empathy for all those who are suffering. I felt that in this way, Father Marian was prepared for his higher mission: to start, where there was nothing, a colony for hundreds of Indian lepers' families. To me, it seemed that all the persons that he saw disappearing inside the Dachau camp, were reappearing again in a leper's body, that he could take care of.

Living this experience, I realized for the first time, what it means to be a real Christian. Yes, I was baptized, and I was grown up in a Christian society, but only after being in contact with Father, I understood the teachings of Jesus, not





in their theological meanings, but in their direct life impact. Yes, again, I must say that I became a Catholic in India. And since then, I felt that India was my birthplace. Like when Jesus said to Nicodemus: “None can see the Kingdom of God, unless they are born again”. Father never spoke with me of the Gospel, but all his life was a clear example of a living Gospel.

Through faith and surrender to the will of God, I realized that all fears of death and suffering could disappear. In fact, Faith and Surrender were for me his first teachings. And then, love, more love, endless Love and Care for all the suffering souls. Father was like a bridge, helping all those forgotten souls to cross the river of abandonment, despair, solitude and desolation. He was like an invisible guardian angel leading them across the desert of misery, aridity and sadness. There was nothing he could do to save the lives of his fellow prisoners in the concentration camp, but that desire to help was now totally fulfilled, spending his life for his Indian brothers. As Jesus said: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends”.

Every time I was watching him cleaning their open wounds, the image of Saint Francis came to my mind, thinking of how the saint was hugging and kissing the leper in Assisi, and how in reality he was hugging and kissing not a leper, but Jesus himself.

After some weeks of visiting his mission, before leaving, he gave me 7 pictures of children of the Beatrix School, asking if I could have found some sponsors to help the children to go to school. At that time, I didn’t know I was holding in my hand 7 seeds, that grew into many more projects for the future of the colony: hundreds more of children could go to a new school and so many wonderful things happened later. All was blessed by the silent presence of Father.

Every year I went back to Puri to visit Father Marian and see his work spreading,

and finding always more inspiration, from his life and attitude, from his friendship and fellowship. Since I was always travelling with my guitar, he always invited me to sing for him *Salve Regina* (Holy Queen) in Latin, that reminded him of his beloved Mother of Czestochowa. Many times, I was visiting him with other friends from Italy, Germany and US, and he invited us to cook a special Italian meal with spaghetti, that we were carrying from home. So many unforgettable moments. Sometimes he used to call my mother in Italy asking “*Yolanda, come stai?*” (how are you?) He knew that I was travelling a lot and therefore my mother was feeling lonely.

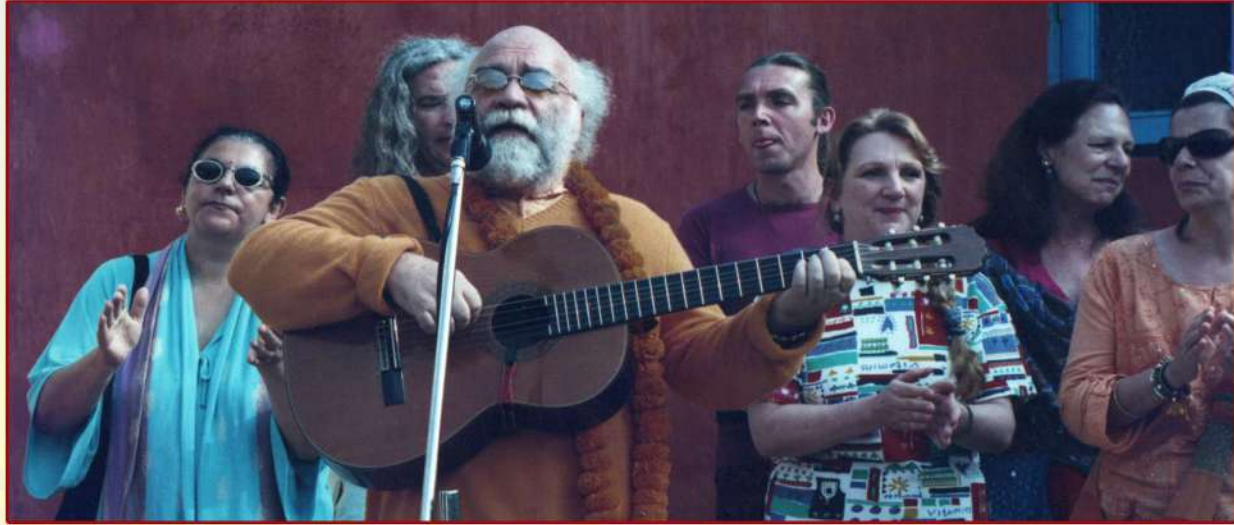






The last time I met Father, was a few months before his passing. He was always telling me about the Black Madonna of Czestochowa, so I expressed the desire to visit the Shrine. He immediately called some Fathers in Poland, asking to organize a visit for me there. Shortly after I could visit his beloved Shrine.

When I reached Czestochowa by train, I had an appointment with Father's brother and Brother Peter, who drove him. Since it was already dark, we decided to meet the next morning: April 30th. We visited the Shrine of Czestochowa and attended Mass for the Sunday service. I was feeling very well, and the atmosphere was very serene and devotional.



When we came out of the church, Brother Peter received a phone call. He was talking in Polish, but I realized from his voice, that he was quite nervous. When he finished his conversation, there was a period of silence. I was looking at them, trying to understand. Finally, with a broken voice, he told us that Father had passed away.

We were really shocked, incapable to show a reaction. Silently Father's brother was weeping. I felt dry, like a desert without any breeze or motion. Silently Brother Peter gave us the details of the event, on how Father very peacefully had left the body among the lepers, after having lunch with them. That was his last desire: to be among the lepers to the end. I realized that we were inside the holy Shrine of Mother Mary, where he loved to be, exactly at the same time when he left the body. Perfect timing.

We decided to enter into the church again to pray for him. As we were entering the gate, trumpets and drums started to play to mark the closing of the Shrine. That moment was so solemn, that we felt, with goose bumps, that Father's Soul was entering into Heaven's Gate. No doubt, that was a real sign from Heaven. **SHANTI.**







# FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK – A HOLY MAN OF GOD

-Fr. Andrzej Danilewicz SVD, Poland

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© Andrzej Danilewicz SVD

I had the honor of taking part in the celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Father Marian Zelazek which was scheduled for February 11, 2018. The parish church in Puri was filled to the brim. It happened that this day was the memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes, and thus the World Day of the Sick. The Gospel assigned for this Sunday spoke of the healing of the leper. There is no better coincidence, if there are any. At the end of the Holy Mass, the local ordinary, Archbishop John Barwa SVD, holding up his hands – and we along with him – emotionally uttered the following words: “In the presence of the Bishop representing the Polish Episcopate, the Vice-General of the Divine Word Missionaries, Polish Provincial and Indian confreres, we hereby announce that venerable Father Marian Zelazek, a holy man of God, may be raised by the Church to the altars, we solemnly intend to begin his beatification process”. The enthusiasm that prevailed at that time in the church was a kind of **Santo Subito!**

While standing there in Puri, I suddenly realized a fundamental truth, fundamental to all missionary activity, and so often forgotten. What really affects others most is our personal holiness. But what is it? What was it in Father Marian’s case?

In the popular understanding, the sacrum usually appears in opposition to the profanum. However, I do not find this in the life of Father Zelazek. At no point he was separated, in conflict with the everyday world; on the contrary – he was immersed in it, and this world plowed him with its lights and shadows, leaving its marks on him.

Holiness is also understood as moral perfection or spiritual impeccability. Perhaps this is not what describes Father Marian the most. Everyone who came into contact with him experienced kindness radiating from him. He himself often repeated: **“It is not difficult to be good, provided one wants to be”**. These words must have been





remembered by the Indian confreres since they placed them on the tomb of Father Zelazek, which is now in Puri. These words are eloquently illustrated by the figure placed at the top of the tomb. Father Marian bends over an elderly leper. It seems that he wants to reduce the distance between them, to show her respect and tenderness; staring at her as if she was worthy of all his attention.

And it was precisely to restore human dignity that he was particularly concerned about. It was as if in contradiction to what he had experienced in the Dachau concentration camp, where attempts were made to strip them of all dignity. In one of the films about Father Zelazek there is a scene in which a leper is asked about the happiest day in his life. The man replies that it was when Father Marian came to him for a cup of tea. It was the first time that he felt like a human being.

Father Zelazek's first 25 years of work in India was to restore the human dignity of the tribal community. The offered education contributed to their social advancement. From people living in forests, completely marginalized, they became full citizens of their own country. Archbishop Barwa comes from this community. During his stay in Poland, I heard him as he was often saying that if we want to see what Father Marian did for their people, he is the best example of it. And no wonder, because saints are there to change someone's life. It was the same with the lepers in Puri. Father Zelazek did not only care about immediate help for them, but he strove for them to take their future into their deformed hands. That is why he organized various jobs for them, thanks to which they could find funds to support themselves and their families.



In the Christian sense, holiness is inseparable from perfect love. Father Zelazek loved life. Maybe because he saw so much death beyond the barbed wire of the concentration camp. Or maybe because his family home with so many siblings was full of life. I remember Father Marian as the one who was always joyful, loved sports, liked to sing, tell stories, meet people and eat well. He just celebrated his life. He even died on a festive day.

April 30, 2006 was the Hindu festival of *Akshaya Tritiya*. Father Zelazek was invited to this feast to the leper colony as a guest of honor. After dancing, singing and eating together, feeling a bit tired, he said goodbye and, accompanied by a few lepers, walked towards his car. After walking several dozen meters, he fell over and died soon. I heard him saying that his dream was to die in his shoes, not in bed; to die while remaining active in the service of those he loved.





# A HOLY MAN

His love for people was not a kind of heroic self-denial or moral imperative. It flowed from an intimate relationship with God. From childhood, he was prayerful and genuinely pious. He could not imagine a day without Holy Mass, which he celebrated with great passion, especially in the last years of his life, in his little chapel, sitting alone at the altar, immersed in the holy rite.

His relationship with God made him open to the signs of the times. The best example of this is 1975. Then, at the request of the Provincial Superior, he leaves his current work and moves to Puri. It was not, however, an ordinary move. He had to leave his beloved Adivasis, among whom he felt like a real missionary. Hundreds of baptisms, schools built, more and more entrenched Christian morality – all this was to be just a memory. On his way to the Hindu city of Puri, he had to give up all this missionary success; he had to learn to be a missionary again.

He told me that he never baptized anyone in the leper colony, but he treated their hard-healing wounds with great tenderness. He could not proclaim Christ openly and with words, therefore he was all the more good. After all, goodness is an effective remedy for the ills of the world.



However, it should be remembered that Father Zelazek was not only a charity worker, but also a missionary. On his first Mass card, he placed the words: “Let the Heart of Jesus live in the hearts of all people”. It was not just an SVD formula, but his sincere desire. He really wanted everyone to know Christ and to be saved.







