



# SOLA Community

## India Link

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### Editorial



In this issue of INDIA LINK we give a variety of topics for you to consider. First, we have the good news to announce the ordination of Fr. Filiyanus Ekka. Our student, Nayak Norendo (Nilu), shares his observations of what took place on that great day.

INDIA LINK is happy to announce that Kanto Hembram, who is from Kolkata, made his Missionary Oath on May 29. He was ordained a deacon in Jerusalem on June 12. We look forward to his ordination to the priesthood next year.

Three of the four interviews are with SOLA who have lived and worked in Africa. Fr. Sabu, Bro. Benjamin Baby, and Bro. Johnson share some of their thoughts with us about: *Ethiopia*, *Ghana*, and *Democratic Republic of Congo* (D.R.C.). The diets of Benjamin and Johnson really caught my attention.

We had a brief visit of some prospective Aspirants. What are the requirements to join SOLA? Read LINK and find out!

Besides studying at SOLA, our students are also encouraged to develop their cooking skills which they

#### *First Thanks Giving Mass*



*Newly ordained priest on the day of his first mass*

#### *Procession to the Altar*



*Fr. Martin, Bishop. Patras Minj, Filiyanus & his mother*

#### *Filiyanus waiting to be ordained*



*Father & Mother accompanying Filiyanus to the Altar*

*Cont. from page 1*

used when our cooks are off. Knowing how to cook helps in Africa as well because the cooks there also get time off.

We have provided some comfort to those who want to sit and watch basketball or volleyball at SOLA. The benches were installed recently and more recently our students took advantage of their presence to sit and relax; no game was necessary either. See the photo!

Prior to Fr. Martin's departure, SOLA gave thanks to him for his tireless service during the ten years that he has been at SOLA. Bro. Alex Micheali, our 2<sup>nd</sup> year

student from Kerala gives his observations of that memorial day.

SOLA is happy to announce the departure of 5 students to the Novitiate. They are Bose, Jisho, Ratan, Sukant and Prabhu. Bose is going to Burkina Faso and the others to Kasama, Zambia. We wish them all a fruitful year of prayer and an enriching First African experience. See the farewell photo of Bose at the last page. We also wish Benjamin, Johnson (gone to Kenya) and Antony (going to South Africa) for their studies in theology.

*Editor*

## Ordination of Fr. Filiyanus

Recently we of SOLA experienced a very happy event that will remain with us for a long time – the ordination of our Fr. Filiyanus. To attend the ordination, we had to travel about 1250 km or 775 miles in train to the northern part of India to the village of Jhalurbahar. On 2nd of May, we started our two day journey from Bangalore to Jharsuguda in Orissa by train and then by Jeep to Jhalurbahar. The trip was a pleasant one, and the scenery was quite picturesque. Some areas of the land were as dry as Sahara desert and others quite green with flowers in full bloom. There was a soft breeze and these trees seemed to dance for the drums anticipating the celebration and joy which lay before us.



*Drummers welcoming the guest*

Filiyanus' brother Theodore met us at the train station in Jharsuguda, Orissa. He picked us up and escorted us to the parish of Ginabahar where we refreshed ourselves and had breakfast. When we finished breakfast, we then went to Jhalurbahar, the village of Fr. Filiyanus.

Jhalurbahar village is a place that I will never forget, because of the reception that we received upon our

arrival. The people were drumming and singing traditional songs. We had the chance to dance with the local people who were in a very festive mood. After the dance, the people performed a traditional ritual for visitors. They washed our feet with turmeric and mineral oil. When they had finished, we were guided to chairs. When this was completed, the villagers came and formed a circle around us. At that time, Fr. Bipin, the cousin of Filiyanus lifted Filiyanus up on his shoulder came in front of us all dancing to the traditional drums. Fr. Bipin then blessed Filiyanus by anointing him with water and oil. The village elders followed the example of Fr. Bipin, and they too anointed our beloved Filiyanus.

Upon completing the anointing, people started dancing, and we enjoyed this as well as the local beer (hadia) which they served us.

In the afternoon, we enjoyed a cricket match with the villagers and SOLA won the match.

May 5th the day of ordination, had finally arrived at Parsakani Parish. The ordination celebration began at 7:30am. Along with Bishop Patras Minj, the ordaining bishop, there were 50 priests, 30 Sisters, and about 1500 lay people to celebrate the ordinations of our Brother as well as a Jesuit.

Liturgical dancers wearing colorful sari danced their way to the altar. Following the dancers was: the bishop, priests, and our Brother Filiyanus and the Jesuit. After the ordination, many villagers sang and danced their way to



*Dance procession towards the Altar*



*Newly ordained Fr. Filiyanus & Anup*

the new priests and presented them with gifts. When the presentation of gifts was completed, the two priests were seated on thrones like kings and carried through the village. As

these two were carried, the people sang and danced. What a day! What a celebration!

