

Saturday, January 30, 2010

Dear Mary Meier and Friends,

Greetings to you. Mary Our Mother Bless you and your family members.

I am Rev. Owen Chourappa SJ, a Jesuit, missionary working in the North Eastern part of India, with and for Dimasa tribal people. North East India is a conglomeration of ethnic tribes of Mongolian race. NE is a land of great variety and natural beauty. Jesuits have been working in NE for more than 35 years.

Our ministries here mainly are Evangelization, imparting quality education and community development programmes. Though many church denominations have contributed to the evangelization process in this land, the contribution of Catholic Church has been of great importance and well received and appreciated by locals.

Recognizing the most effective and concrete contribution of the Catholic Church to education, evangelization and community developments in other parts of NE, the Dimasa elders invited Jesuits to their district to help to educate their children in Christian and Catholic traditions. (Until then no other Christian denominations were invited by the Dimasas). At the time of invitation they whole-heartedly agreed to let us do the evangelization work.

Dimasa is one of the many tribes inhabiting the NE. Dimasa's are small of tribe of 150,000 people living in the North Cachar Hills district of Assam state. This district falls under the Diocese of Diphu in the Arch Diocese of Guwahati, Assam. Dimasa's are a community of people in their search for identity and peaceful living in this ethnic conflict ridden land.

Moved by the desire to serve Christ our Lord by walking with the people in their search for meaningful and peaceful life, and with zeal to embrace the opportunity for the same, we the Jesuits, accepted the invitation. We were invited in the year of our Lord 1998.

Remaining faithful to our charism of going to the most difficult part of the world to preach Christ, we are working in four corners of the district in the deep jungles. These are really deep jungles where basic facilities like transport, healthcare are scarce. Recently poles have been planted to bring electricity, but by the time poles light up our dark villages could be longer.

Evangelization is the major thrust of our work. The children in our schools are taught to pray daily in catholic traditions. Rosary is the most accepted method of praying here among the Dimasa people and the children. They attend mass regularly, and their parents too are invited to be present at our weekly Eucharist celebrations. We are hopeful that God's church will be established soon in this land and the children, the future of this tribe, will be bearers of Christ in the Dimasa Catholic Church.

Besides, primary and high school education, we are also taking care of the health needs of people. This is a malaria prone area and each year the malaria sickness attacks simple villagers in various forms and intensity. Every year there are minimum 50 – 60 persons dying of malaria. In the initial years, for about 3 – 5 years, we lost 5 – 6 children from our schools. Those were the painful years for us. Thanks to some friends of ours we have been able to control to certain extent for the past 4 years by providing safe drinking water and timely care for the children. Since four years not one child has died a victim to malaria.

We also carry out social development programmes. Our self-help groups are a major success which is helping the people to taste financial security through small savings and collective works, other poverty stricken people. As a result many parents today are ready and willing to send their children to school by paying full tuition fees.

We use our school premises and villages grounds to conduct awareness, health education programmes among the villagers. In fact these are the platforms for us to speak of the life of Christ and Christian living. Loving, caring, forgiving and peaceful co-existence are the major themes of our discussions at such forums. But most of our programmes are done in typical tribal style oral tradition.

As the days are fleeting past and the day of the establishment of the Christ's church is drawing near we would like to intensify our mode of evangelization by adapting to modern means of evangelization. We strongly believe in the interceding power of our Blessed Mother Mary. Our existence and progress in the Mission is the proof of Mother Mary's guiding presence with us.

As mentioned above, praying the Rosary daily is the favorite method of prayer here. Every night before retiring, all of us – the children, staff, fathers and sisters together say the Rosary by walking in procession in the campus. We also feel the need to gather together and pray the rosary. For this reason we would like to build a grotto for Our Lady. This will help us to give Mother Mary the most honoured and prominent place in our campus.

To build the grotto we are asking the cooperation of many generous persons like yourself to contribute generously to build the grotto. For this purpose we propose a following simple plan along with the cost estimation.

Plan: The grotto will be made up of cement, bricks, iron rod and other material. It will comprise of two cemented flat posts measuring 20 ft each. The foundation will be of 6 ft width, above the ground candle stand, over the candle stand a platform of 5 ft. From this platform an glass enclosure will be prepared which will house the statute of Our Lady. Above it will be arched roof. The ground in front of the grotto will be cemented in a circular shape. The circular shape will be surrounded by line of cemented benches for the faithful to sit down and pray.

To achieve the above plan we foresee the following expenses.

Cost estimation:

Cement	55 bags x Rs. 420/-	= Rs. 23,100/-
Sand	18 cm x Rs. 1300/-	= Rs. 23,400/-
Stone chips	7 cm x Rs. 1300/-	= Rs. 9,100/-
Bricks	5500 x Rs. 6/-	= Rs. 33,000/-
Iron Rod	120 kg x Rs. 40/-	= Rs. 4,800/-
Labour		= Rs. 10,000/-
Statue		= Rs. 10,000/-

Total **Rs. 1,13,400/-**
(Rupees One lakh thirteen thousand four hundred only)

Rs. 1,13,400 = **Euro 1,990** @ 1 Euro = Rs. 57.00

Rs. 1,13,400 = **USD 2,835** @ 1 USD = Rs. 40.00

Grotto for Mother Mary will be of a great influence to all of us in the campus and the village. It is encouraging to know that many children of Our Blessed Mother come forward to generously contribute for such purposes. With the same spirit of encouragement we make this application, requesting your partnership in Christ's mission in this land.

Your support will enhance our **partnership in building Christ's Church** in the Dimasa land.

Your generous contribution in this endeavour will benefit the Dimasa community immensely.

Therefore, I, on behalf of children and the people request you to support us to build the grotto for Our Blessed Mother.

I take responsibility to provide any further information as and when requested by yourself.

While I hope you will consider our request favourably I also thank you for your patient reading of our request.

Yours in Christ



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