## FR. MARIAN: A GENUINE CHRISTIAN

-Mrs Barbara Dash

TESTIMONY



### FR. MARIAN, A MAN WHO LOVED HIS NEIGHBOUR MORE THAN HIMSELF:

By religion I am a Baptist Christian; my husband is a Hindu. Both of us are recovered leprosy patients. I met my future husband while undergoing treatment for leprosy in a hospital in Andhra Pradesh. We both were healed of the disease but lived with some deformities and discriminations. We could not live together. My husband lived in Puri. I stayed in my parental home in Cuttack. Fr. Marian hearing about it accepted me as a teacher in Beatrix school so that I could live with my husband. During my first meeting itself I felt that Father Marian was a very compassionate person with deep understanding for those who are suffering. Ever since I was affected with leprosy I had not met anyone with such concern and acceptance.

I worked for 20 years under his guidance and in close collaboration with him. He taught me not to scold the children but to care for them lovingly. He gave me the responsibility to look after the boarding children, especially to teach them music, dance and drama. I used to spend a lot of time with children in the boarding helping them in different ways. All these gave me the blessing of knowing Fr. Marian closely and to experience his kindness and love. I was inspired by his care and concern for the leprosy patients and their children.

I believe Father was someone who understood the compassion of Jesus and showed it to others generously. Since I and my husband suffered from leprosy, I know how great was his compassion to the leprosy patients. I have seen him washing the wounds of the leprosy patients filled with maggots and with awful smell, with his bare hands and bandaging them. He sat with them and ate with them.

Father's vision for education, through Beatrix school, provided an effective atmosphere for the children of the leprosy affected families and the normal families for education and for social integration with society. Through various socio-economic and health care programs to a great extent he rehabilitated the leprosy affected people.





**FR. MARIAN, A VENERABLE PRIEST:** Father Marian was the first Catholic priest whom I came to know closely. Certainly he was outstanding in Faith, and trust in God. He started to serve the leprosy patients because he believed in Jesus and his words. Through all that he did he communicated God's love to people and strengthened their faith in God. His faith and love of God enabled him to do what he did for the leprosy patients and others. He did everything possible to remove injustice done to the poor. He was very courageous at his service. He was very prudent and wise. He was humble and gentle.

He trusted in people. When he started the work in the leprosy colony, which he turned into Karunalaya (House of mercy) he had no money and no one to help him. But he trusted in God and worked hard and the rest God took care of. I believe, he was full of self-giving in Charity and he lived for others, especially for the suffering and unwanted people. He did not make any distinction among people. He was a father to all. He had a preferential love for the sick, poor and the most unfortunate people. He trusted me more than I trusted myself. He trusted his teachers and the children. He was so trustworthy that anybody would trust him.

**FR. MARIAN, A MAN OF PRAYER:** In the school he created an atmosphere of prayer and godliness. In the morning we started the classes with prayers and we concluded them in the evening with prayers. Since most of the children were not Christians he did not insist on Christian prayers. He taught children to pray for their parents, teachers and for the nation. He taught the children to celebrate the main feasts of different religions and pray for each other and he prayed with them.

He kept his time for personal prayer and meditation. Often when I visited him in his Ashram he was praying in his small chapel alone. He used to walk in the Ashram compound and pray. When he came to our house he prayed. When he visited Hindu families he prayed silently. Only when people asked him to pray in their houses he prayed loudly. I have participated in the Holy Mass he celebrated in the church. He did it with great devotion and it was inspiring.

Most of the time father was quite busy. But anytime I approached him for anything he made himself available. This is true with everyone who wanted to meet him, especially someone in pain and difficulty. Disregarding his own health and other personal concerns he made himself available to others. He was very patient with everyone, especially those who were helpless, even if someone was unreasonable and violent he listened to him/her.

**FR. MARIAN, A MAN OF CHRISTIAN VALUES:** Father Marian lived a very simple life. He ate simple food which the ordinary people ate and he lived with minimum conveniences. He shared whatever he had and the conveniences he enjoyed with anyone in need. Everybody could enter his room and take a seat. He considered everything he had as God's gift to him to be shared with all.

He was a man of peace and unity. One thing I always noticed was how he tried to bring reconciliation among family members and neighbours. Many of the families in the leprosy colony were divided. He helped them to forgive one another and live





in unity and in peace. He himself never kept anything against anyone, no matter what they told him or did to him. Because of his presence in the colony and in the school people learned to avoid quarrels, to get reconciled and to live in peace and harmony.

He was a person who always tried to encourage and promote everyone, especially the dejected leprosy affected people. He promoted the children; not only arranging for their education but also providing opportunity for developing their talents. He provided opportunity for everyone. To provide employment for the handicapped leprosy patients he started small scale industries like making products from jute and coconut fibre, tailoring school and readymade cloths, vegetable garden, dairy and poultry farm etc.

He was fully dedicated to the leprosy affected people. However, he was also concerned and committed to the other poor people around. He gave admission to the poor children from the neighbourhood of Beatrix school and helped them in every possible way. The poor people in the neighbourhood were part of 'his people'. He had a mobile clinic with which he reached out to the sick who could not get medical help otherwise. During the times of cyclones and other natural calamities he would distribute food, clothes and medicines. We used to help him to pack things. People in Puri still remember the yeoman service he rendered during the 1999 super cyclone, reaching out to the marooned people with food and medicines and cremating/burying the dead humans and cattle.

He was open and welcoming to everyone. He made friends with people of all religions and castes. He was a welcome person among all groups, considered as a blessing, a joyful, presence. In fact, on important occasions many people sought his presence and blessing.

He has made many redeeming contributions to the people in Puri. According to me, the acceptance and respect he brought to the leprosy patients as normal human beings would be one of his main contributions. He cared for them with love and compassion like a father. Thanks to him the leprosy patients got back their human dignity and acceptance in the society. He reminded the people that Puri is made a holy city not only by Lord Jagannath but also by the holiness of the people living in the city.

**HOLINESS:** For me Father was a living saint. I believe all those who knew him considered him, like Mother Teresa, a saint. Many of the leprosy patients considered him their personal god. He was well known in the city of Puri. He was known as the Father and a saintly person.

He died on a most auspicious day (*Austoprohory* day). According to Hindu belief, one who dies on that day will directly go to heaven. The people of Karunalaya observed the day every year together with special prayers and a common meal. Father participated in their celebrations and died in their midst. People of Karunalaya believe that he is in heaven and I too believe that he is in heaven.

He was accepted and respected by people irrespective of caste and creed. As far as I know, he is one of the most accepted and respected persons the holy city of Puri has seen. People of all religions and castes revered him. I have seen the Chief Priest of Jagannath temple embracing him with affection and respect.



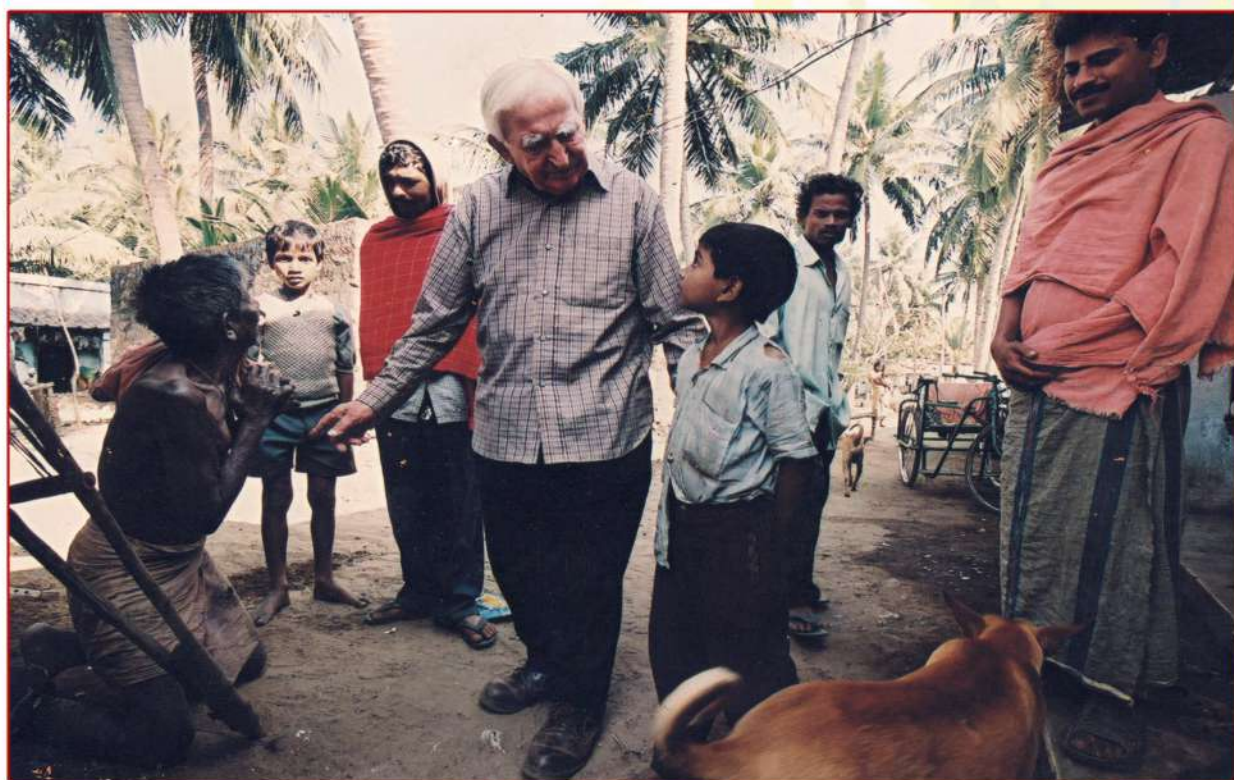




# TESTIMONY

**A SAINT IN THE MAKING:** I am very happy about the initiative being taken to declare him a saint. I have some idea about what it is all about as I was lucky to participate in the beatification ceremony of Fr. Damien in Belgium, thanks to Fr. Marian. Two of us, cured leprosy patients from Puri were chosen to participate in the beatification ceremony in 1994. It was a very awe inspiring ceremony. I wish and pray that same thing happens for our Father. I do think that it will have a very positive influence on the people of Puri and elsewhere.

*-Ms. Barbara Dash,  
Jagannath Colony, Baliapanda Road, Puri*







# MY LOVE STORY

-Ms. Bijuli Pradhan

TESTIMONY



I am Bijuli Pradhan, one of the oldest inhabitants of the leprosy settlement near Loknath Temple, later I joined Karunalaya leprosy care centre started by Fr. Marian Zelazek, SVD. I was born in 1940 in Saguru Village, Kalapathara P.S., Khordha District in Odisha. My father was a pujari (temple priest) serving in the village Siva temple. My mother died soon after giving birth to my brother. I was still very small. My father married again. To my luck, my step-mother was like my own mother, a loving mother to me. She gave birth to two sons and a daughter. We were a happy family. I enjoyed my life with my family and in the village. Sometimes, I accompanied my father to the temple.

When I was about 10 years old, I was found with signs of leprosy. The family tried to hide it. But when the villagers found it out, they insisted that I should be thrown out of the house and village immediately. My step-mother put up some resistance in vain to protect her beloved daughter.

My father forcefully brought me to Hind Kustto Nivaran Sangh (HKNS) Ashram near Loknath Temple at Puri, Odisha. HKNS Ashram was a government leprosy asylum providing care and rehabilitation to leprosy patients. My father told me that I should stay there for a few days for a treatment and after that he would take her back home. As a little girl in tears, I would not leave him. He put me in a room and locked from outside and left, never to return home. I wept until there was a tear left in my eyes. I refused to eat for three days. Out of shock and exhaustion, I collapsed.

APRIL 2021





# TESTIMONY

The other leprosy patients nursed me back to life and gave me protection and care. They were very good to me. I somehow adjusted to the life there. I went with other patients to the road side begging. I got very little, as I looked pretty and unlike other leprosy patients so pathetic.

When I reached puberty, I was asked to move out of the Ashram and live in the leprosy colony nearby. The disease had not caused any major deformity to me yet. I looked beautiful and attractive. As a young girl, it was difficult to protect myself from the lustful men. Dr. K.C. Mahapatro, the District Leprosy Officer (DLO) and some others thought it was dangerous to leave me alone. They found Dhoba Parida, a young man, who was also found with leprosy and was under treatment at the asylum, belonging to a respectable Brahmin family from nearby Ramchandi Sahi, Puri. They arranged my marriage with him. He was gentle and caring. His mother was a teacher at the Girls' High School, Puri and his father, a government employee. His family sent all the necessary provisions for us. His mother kept visiting us stealthily. She was very loving like my own mother. Once she even took me to her home. She treated me as her own daughter. She gave me gifts. In spite of my sickness, I felt very happy. My husband and I found solace in each other's company and we lived happily in our hut. Gradually, we were afflicted by the disease more and more. After about 11 years of living conjugal life, my husband died, leaving me alone without any children.

Then I struggled to make a living by begging like other leprosy patients. I still looked relatively healthy and beautiful so people did not give me alms, thinking that I must have been forcefully brought by someone and kept there to make money. Besides, I was disturbed and threatened by unruly men. So the DLO with the help of some elders found another man, Daitari Pradhan to marry me from Nimapara. He was a married man with children. Having found with leprosy, he was thrown out from his family and home. He also landed in HKNS Ashram. I tried to adjust with my new husband. It was not easy. Besides, both were getting more and more afflicted by leprosy, our bodies covered with sores and gradually both lost our fingers and toes. Mobility became more and more difficult. By then, Fr. Marian appeared like an angle in



the leprosy colony. He bandaged our wounds and provided medicines. He gave us food from the mercy kitchen and assisted us with other necessities. I found in Fr. Marian my *Bapa* (daddy).





Eventually, my second husband also died leaving me alone with no children. Another crisis in my life, that is, twice widowed. But by then, I felt respected and loved by most of the leprosy afflicted people in the colony. Fr. Marian was my main solace and I totally relied on him for everything. He extended all possible assistance to me. I believed that ‘*Bapa moro deveta*’ (Bapa is my God). I experienced God’s compassion and protection in and through ‘*Bapa*’ Fr. Marian.

I lost both of my palms and the legs below the ankle. I had ulcers on my hands and legs. I tried to learn to take care of myself, to cook my own food and to clean my hut, to wash my clothes etc. *Bapa* assisted me and two of my neighbours, Lalita Subudhi and Sashi Prusty, who were in similar situation, to stand together and protect ourselves. *Bapa* helped me to adopt a young lady, who was my immediate neighbour, named Snehalata, as my daughter. Until today, my adopted daughter and her two daughters look after me as their own mother.

My *Bapa* provided for all my basic needs, most importantly, social acceptance. Both as a leprosy patient and widowed woman, I had no place in the society. Thanks to the acceptance and respect given to me by *Bapa*, the people also began to accept and respect me. I remember how *Bapa* used to collect water in a bucket from the common tube well and bring for me. He helped me to prepare tea and he would drink tea with me. He took me to the church and to the city in his gaddi (jeep). I always waited for *Bapa*’s visit to the colony, which he did at least twice a week.



The news about the death of *Bapa* shattered me. I wept for days after his death and even now the very thought of it fills my eyes. I am very grateful to God for providing a *devata* (god) to protect and provide for me. I believe Fr. Marian is in heaven with God. I will continue to be cared by *Bapa*’s successors and Karunalaya.

*Ms. Bijuli Pradhan*  
*Jivramaji Leprosy Colony, Loknath Road, Puri.*







# MY EXPERIENCES WITH FR. MARIAN

-Mr. Prafullo Sahoo

TESTIMONY



I am Prafullo Sahoo, one of the many leprosy patients saved by Father Marian and privileged to work with him to help my fellow the leprosy patients. I was born in 1952 in Malikudo village of Baudh District of Odisha. My parents were landless labourers. Both of them and three of us their children were infected with leprosy. I was then about 15 years old. The villagers chased us out of our village and we all got scattered here and there. I managed to get some treatment in a leprosy hospital in Champa, Chhattisgarh. I moved around seeking shelter and the possibility of making a living from begging, as was the normal fate of the lepers. After about 5 years of wandering around I managed to reach Puri, where I had an acquaintance who passed on a disease to me stayed in Jivramji Leprosy Colony, one of the colonies of the lepers in Puri, near Loknath Temple. Puri was then an attractive 'holy city' for lepers because of the possibility of begging from the pilgrims to Jagannath Temple and tourists to the sea resort. Nearby there was a government leprosy care and rehabilitations centre from where I got some medical assistance. I made my home in a hut and found a partner to live with. My wife and I managed to earn a living on begging.

**FROM A BEGGAR TO A LABOURER:** In 1976 Father Marian from the Catholic Church at Puri started rendering services to the leprosy patients in our colony. He met me and another young man, Brindaban Mahanty begging near the temple. Though, we were leprosy patients, we had no serious physical deformity and were able to do some manual work. To save us from the humiliation of begging, he invited us to work at the Church, about three km away from the leprosy colony. We worked in the garden and assisted at the construction site. Father Marian was very kind to us. We got used to the work and were happy with the wages we got.





Father Marian, as he cleaned the lepers' wounds and bandaged them, realised their wounds on the legs would never get healed, as they were walking on bare feet covered with ulcerous wounds. He considered it a critical and urgent need to protect their feet from getting further hurt from filth, rats and flies. He searched and found a cobbler who was used to making shoes and sandals for leprosy patients. He employed him at Karunalaya and asked me to assist him. I tried to do it for a while but the remuneration I got was too little to take care of my family.



Fr. Marian opened a dispensary to take care of the medical needs and a Mercy Kitchen to provide food and other basic necessities to the serious and helpless patients. He also realised the need to provide employment to prevent healthy people from going for begging. So he started a small farm to grow coconuts and vegetables. He also dug two fish ponds. The produces from these were used in the Mercy Kitchen. The employees were given reasonable wages. I with my experience of working in the fields, preferred to work in the garden. Father Marian reluctantly gave me permission to work in the farm and gave me better wages.

**FROM A SALARIED MAN TO A CARING SERVANT:** After a while, Father Marian invited me to go for a training to be a certified cobbler. After my training in 1981, when the main cobbler left Karunalaya Father Marian appointed me as the in-charge of the shoe workshop with a reasonable salary. Under the direction and help of Father Marian; I learned to attend to the requirement of each patient. Initially, when patients came with pus, ulcers and maggots, I covered the foot with paper or cloths and took the measurements. Father Marian noticed it and sat with me and started taking measurements with his bare hands holding/touching the messy ulcers. Gradually I got used to the same and learned other possibilities to care for the patients. He supplied shoes and sandals not only to the patients from Puri but also from all over Odisha and even to neighbouring states.

**A PARTNER IN FATHER'S MISSION:** Some people complained that Father Marian was doing religious conversion in the name of serving the lepers. Father Marian was a genuine man of God but he never made any mention of his religion or his God. When he wanted to place a statue/bust in front of the new dispensary, he placed the bust of Mahatma Gandhi. Some ungrateful and ignorant people verbally abused Father Marian and accused him of all kinds of heinous crimes but he never got angry or reacted to them in any negative way. He treated them with love and concern.







I was deeply touched by the concern of Father Marian for the overall development and wellbeing of the lepers, their families and children. Almost from the inception of his ministry he started a nursery school. Eventually, he started a full-fledged school for their children who could not get admission to any school because they were born of leprosy patients. Thoughtfully, he opened the school for the children from the neighbourhood. At first they were reluctant. When they saw that the school provided quality education and maintained very good results so many sought admissions that all could not be admitted. The children mixing with each other and becoming friends removed the social distancing from the leprosy affected people. Besides, of course, many of their children who made use of the opportunity got good jobs and positions in the society.

**FATHER TAUGHT US WITH HIS HUMBLE LIFE AND SELF-GIVING SERVICE:** He washed the wounds of the leprosy patients and bathed them. He provided food in the Mercy Kitchen and water by giving each family a tube well. Prafullo gratefully acknowledges: Thanks to Father Marian's compassion and human touch that made us feel human, gave us back our humanity. The people who used to spit on us and treated us as outcasts and cursed creatures began to treat us like human beings. The socio-religious discrimination and ill-treatment gave way to general respect and acceptance. Father Marian taught me to treat my people with greater concern and respect.

Father Marian had no hesitation to do any menial works. He used to clean the toilets of the leprosy patients and even emptied the septic tanks and cleaned them. Thanks to his openness and acceptance of everyone from the least of the leprosy patients to the high priest of Lord Jagannath Temple. Without making any distinction between people of different faiths, cultures and castes, people gave the lepers greater acceptance and respect. Father Marian made them 'my people and became their father 'Amo Bapa' (our daddy). Bapa made us human beings. He is our God – 'Bhagavan, Devata'. He taught me to pray, pray to my own gods for myself and for others and make my work a prayer. Our Bapa is praying for us from heaven and blessing us.

-Mr. Prafullo Sahoo  
Jivramaji Leprosy Colony, Loknath Road, Puri.







# I FOUND MY FATHER AND GOD IN FATHER MARIAN

-Mr. Laxmidhar Kar



TESTIMONY

I am Laxmidhar Kar. I was born a Brahmin, the priestly class of the Hindu society. I was born in a village about 25 km to the north of Puri. I am the only surviving child of my parents. My sister died at a very young age. When I was about eight years, my mother contracted leprosy. This fact could not be hidden with ulcers and disfigurement on her body. My father, fearing ostracisation of our family by the villagers, left her at the leprosy asylum at Puri. She never returned to the village ever since.

When I was about 12 years old, scars began appearing on my stomach. My father took me to the leprosy asylum where he had left my mother. As I was a minor, the asylum refused me admission as children were not admitted there. By then, my mother, after her treatment at the asylum, had taken shelter with someone in the nearby leprosy colony. I was left with my mother and my father returned to the village only to die of snake bite soon after. My mother and I were left to fend for ourselves. We began making our living by begging on the streets of the temple town, Puri.

Father Marian had just arrived on the scene, attending to the leprosy patients living on the streets of Puri. He had begun cleaning and dressing their wounds. Gradually, he started providing livelihood support and some sort of shelter (hut) to them. My mother pleaded with Father Marian for a hut and he helped us to make one. He provided us with rice as ration and asked us to stop begging on the streets.

As days went by, the illness took its toll on me and both of my palms were contracted, making my life more and more difficult. Father Marian sent me to a distant leprosy rehabilitation centre at Salur, in the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh, for the treatment of my affected hands. I was, in a way, lost in this place as I could not understand the local language and did not like the food served there. Feeling home sick and lost I ran away from there and somehow reached back to Puri. Father took a lot of trouble for me and took me to another government rehabilitation centre in Odisha, about five hours travel distance from Puri.





# TESTIMONY

Father Marian was concerned about the overall wellbeing of the leprosy affected people. He noticed that the little children living with their parents in small hutments near the temple, were either going for begging with their parents or were loitering around uselessly. The schools did not admit them due to the stigma of leprosy.

He began collecting the little children; first near the little leprosy settlement and later near his house. He engaged someone to teach them the basics of education. Gradually this developed into Beatrix School, where the children study in a free atmosphere and mix with children from normal society. He made provisions for their food and requisite medicines. He took personal care of each one and attended to us, guided and mentored us. With my deformed hands I could not make much progress. The more mischief I made, the more Father Marian loved me. This school over the years had played a major role in the eradication of the stigma of leprosy in in this locality.

I was ambitious of making big money and so got involved in drugs trade along with a couple of friends from the leprosy colony. I was caught by police and was imprisoned for 10 years. Like a loving mother, Father Marian engaged a lawyer and got me out of the jail. Now I am in my fifties, married and well settled in life. I feel nostalgic when I think of my life story; thanks to Father Marian. I remember an incident when I vomited blood and was admitted in the hospital. Father Marian personally attended to me and offered his blood for transfusion. While others ran away from the leprosy victims, he loved us and came closer to us. He embraced us, tenderly cared for us and even offered his own blood to save us. My mother and my family still get our regular medicines and livelihood support from Karunalaya Leprosy Care Centre founded by Father Marian.



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*“While my own people, our village ostracized me and my mother, we were taken care of, provided with our every need, above all Father Marian loved us as his own. He has been a living God for us. The life I live now with my own family is because of his love. He provided me everything I have today; cure from illness and a comfortable house to live in. He is my living God.”* I can never thank Father Marian enough.

**-Mr. Laxmidhar Kar**

**Jivramaji Leprosy Colony, Loknath Road, Puri.**







# SERVANT OF GOD FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK, SVD MY FRIEND AND GURU

-Rev. Surendro Kumar Mohanty

TESTIMONY



My first meeting with Father Marian was in his residence in Puri, adjacent to the Catholic Church. I was in depression and looked for a place to be alone to reflect and pray. So I went to the Catholic Church. I was there for an hour or so. An European appeared before me and looked at me and he observed: “*you look sad and depressed, why?*” I said: yes. I came to pray’. “*Show me your hands*”, he said. “*Let me see whether they have nailed you.*” He observed: “*you have no marks of the nail. Don’t worry, the day they nail you, you will be one more step closer to him, Jesus.*”

I had just returned after my studies in the USA and was in the initial stages of starting a home for the destitute children. I found it all confusing and hard. Father knew about it. He took me to his house, offered me a cup coffee and listened to me. This is how our relationship started. I went away that day with the impression: “He is the best human being I have ever met”.

I met him whenever I felt I needed a Guru. He guided me. He invited me to be part of his work in the Karunalaya (leprosy Care Centre) and Beatrix School, the school he started for the children of the leprosy affected people. I was privileged to collaborate with him in his challenging mission. He treated me like a younger brother and a trusted friend. Over the years he became my good friend and Guru. He became so much a part of my life that I started every New Year visiting him early morning and taking his blessing.

He was a priest TOTALLY dedicated to Christ and his teaching. Though he was a Catholic priest, he was a priest for all people. He prayed for all and prayed with all. He was good news and a blessing for all. I was touched by Father Marian’s deep faith in God which made him fearless, energetic and enthusiastic. His faith in God made him a man of God for all. He ventured into unknown territories like the care for lepers, interreligious dialogue and active collaboration with all people of good will, irrespective of their faith belongingness, social status. His trust in God enabled him to trust in people, especially those whom he was serving.





**A PRAYERFUL PERSON:** When I visited him, very often I found him in prayer, in his little chapel, in the garden or in his room. There was a glow on Father's face when he was in prayer. I believe, the Holy Spirit was upon him. Many times I have participated in the liturgy conducted by Father in the church. His prayers and the interpretation of the Word of God was personal and inspiring. During the meetings and inter-religious gatherings, he prayed, making use of the Word of God from the Bible and the Sacred Books of other religions.

He had the gift of 'water divining'. He made use of it freely to help people to find the source of good water. He began his search always with prayer. He trusted on Jesus word: I am the life giving water.



I was deeply touched with his simple life style. His life style was in tune with the life style of the people he ministered to. He had a very simple life style – ate simple food and availed the minimum conveniences necessary. He shared everything he had. He easily reached out to the poor, the leprosy patients and the social outcasts; he gracefully mingled with them, ate with them and made himself feel at home with them.

**A MAN FOR ALL AND ALL SEASONS:** He came across to me as a 'Good Shepherd' who took care of his flock. He had a very inclusive approach. No one was left out of his flock. He made himself available to all, with extra attention to the least and the last. He was a minister who lived to serve and not to be served. Though he was a Catholic priest, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and even those who did not believe in God found in him a loving 'Father'. The Chief Priest of Jagannath Temple' and Father considered each other as 'best friend'.

He lived to bring about peace and harmony among all the people, respecting their cultural and faith differences. He tried to remove prejudices, blind beliefs and unjust distinctions. He laboured hard to eradicate pain and suffering. He was a true reconciler between God and man. He reached out to people with a healing touch. He healed the leprosy patients of their bodily and inner wounds and helped them to reconcile among themselves and with God. He tried to bring about reconciliation among people of different religions and cultures. He protected and promoted life and dignity of all as human beings.





He was a promoter of the best in others. Father ran a mobile clinic in the leprosy colony near the Railway Station. One day while passing by I saw a young boy sitting near him and playing 'daskathia' (a simple musical instrument made of two short sticks). It wasn't a great performance. But Father listened to his performance attentively and encouraged him and rewarded him. This was the principle he applied in his educational apostolate. He promoted each child and some of them reached high positions.

He respected all human beings as brothers and sisters. He offered the same chair to a leper and to a high official. A carpenter who worked for him told me how Father used to invite him to eat with him and shared his lunch with him. The carpenter was amazed at his simplicity and humanness. He told me: ***Father must be a saint.***

Though he was a busy person, neither his health nor his regular works came on the way of his attending to the person in front of him, those who approached him. He was a very good listener. He took everyone seriously and gave an attentive listening. He has given very attentive and patient listening to me whenever I was in need. He had immense patience with everyone. I have never seen him or heard of him getting impatient with anyone. He was extra patient with the sick and helpless and the children. He was patient even with those who were not reasonable and/or violent.

The people whom he called "My People", were the leprosy patients and the down-trodden people. He was very compassionate to them. He washed their maggot infested wounds with his bare hands and looked after them like a loving mother and they called him 'Bapa' (father). He was a welcome presence among all the people who knew him. His presence was considered to be a blessing. People sought after his presence on important occasions in their families and institutions to receive his blessing.

**HIS MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS:** Puri is considered to be a holy city because of the Lord Jagannath and temple dedicated to him. I think Father Marian walked on the sands of Puri and made it holier. With his humanness he made it a bit more human. His compassionate love for the leprosy patients and the ostracised people, his dedication to give them security and human dignity were contributions that go beyond the shores of Puri. He brought about greater understanding and unity among the various religious heads and different cultural communities.

**HOLINESS:** He was surely a holy person during his life, especially towards the end of his life. The leprosy patients who got a healing touch for their body and soul considered him their devata, god. Beginning with the Chief Priest of Jagannath temple to the ordinary Hindus looked up to him as a very saintly person. The rickshaw pullers to the intelligentsia of Puri talked about him as someone close to God and to get close to him a blessing. Many Europeans visit his tomb and his Ashram as they would visit the shrine of a saint.

At his death people spoke of having lost a saintly great soul. The people of Puri gave him a tearful and touching farewell. He is very much remembered and homage is paid to him. He wished to die among his people, the people of Karunalaya. Literally he died among his people and that too on the most auspicious day in their calendar.







We couldn't but take note of the fact that Father's Ashram was miraculously saved during the recent cyclone Fanny (on May 3, 2019). All around his Ashram there was total destruction but his tomb and the Ashram remained intact. He is one of the few or the only one I know of accepted and respected by all people irrespective of their socio-cultural and religious belonging.



Religious Heads solemnly carrying the MORTAL REMAINS of FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK to be placed in the MEMORIAL at Karunalaya Leprosy Care Center Office Campus, Puri

I believe that Father had superhuman courage and strength to do the selfless service to the leprosy patients and the others is because of his deep faith in God. He was not counting on his human strength, rather he put his trust in the Divine power. This gave him a hope filled vision. He was in touch with a living God who accompanied him. The Risen Lord who promised to be with us till end of the world gave him light and power.

Humility was one of his greatest strengths. He was humble enough to do any job which others considered as mean and impure. He washed the maggot filled wound of the leprosy patients, gave them bath and cleaned their houses and ate with them what they offered him. He never took any credit for his success and acceptance. He gave credit to God and others. He found greatness in simple people. He received so many award from India and from Poland. But he never made a mention of them.

He was a man of Prudence. He was prudent not to offend anybody and at the same time to hold on to the vision and values he cherished. Only a very prudent man could get acceptance and success in a traditional and complex city life of Puri. He was a just man. He defended the poor and those who were treated unjustly by others. His defence was not through law or words. He stood for justice through his self-giving service.

He was a man of self-control. I never saw him losing control of himself. He never gave into any negative feelings or judgements. He kept his calm and cool even in the most trying situations. I feel he died with the same enthusiasm and determination with which he started his mission here in Puri. The long years of his demanding mission in Puri, he carried out with unwavering hope and strength. Even in the midst of his serious health concerns, he gave his best to others in pain and need. He died on his feet and among 'his own people'.





**FR. MARIAN, A SAINT:** I am glad the Catholic Church has initiated the process of declaring him a saint. Like in the case of St. Mother Teresa of Kolkata, a public recognition by the Church would be affirmation to the recognition given to him by the people. He would continue to be a greater inspiration to the people. Promotion of such saintly heroes will highlight the need and possibility of such dedicated life. I will be extremely happy to see him declared a saint. He deserves it and I trust it will happen. I am praying for it.

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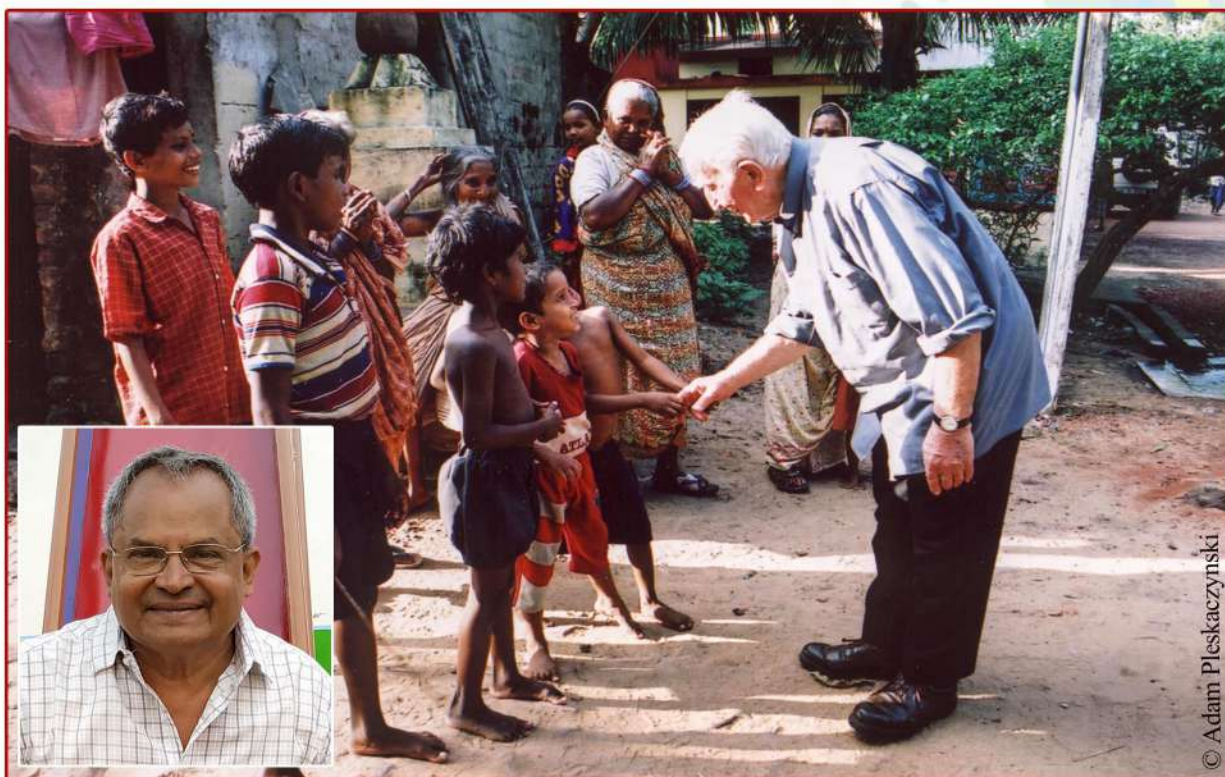




# MARIAN ZELAZEK: A COMPASSIONATE SVD MISSIONARY

-Fr. Baptist Michael D'Souza, SVD

COMPASSION



*'But for FATHER, I would have been confined to ashes at Swargadwar (city's crematorium) years ago' – echoes the powerful voice of Bipro Mahakud in the documentary film – 'Love Beyond Borders'.*

*'Father gave us life'; 'I am alive today because of Father and his kindness'; 'Father gave me all I have – he nurtured me while I was a young boy, taught me a trade, got me married, gave me a house to live in – what more do I need' – such are the expressions one hears at the Karunalaya Leprosy Colony set up by Father Marian Zelazek in Puri, as one interacts with the victims of Hansen's disease. Until this missionary arrived on the scene in 1975, the victims were staring at death in the eye. The healthy ones and those who could at least drag themselves to the road went begging in the town and around the Lord Jagannath Temple to earn a living. The old, crippled and the ones suffering from ulcerated wounds were lying around wreathing in agony and depression cursing their destiny. Leprosy that took the cheer out of their lives and separated them from their own family, they believed surely was a curse of the deity. They were the outcastes whom no one befriended. Into this situation walks in Father Marian – first alone with his healing touch, later on joined by Sisters of Charity Maria Bambina. His words of compassion melted their hearts. He would bend down and lift up the weary eyed woman lying in a corner outside her hutment. He would wash the dirt off her pestering wounds. Would remove the maggots from her wounds with his bare fingers. Word soon spread around that there is a white man around who does not shy away from leprosy.*

Initially, he used gloves while dressing their fussy, maggot filled nauseating wounds. Soon he realized that what they needed was human touch. And he never used the gloves again, in spite of the medical advice. He reasoned out that the use





of gloves would make the victims feel that their disease is dreaded and fatal. He wanted to give them a human touch unhindered by the protective gloves. He continued serving them with bare hands for long 31 years uncontaminated by the dreaded disease.

To the infirm and helpless, he would personally fetch water from the tube well for their needs. He would even bathe the bed ridden with the tenderness of a caring mother. He would do anything, even walk the extra mile 'to alleviate the suffering of the person in front of me'. Such personal touch endeared him to the victims who until then were craving to be treated with human dignity. And they lovingly adored him as their *BAPA* (DADDY).

Stories such as these are legends among the surviving leprosy victims in Puri. It is told that he never rejected or refused any one that came to him seeking assistance. Often it was long hours of patient listening he gave them that comforted them beyond words. Because until then, no one else had talked to them in such a compassionate and caring manner. He knew each of the 400 odd victims by name. He even gave them nicknames out of love. He would not make light even of their unreasonable demands. It is told, at times some of the victims would abuse him, shout at him, call him names and yet he would only respond with a smile without any reprimand. He would not mind their taunts. Such was his compassion and love for the people he addressed as 'my people'.

# COMPASSION



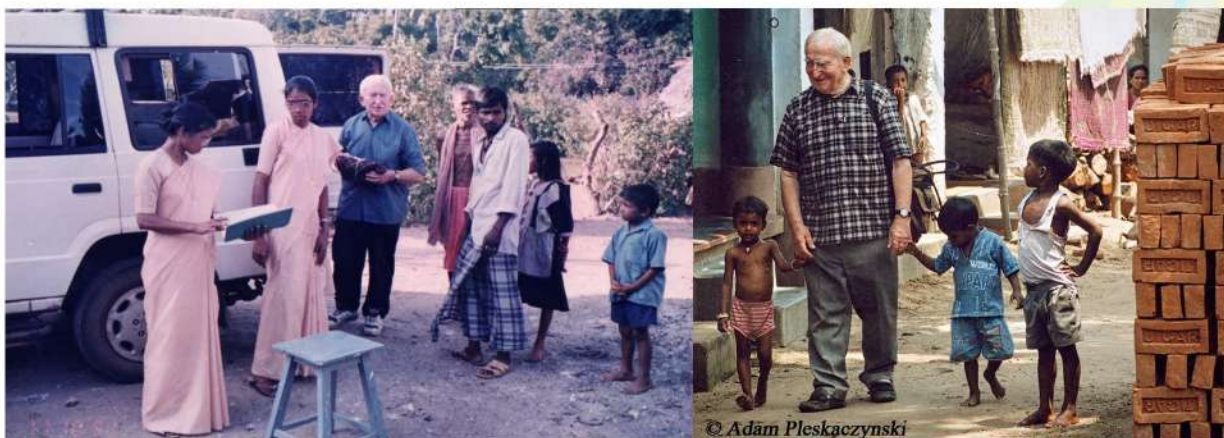
The Missionary in Father Marian Zelazek responded to the needs of the people in a pro-active manner. There was no fixed agenda on which he worked. Call of the time and occasion brought forth a kind response in him that eventually got institutionalized as 'Mercy Kitchen' –offering free food for the destitute; 'Rehabilitation Centre' – offering work and employment opportunities to earn a decent living; Orthopedic workshop providing micro cellular rubber shoes to the victims; 'Karunalaya Hospital' that would be a caring mother with its healing touch. It is due to his efforts that about 200 families living in shanties and squalor found a decent house to live in. The little 'School' under a mango tree for the kids from the leprosy colony grew into an impressive 'BEATRIX SCHOOL' and turned out to be the silent game changer in removing the stigma attached to leprosy from the minds of the people of the locality.





# COMPASSION

‘He treated us as human beings. He gave us back our human dignity’ - is the oft heard statement you hear when you strike a chord of familiarity with the surviving victims. Father had an old jeep with which he used to carry the patients to the hospital, bring the Charity Sisters to the colony for attending to the medical needs etc. Once, one of the newly appointed teachers at the school tried his driving skill without the knowledge of Father and dashed the vehicle against the wall smashing the front glass and damaging the vehicle badly. ‘Hope you are not hurt badly. You go for a checkup first. Vehicle can be repaired’ was the response of the compassionate missionary. Seasoned from the concentration camp at ‘Dachau’, he had begun valuing human life. That experience became the primary motivating factor all through his missionary journey of compassion, care and passionate love of the poor and marginalized.



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Watching Father Marian serving the outcaste leprosy victims with passionate commitment was an eye opener for many onlookers in the Holy city of Puri. ‘Compassion’ is one of the three lessons Father taught the people of Puri observed Prof. Brajakishore Swain - with whom Father Marian initiated the Inter Religious Dialogue in Puri - the bastion of Hinduism. At his sudden departure on the fateful day 30 April, 2006, a respected gentleman from the city exclaimed – ‘Father Marian with his compassion and love has made the Holy city of Puri little more holier’.







## FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK - PROMOTER OF VOCATION AND EDUCATION

+ Lucas Kerketta, SVD  
Bishop Emeritus, Diocese of Sambalpur

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I am Bishop Lucas Kerketta, SVD, the Bishop Emeritus, the Diocese of Sambalpur. I have lived experience with Fr. Marian as a young boy of the Apostolic School at Hamirpur, Rourkela. With this short article I would like to put my old memories in words. Fr. Marian was holding multiple ministries when he was in Hamirpur Parish. He was appointed by the Society as Head Master of Mission High School at Hamirpur and during this time he initiated the Apostolic School. I studied at Apostolic School Hamirpur from 1953-1957.

Fr. Marian being in the mission for some time, already had learnt *Hindi* (national language) and *Sadri* (tribal dialect) languages. When he was asked to take up the education ministry, he went to Berhamapur to learn *Odia*, the official language of Odisha. The Odia language was necessary to communicate with the students, teachers and government offices as latter on he was appointed diocese school secretary.

My impression on Fr. Marian was very inspiring. He was very fatherly to every student. He was approachable; students, teachers and others could easily meet him and discuss their problems. He was very loving, man of prayer and deeply spiritual. In spite of many responsibilities, he had time for prayer with the children. He also found time for his personal prayer. His spiritual activities inspired many of us to become priests in the Church. He had special love towards the tribal boys. He loved them and accepted them as precious gift of God. He was a very good spiritual father to them. He had conviction for local vocations from the Tribal and Dalit community. This was the reason he took special interest in education of tribal boys and help them to discern their vocation to become priests or choose a good career through which they can contribute towards developing the Tribal and Dalit Society. Therefore, he initiated the Apostolic School to nurture the seed of vocation among tribal boys. He specially cared for the tribal and dalit boys, but he never despised other people. He had inclusive approach to everyone as the children of God.





# PROMOTER

He imparted the Gospel values to children by words and actions. As children sometimes we used to quarrel or fight. He never punished us instead he used to call us and was making us to reconcile with each other. The students learned to forgive each other. He used to tell us the Bible stories, life of saints and angels. He himself was ideal for us to follow Christ. He was role model for students. He accompanied us in all spiritual activities and taught us. He was taking special catechism classes for students. Every Saturday and Sunday or on holiday he used to take us for family visit to the nearby villages. It became part of our education. We went and prayed in the families in his absence also. He was also going for sacramental ministry of anointing of the sick and viaticum. He had appointed me as monitor for the students, probably he was able to perceive the leadership quality in me which became evident latter on in my life.



As the Education Secretary of Sambalpur Diocese and Head Master of the High School he was a person of discipline, punctuality and systematic. He was friendly to the teachers, students and the parents. The teachers accepted him as one of their own though there were teachers from different faith. Whenever the parents of the students came he used to receive them lovingly. He encouraged them to pray for their children to become priest.

He had special gift of divining water. Many people even government officials approached him for divining the water. He was available to all. Through this gift he was reaching Christ to the people of other faith. He also had a special concern for the poor, sick and marginalized.

When I became bishop of Diocese of Sambalpur he used to come from Puri to meet me. He used to enquire about his students, those who were studying with me in the apostolic school. He was interested to know the progress that his students had made in life. Fr. Marian truly became a role model for the youngsters who were inspired by him to join religious life and priesthood, while others did well in their studies. Thus Fr. Marian becomes promotor of education and vocation to religious life and priesthood.

*(Fr. Dilip Dungdung, Bishop's secretary has interviewed Bp. Lucas and written the text for Bp. Lucas Kerketta)*







## FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK: A VISIONARY AND GOOD SAMARITAN

-Fr. Lancy Rodrigues, SVD

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The covid-19 pandemic has changed the world, it has brought revolutionary changes in almost every aspect of human life. The pandemic has made a tremendous impact on religious life too. There is a new realization that God is the source of our life and is in control of everything. Our sense of pride and self-sufficiency is shattered. The pandemic also has been a time of grace, introspection and conversion. There has been a shift from our mechanical way of life to live a meaningful and purposeful life. The pandemic is a call for us to slow down, to stop, to reflect, to interpret reality from God's point of view. The limitations of science, the powerlessness of states, and the fragility of humans is brought clearly to us. The pandemic has compelled a new way of living and coping with the crisis.

In human history there were many heroes who turned the crisis into opportunities for people to discover their human dignity and meaningfulness of their life. A man who was sanctified for God, inspired everyone to seek first the Kingdom of God (Reign of God). He is none other than the Servant of God, Fr. Marian Zelazek, SVD, a Polish Religious Missionary Priest and he belonged to the "Society of the Divine Word" (SVD). I had the privilege to watch his life and ministry from close quarters when I was the treasurer of the Archdiocese of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar from 1986-2002. What struck me most from his life is that he was a visionary as well as a mystic dedicated totally for God's mission to reach out to people in every possible way.

Fr. Marian worked in Odisha for 56 long years, 25 years in Sambalpur Mission of the present Diocese of Sambalpur and Rourkela and 31 years in the holy city of Puri. In the Sambalpur mission he toiled mainly among the tribal/indigenous





people, trying to empower them through education, and in and around Puri, he worked for the enhancement of the human dignity of the lepers, the unwanted, the poor and the abandoned. Fr. Marian Zelazek, SVD, often used to say “It is not difficult to be good, provided one wants to be so.”

In the light of Letter *Samaritanus Bonus* on the care of persons in the critical and terminal phases of life from the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* (CDF) published on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020, Pope Francis expounds the Church’s ethical position to a throw away culture that is prevalent today. In this context Fr. Marian Zelazek’s ministry to reach out to the poor, the abandoned, the unwanted and the lepers to enhance their human dignity is commendable and as “in the parable of the Good Samaritan” his heart resonated Christ’s compassion as expressed by Pope Francis an “Ethics of care at the End of Life”. The ethics of care is open to the transcendental value of human life revealed in Jesus, God in human form, the Good Samaritan, whose very life and death on the Cross paved way for a grace of hope to the human life which has its final destiny only in God. The foundations for an ethics at the end of life according to the Letter are explained very well in the first 3 chapters of the Letter:

**1. THE FIRST FOUNDATION IS CARE FOR ONE’S NEIGHBOUR:** It is expressed in concern, dedication, shared participation and responsibility towards all entrusted to us for material and spiritual assistance in their hour of need. It is expressed in the principle of justice, transformed by Jesus into the golden rule “Do unto others whatever you would have them to do to you” (Mt 7:12). Care for life is therefore, the first responsibility the guides the physician through a “therapeutic art”, which entails robust relationships with the patient, with healthcare workers, with relatives and with members of communities. This responsibility exists not only when the restoration to health as realistic outcome, but even when a cure is unlikely or impossible, care is always possible, not only when it attends to body’s function but also to psychological and spiritual well-being of the patient.

**2. THE SECOND FOUNDATION IS THE LIVING EXPERIENCE OF THE SUFFERING CHRIST AND THE PROCLAMATION OF HOPE:** Christ’s suffering has become the grace of hope for those who suffer because of nearness to them; his experience of multiple forms of pain anguish resonates with the sick and their families during the long days of infirmity that precedes the end of life. With Mother Mary’s and the disciples, remaining at the foot of the Cross, we participate and proclaim to men and women of today a hope that imparts meaning to the time of sickness and death. The nutshell of this foundation is that Christian response to the problem of suffering at the end of life is not seen as a solution to the problem but as a certainty of a presence, a remaining, a nearness, a proximate, given to Job by God in OT, given by Christ during His earthly existence, given by the saints and believers in history and given by us today for those at the end of life.

**3. THE THIRD FOUNDATION IN HUMAN LIFE AS A SACRED AND INVIOLENT GIFT:** Sanctity or dignity of life presupposes unavailability of life which is inviolable. Whatever their physical or psychological condition is





human persons always retain their original dignity as created and are called to exist in the image and glory of God. Their dignity lies in this vocation. The ultimate foundation of human dignity is that God became man to save us, promises us salvation and calls us to communion with Him. This is a participatory dignity and therefore even the weakest do not lose their dignity and it is proper for the Church to accompany them with mercy in their journey of suffering, to preserve them the theological life, and to guide them to salvation. Everyone is called to have the “heart that sees” which is central to the program of the Good Samaritan.

It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life upon which all other inalienable right of individuals is founded and from which they develop as persons. Only respect for life can be the foundation and guarantee of the most precious and essential goods of society, such as democracy and peace. (*Evangelium Vitae* no. 102). It is the Church’s conviction that what is human is not only received and respected by faith, but also purified, elevated and perfected. God, after having created man in his image and likeness (Gen 1:26) described his creature as “very good” (Gen 1:31), so as to be assumed later in the Son (Jn 1:14).



The respect for the individual human being, which reason requires, is further enhanced and strengthened in the light of these truths of faith: thus, we see that there is no contradiction between the affirmation of the dignity and affirmation of the sacredness of human life. The different ways in which God, acting in history, cares for the world and for mankind are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary, they support each other. They have their origin and goal in the eternal, wise and loving counsels whereby God predestines men and women to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29). (Cf. Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Personae* on certain bio-ethical questions, Sept. 5, 2008, p. 1179).

**FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK, SVD: A VISIONARY, MYSTIC AND A GOOD SAMARITAN:** Fr. Marian Zelazek, SVD served God and people for more than 56 years. The works started by Fr. Marian were:





# VISIONARY

1. Library and Inter-religious Dialogue Centre to reach out to the non-Christian intellectuals
2. The building of the Catholic Church to make the believers as disciples of Christ
3. Karunalaya leprosy Care Centre to give dignity to the patients with leprosy.
4. Mercy Kitchen to feed the hungry.
5. Garden of Hope where his letters and writings as tool for mission animation back in native Poland.
6. Beatrix School to wipe away the taboo and discrimination meted out to the leprosy patient's children and establish social harmony in the society
7. Ishopanti Ashram to help Missionaries to become men of God and renew in their missionary commitment.

In all the seven major activities he reflected a compassionate heart of a pastor who had love and understanding for the poor, the lepers, unwanted and the hungry. He led a life of witness to the Christians and non-Christians alike, was transparent to acknowledge receiving various gifts and money and always thanked the donors. In order to encourage people to practice morality he advocated Natural Family Planning among the married couples. He had a unique gift of “dowsing water” or water divining by which he would reach out to all sections of the people without any barriers.



Regularly he would come to Archbishop's house, Bhubaneswar to meet late Archbishop Cheenath, SVD and to submit bills and vouchers to the treasurer. His statement of expenses was transparent with the supporting bills and vouchers. Once I asked him how he was able to do that perfectly well. He would say that was because of his driver who had learnt the art of accountancy and book keeping. Even after some months in treasurer's office when I did not visit him in Puri, he invited me to see his ministry and place of work. I could see his enthusiasm and joy in showing the work at the Karunalaya leprosy care centre and mercy kitchen where the baking of bread was done. Fr. Marian Zelazek's mission outreach clearly reflects Pope Francis' call for a Church of today to reach out “people in the periphery”.



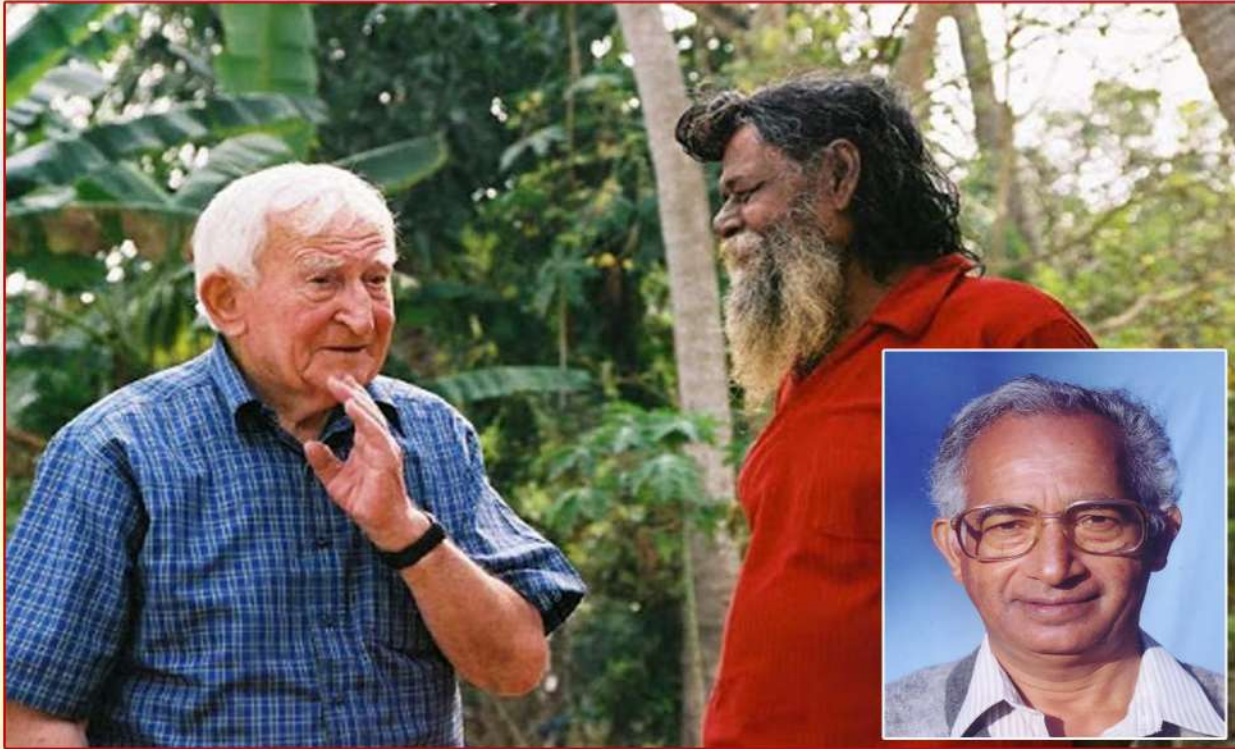




## FR. MARIAN ZELAZEK: AN APOSTLE AND CHAMPION OF DIALOGUE

-Fr. Peter Vattakeril SVD

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I, Fr Peter had the great joy to live with Fr Marian Zelazek for nearly 9 years, the last 9 years of his life here on earth. He lived a very vibrant life, respecting and appreciating others and pouring positive energy to all whom he encountered. He lived in Ishopanthe Ashram, taking care of the leprosy colony and the school especially for the children of leprosy patients, and I lived in the Catholic Church, Puri parish. But we used to meet very often and share our life.

I want to share with you, one important aspect of Fr Marian's life. That is: he was veritably an Apostle and Champion of Dialogue, dialogue in its most important areas that is first, dialogue with the poor and second dialogue with the believers of other religions.

**DIALOGUE WITH THE POOR:** As St Pope Paul VI has very beautifully and powerfully expressed, "Dialogue is the internal drive of Charity, which tends to become the external gift of Charity;" Fr Marian was truly gifted with this internal drive of charity towards all. The five long years of torture and extreme hardship he endured in the German Nazi Concentration Camp has not made him bitter, but rather only turned him like sparkling gold purified in the fire. His firm determination was to do some good for the poor and the suffering. As he came to India, he poured out his soul and energy to dedicate for the education of poor tribal boys and girls.

He came to Puri in 1975. He became the friend of the leprosy patients at the first sight of them and grabbed the first opportunity offered by the Government authorities to resettle them instead of roaming and begging on the *Bodo Dando* of Sri Jagannath Dham, Puri. Not far from the Jagannath Temple he set up a decent residential establishment where all the leprosy affected people could comfortably live with dignity. He called this abode "Karunalaya" a home of compassion. His love,





dedication and collaboration with the leprosy affected people and their family members turned their residential area into, as Fr Marian wished, a Garden of New Life.

Here each family had a decent house to live in, a tube well in their backyard, electricity supply and other facilities. For those who could engage themselves in any work, accordingly different work opportunities were provided. The so called beggars became proud labourers earning for themselves. For those who could not work at all, had a mercy kitchen to provide daily food.

Future of their children was the great dream of Father Marian. That was realised when the beautiful Beatrix School came up. It was a beautiful school with good education, but only up to 7<sup>th</sup> standard. Because these children could go to other schools and study and mix with other children and thus got rid of the stigma of a ‘leprosy child’.

Fr Marian had deep respect and concern for the poor and suffering. He would interact with them as equal as friends. He would often visit the little hospital which he built for them to console the sick and invariably he would cleanse and dress up a few of the leprosy patients.

Fr Marian’s love and dialogue with the leprosy patients was rooted in his deep faith that God is love and we are created in His image to live by the power of that love. Fr Marian’s dialogue with the poor leprosy patients had a wonderful climax. Fr Marian had an agreement with God, which he had shared with me more than once. “If God willing, I will be walking around in the colony with my friends and there, in their midst, one day I will collapse and that would be my happy end.” As he had requested God, on April 30, 2006 on the great feast of ‘Akhyatrio’ just after he had enjoyed a meal with his colony friends as usual he told them, “I will go to take a little rest”. As he was approaching the vehicle, he gently collapsed in the hands of his friends, the leprosy patients and into the hands of his eternal Father. Fr Marian kept his promise to God, and God too kept his promise to Fr Marian.



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**INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE:** The other face of dialogue, which is equally or more important in the present world scenario is: Dialogue with the believers of other religions. In a world where true democratic and human values are trampled, inter-religious and cultural values have supreme importance.

Love and respect for all, as children of one God, was supreme value for Fr Marian and the very basic for inter-religious dialogue. Hence it was natural for him to





acknowledge and appreciate the values of any religion and culture of any people, especially with whom he lived. As soon as Fr Marian came to Puri, the Holy Dham of Sri Jagannath, he got fully involved with the people and the religious and cultural life of Puri.

He changed the life of leprosy patients in Puri. It gave a face lift to *Bodo Dando* where they were begging around with open sores on all over their body. Soon he became a friend of the people of Puri and very especially the religious leaders became his close friends. He made special efforts to build friendly relationship with the leaders of other faiths, such as *yogis, gurus, and sanyasis*. He made efforts to cherish such friendship by visiting and spending time with them.

The high priest of Jagannath temple was a close friend of Father Marian. On the occasion of Fr Marian's sacerdotal golden jubilee, the high priest honoured Fr Marian with a special shawl and embraced him in front of thousands of people, a beautiful gesture of genuine inter-religious dialogue.

Dialogue with other cultures and different ideologies are equally important in the present age and Father Marian has given his life to it. For Fr Marian love is the fundamental principle of his life, and he loves the other, because the other is a child of God like himself. Fr Marina loved very much his Polish culture and he knows how it has helped him to become what he was. So he knew that for everyone, one's culture is as precious and dear as his life itself.



His five years of excruciating pain and agony in the Nazi concentration camp does not make him at all bitter against the Germans. He only said, "The love of God was not there".

When he arrived in India, he gave his full mind and heart for the upliftment of the poor tribal boys and girls through best education. Later he was appointed to Puri and at the very first sight he fell in love with the poor leprosy patients of Puri and he breathed his last breath, he collapsed into their loving hands. They called him *Bapa*, the most endearing way to call one's father. He accepted them, their life and culture. As he lived in Puri, Fr Marian had fully immersed himself into Sri Jagannath and Odisha culture. He loved to speak *Odia* language.

Dialogue with different ideologies is a step further in the journey of dialogue. Respect for the other and to engage in sharing with open mind and heart is basic to dialogue. A close friend of Fr Marian, Mr Giorgio Kriegsch writes about Fr Marian, "*The capacity to relate with so many different persons and beliefs was something I also loved in Father Marian. He saw God in every person he met, whether it was Brahmin, a Krishna devotee, a Muslim, a Buddhist, or the untouchable leper.*"





# DIALOGUE

Different people have different convictions, ideologies; they are born in it or come to believe and then live in it. People of different ideologies often clash with each other fiercely. But Father Marian having lived for long five years in the furnace suffering and gazing death every moment of his life in Nazi Concentration Camp came to realize that the love of God and neighbour whoever it may be, is the supreme and only enduring reality and the authentic way of life: Father Marian blissfully immersed in it. That was life for Father Marian. He was truly a living witness and Champion of Dialogue in all its aspects.



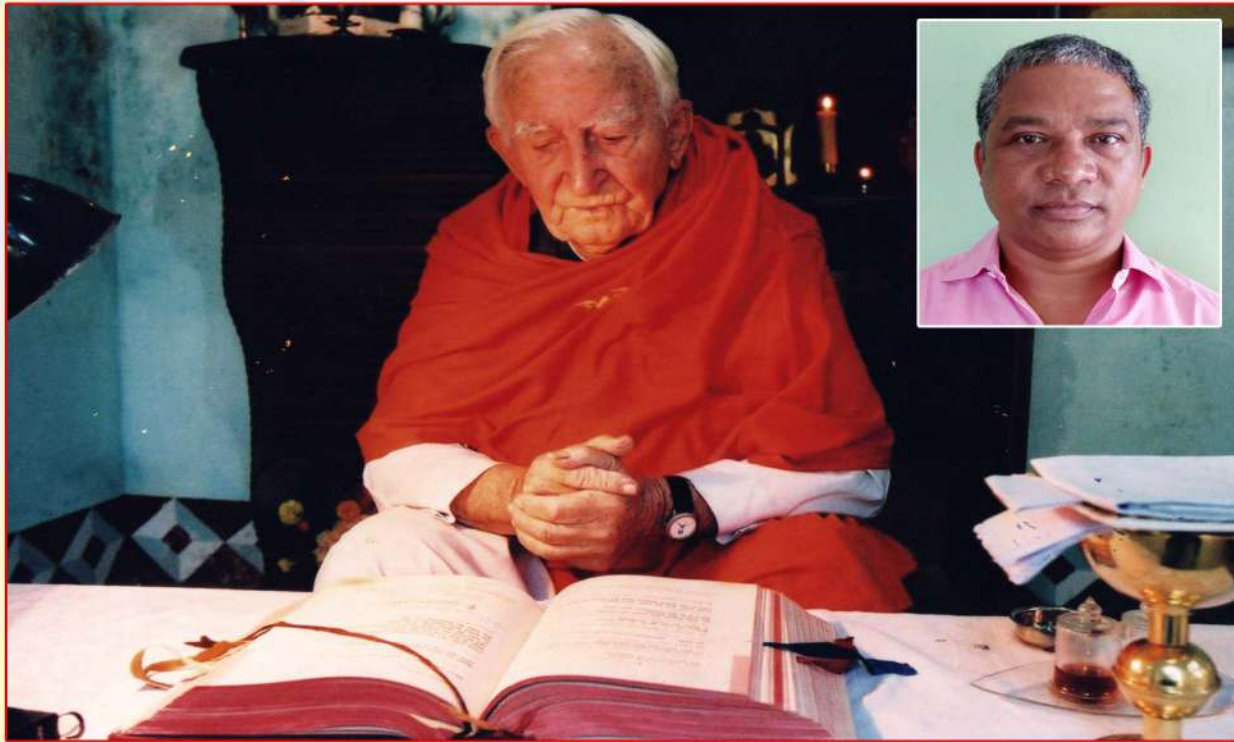




# SPIRITUALITY AS LIVED BY FR. MARIAN

-Fr. Anuranjan Dungdung, SVD

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SPIRITUALITY is a broad concept with room for many perspectives and interpretations. As Buddha says, “Just as a candle cannot burn without fire, men cannot live without a spiritual life.” I, as a young priest, 33 years old then, had the blessed privilege to have lived with Father Marian during his last one year of his life on this earth. I was appointed as the first Assistant Director and Treasurer of St Arnold’s Spirituality Centre, Puri in the year 2005. Thus, we lived in the same community till the end of his life. We prayed together, celebrated Mass together on number of occasions. I am so grateful to God that He gave me such a wonderful opportunity to live and work with such a saintly person. I have been really blessed by being with him in Puri.

Speaking about the spirituality or spiritual life of Fr Marian, I feel too small or greatly humbled to delve into it. All the same with my limited experience with him I like to share about his spiritual life from my perspective. At the very outset, if we look at his life, his whole life was lived with deep spirituality. It was his profound spirituality that gave him energy, power and strength to carry out his life and ministry with greater love, commitment and dedication. His whole life and activities were driven by his spirituality. The way he would meet people, the way he would greet, talk, relate, share with or listen to others, one could feel the presence of the divine. I firmly and strongly believe that it was his strong faith in God and his own personal spiritual life that helped him to survive that agonising and excruciating pain, persecution, suffering, hunger and thirst in the Nazi concentration camp. He has seen so many people dying in front of him. His own fourteen classmates gained martyrdom in the concentration camp. There are some questions which can also help us to understand his spirituality better.





Where do I find meaning? How do I feel connected? How should I live? Who am I? What is the reason of my existence? Where do I find true happiness? If we look at Fr Marian's life very closely, we can say he had found the answer for all these questions. He was a man of depth, in the sense anything that he did that flowed from his heart.

One of the phrases that I have often heard from his mouth is, 'my dear'. It's a very simple phrase but it came out from his heart. It's so profound. As he had promised God while he was in the Concentration camp that he would do some good work in order to alleviate hunger and suffering of some poor and the needy. That's what exactly he did and that is where he found meaning of his life and existence. He also found joy and happiness in everything that he did.

Now let me share some of his spiritual practices which enhanced his life and strengthened his commitment.

**PRAYER LIFE:** He was a man of prayer. Often he was seen sitting for hours in front of the Blessed Sacrament, adoring and praying to the Lord present in the Blessed Sacrament. It was his prayer life that gave him strength and energy to carry out his missionary tasks with enthusiasm. Prayer was part of his life. It was his prayer life that enabled him to remain cool and calm in spite of people shouting at him or abusing him. He always had his Rosary with him and he would regularly pray the Rosary. Without prayer, he wouldn't do anything; prayer played very vital role in his everyday life. Moreover, he inspired others also to pray with him.



**PRAYING BREVIARY:** If I am not mistaken, there was not a single day in his life as a priest that he has missed praying the Breviary. Be it in the morning, or noon, or evening or night he was seen carrying his Breviary to the chapel. Sometimes he was seen praying the Breviary on the way to the chapel or he would be walking around praying his Breviary. Whenever he came back late in the night, first thing

he would make sure was to pray the Breviary. Sometimes during the morning prayers or evening prayers he would share with me his Breviary. I am grateful to Fr Marian for teaching me the Marian Hymn, "Salve Regina". He would open the page, where the hymn was and would give me the Breviary and he would start the hymn and I used to sing along with him.





**THE HOLY EUCHARIST:** The Church teaches us that the Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life. It was very true in the life of Fr Marian. On many occasions we celebrated Mass together in the chapel at Ishopanthe Ashram. Whenever two of us were there for

the Mass, he would be there at the chapel well in advance and waiting for me. Most of the time he was alone in the Ashram and so he used to celebrate Mass alone but when we had the community there he would always wait for us for the Eucharistic celebration. For Fr Marian, the Holy Eucharist was the source of Power and Strength, it was a power house from where he drew strength for his daily activities. I remember, it was 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2006, the previous day of his death, he was waiting for me for the Mass and then it so happened that it was my turn to celebrate the Eucharist. As I reached there, he said, “You see, today is the day, we were released from the concentration camp”. Immediately, without any hesitation I said, “Father you please celebrate the Mass”. And he replied, “Yes, I will”. And who knew, that Eucharistic celebration would be last one I celebrated with him in the small chapel in his Ashram. Whenever he celebrated the Holy Eucharist his whole heart and mind was into it and I could really feel the presence of the divine. It was really a special moments for me whenever I celebrated the Eucharist with Fr Marian.



**READING OF THE WORD OF GOD:** He was truly a Divine Word missionary priest as the Word of God found special place in the life of Fr Marian. Often he was seen walking around reading and during that time he would be either praying the Breviary or reading the Word of God. Daily reading of the Divine Word always inspired him and most often he would relate to the Divine Word to his very life and the life situation. It was basically Love of God and love of neighbour that shaped and moulded his missionary life and spirit (Mark12: 28b-34). Another passage that touched him and motivated him much is from the Gospel of Mathew, Chapter 25:40; “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me”. In fact, he made this verse as the motto of Karunalaya Leprosy Care Centre in Puri. One motto song was composed based on this verse and it was sung every day before they began their work at the centre.

Thus I can say that it was his profound spiritual life accompanied by above mentioned spiritual practices enabled him to be a holy person and his holiness was manifested in his everyday life. As someone beautifully said, “The Holy City of Lord Jagannath became further Holier by the holy life of Fr Marian.” May his holiness continue to inspire us and help us to lead a holy life.







## ALL ABOUT CONTRIBUTORS

CONTRIBUTORS

**FR. ANDRZEJ DANILEWICZ, SVD** was born in Poland in 1964. He joined Divine Word Missionaries in 1985. After priestly ordination, he did pastoral work in Slovakia and then studied at Kairos Communication Institute in Ireland. After returning to Poland, he worked in the mass media for 12 years. In the years 2007 - 2013 he was the provincial of the SVD Polish Province. He is currently the Mission Secretary and the press spokesman for the Province.

**FR. ANURANJAN DUNGDUNG SVD** is a Divine Word Missionary belonging to INE Province. During the past years he has worked in the field of pastoral work, communication and formation. Presently, he is the Director of Vikas Deepti, Bargarh, Odisha, a centre for children with disability. For the last 3 years he has been involved in Social Work; mainly working for the rehabilitation and empowerment of the children with disability and Persons with Disability (PwD) and also for the eradication of leprosy and their rehabilitation along with the education of their children in the District of Bargarh. He had a personal experience of living with Fr. Marian in Puri mission.

**FR. BAPTIST D'SOUZA, SVD** a member of the India-East Province (INE) of the Society of the Divine Word. He worked most of his missionary life as a pastor among the Ho tribal parishes. Currently he is the Director of Karunalaya Leprosy Care Centre and Ishopanathi Ashram, Puri, Odisha. He served as Provincial Superior (1996 – 1999) of INE Province, during this time he was closely associated with Fr. Marian.

**GIORGIO KRIEGSCH (SWAMI NIRVAVANANDA SARASWATI)**, was born in Italy from a Catholic Italian mother and a Evangelical German father. From his childhood he grew in a family of musicians and to music he dedicated his all life, learning first the classical guitar and later the Indian Harmonium. After travelling to India, he decided to learn Indian Bhajans using the sound of the guitar and therefore he changed completely his repertoire, playing then only spiritual music of different faiths. After meeting Father Marian in Puri, going back to the West, he organized many spiritual meetings in Europe, US and South America with chants and meditation, collecting at the same time donations for the mission of Father Marian. He released nearly 100 CDs. One of his chants was recently included in a collection of prayers of Pope Francis, called "Wake Up!". It was the "Holy Queen" prayer, the same one that Father Marian loved.

**FR. IGNATIUS SORENG, SVD** is Divine Word Missionary. He has been serving in the mission for over thirty years. He has been in the field of education for nineteen years, and currently is the Director of the Sanskruti Kendra: Tribal Cultural and Research Centre, Sundargarh, Odisha, India. He holds a Ph.D. in Odiya, and a Masters' in Odiya and English literature.





**BP. JERZY MAZUR SVD** is Divine Word Missionary from Poland. He studied missiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and after study he did missionary work in Ghana (Africa). Since 1986 served as a prefect and lecturer of Missiology at the Divine Word Mission Seminary in Pieniężno. From 1992 to 1998, worked in the field of evangelization among Catholics in the former Soviet Union, setting up parishes and providing pastoral care in Baranovichi (Belarus). From 1997 he served as the regional superior of the Ural Region (covering the area of the former USSR). In 1998 he was appointed as an Auxiliary Bishop of the Apostolic Administration of Asian Russia, based in Irkutsk (Siberia), for Catholics of the Latin Rite. Later on (18.05.1999) served as the first Apostolic Administrator of Eastern Siberia and the Administrator of the Apostolic Prefecture of Karafuto (Sakhalin). In 2002, he was appointed as the Bishop Ordinary of the newly created Diocese of St. Joseph at Irkutsk but on 19.04.2002, he was not allowed to enter Russia, Siberia. So in 2003, he was appointed by Pope John Paul II as Ordinary Bishop of the Diocese of Elk, Poland. Since 2011, he is a Chairman of the Polish Bishops' Missionary Commission.

**ARCHBISHOP JOHN BARWA SVD** is a Divine Word Missionary belonging to INE province. He has a Licentiate in Sacred Liturgy. He served as provincial superior of INE province during the years 1999 to 2005. He became co-adjutor Bishop of Rourkela on 19th April, 2006 and took full charge of the diocese on 2nd April, 2009. On 2nd April, 2011, he was appointed Archbishop of the Cuttack-Bhubaneswar. While being provincial superior, he was closely associated with Fr. Marian Zelazek and has personal experience of encountering him.

**FR. KURIAN T.K. SVD** is a Divine Word Missionary belonging to INE Province. He has Licentiate in Spirituality from the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. He was the first Rector of Khristo-Jyothi Mohavidyalaya (KJM), the regional Theologate of Odisha. He was instrumental in developing this Theology seminary. He also worked as SVD Generalate secretary for education and formation. At present he is the program coordinator of Ishopanthe Ashram, Puri and postulator for the cause of Servant of God Marian Zelazek. During the year 2004 – 2006, he worked along with Fr. Marian at Ishopanthe Ashram Puri, so he has rich experience of living with him.

**FR. LANCY RODRIGUES, SVD** has done his Licentiate & Doctorate in Moral Theology under the Lateran University at the Academy of Alfonsiana, Rome. He has contributed in administration as Treasurer of the Dioceses of Sambalpur & Cuttack-Bhubaneswar during which he got many chances of meeting Fr. Marian. He has worked as Pastor in the Catholic Church Sundargarh, Sambalpur Cathedral parish and Burla parishes. As Formator he has served as moderator & Rector of SVD Divy Jyoti Seminary and currently he is the Rector of Regional Theologate, Khristo Jyothi Mohavidyalaya, Sason, Odisha.





**CONTRIBUTORS**

**MOST. REV. LUCAS KERKETTA, SVD** is a Divine Word Missionary belonging to INE province. He became Bishop of Sambalpur and was instrumental in developing the missionary Diocese. Currently he is the Bishop Emeritus and lives in the bishop's house, Sambalpur. As a Apsotolic School student during the year 1953-57 he was under Fr. Marian Zelazek and has a very deep personal expereince with him as a young boy. Fr. Marian was his mentor or spiritual father who has sinspired him to study well and become a missionary.

**FR. PETER VATTAKERIL, SVD** is a Divine Word Missionary belonging to INE province. He has a Doctorate in Systamatic Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian Universtiy, Rome and his special interst has been inter-religious dioalogue. He was the first dean of studies at Khristo-Jyothi Mohavidyalo (KJM), the regional Theologate of Odisha. He worked as parish priest at Catholic Church Puri, which was developed and built by Fr. Marian, during this time for almost 9 years he closely worked with Fr. Marian. Currently he is working as parish priest of Catholic Church, Bargarh in the diocese of Sambalpur.

**REV. SURENDRO KUMAR MOHANTY** is a Baptist Pastor of Puri. Besides his pastoral involvements, he is fully committed to the case of the poor and downtrodden people, especially through the education of the poor children. All through Fr. Marian's life in Puri, he has been very closely associated with him as a friend and a very close collaborator of him.







**“Here is A GREAT AND HOLY MAN,  
who BY HIS PRESENCE at Puri for the last  
31 years has made the holy city of  
Lord Jagannath A HOLIER CITY AND A  
BETTER PLACE TO LIVE”**