The celebrations did not just end on May 5<sup>th</sup>. The following day, twelve priests joined Fr. Filiyanus for his First Thanksgiving mass in the local language, Orau.

After this mass, we SOLA gave our gifts to Fr. Filiyanus. Next, the parents and the villagers gave their son to SOLA as their gift for proclaiming the Good News to the African people. This gift-giving of their son brought tears to all of us. How generous these people are!

In the afternoon there was another cricket match with the Jhalurbahar players. Unlike the previous game, we played to a draw. As we completed the match, the heavens opened. We had a downpour of rain, and this was interpreted as God's blessing on all of the events of the last few days. God is good!



*Frs. Jean-Pierre, Filiyanus, Martin & Leo*

Our leave taking was a traditional and emotional one; that is, the people walked with us to the bus singing and dancing. We were all sorry to part the much enjoyed company during and after the great festivities in Jhalurbahar. Tears fell in many cheeks as we left the village. What an experience!

We took again the train back from Jharsuguda, Orissa to Bangalore and we arrived safe and sound in SOLA. We thank God for such a great experience.

*Bro. Nilu, 3<sup>rd</sup> year Philosophy*

## Interview with Benjamin Baby

Recently Benjamin Baby came for his home leave. When he stopped by SOLA, INDIA Link interviewed Benjamin for all our readers.

**Ed** (Editor) – Where are you from?

**BB** (Benjamin Baby) – I am from Kerela.

**Ed** – When were you studying at SOLA in Bangalore?

**BB** – I did my studies from 2004 – 2007.

**Ed** – Where did you do your novitiate?

**BB** – I did my novitiate in Kasama, Zambia.

**Ed** – When you finished your novitiate, where did you do your Regency?

**BB** – I did my Regency in Savelugu Pairsh in Tamale Ghana, West Africa.

**Ed** – Who was with you in Ghana?

**BB** – I was with an American, a Mexican, a Tanzanian and a Zambian who is a Brother. We were quite a mixture.

**Ed** – What challenges did you face in Ghana?

**BB** – I found it extremely hot in the Northern part of Ghana; the language was quite difficult, but I eventually understood it. The culture was also difficult.

**Ed** – What did you find difficult about the culture?

**BB** – We live in an area where there was a large Muslim presence. We Catholics were few in number. We had to be very careful in our relationship with the Muslims. Many places did not have electricity, especially in villages. There was also a problem with water.

**Ed** – What was your prayer life like; how important is it for you?

**BB** – Prayer life is very important especially for a missionary. I had to balance my community prayer life and my personal prayer life.

**Ed** – When was the best time for you to pray?

**BB** – I prayed early in the morning between 5-6am.

**Ed** – What types of food did you eat?

**BB** – We had something called “T.Z.” This is made of maize flour which is similar to Ugali in Zambia [Ed-Ugali is ground corn flour mixed with hot water. This resembles a thick porridge]. We also have something called Fufu. This is made of boiled yams that are pounded. We eat this with soup that is made of meat, chicken, beans, and vegetables. We also have rice, yams



and plantain. The plantain is fried. People also eat dogs, cats, snails, crocodiles and rats. There is variety in the food that we eat.

**Ed** – What was your family’s reaction to your wanting to join SOLA?

**BB** – My family was quite happy about my decision. My family knew that I wanted to be a priest. They never said anything against me being a missionary.

**Ed** – What advice would you give to our readers who are considering SOLA as their calling in life?

**BB** – Listen to the Lord! Vocation is yours. It is not the mother’s or the father’s vocation. Don’t depend on what the parents say about what your vocation should be. It is your vocation and not your parents’. Listen to the Lord for your vocation.

**Ed** – How long is your home leave?

**BB** – Three months, on 28 July I will go to Nairobi, Kenya for Theology.

**Ed** – Thank you Benjamin for sharing your thoughts with our readers. We wish you all the best in your vocation as SOLA.

## Interview with Johnson Singarajan

Recently JOHNSON came for his home leave. When he stopped by SOLA, INDIA Link interviewed Johnson for all our readers.

Editor (**Ed**) Good afternoon Johnson. Welcome back to SOLA. How old are you now?

Johnson Singarajan (**JS**) I am 29 years old.

**Ed** – Where are you from?

**JS** – I am from Tamil Nadu.

**Ed** – How many are you in your family?

**JS** – We are three boys and three girls. I am the fifth born.

**Ed** – What was your family’s reaction to your desire to join SOLA?

**JS** – My family did not like this. My father wanted me to go into business. I had been working for four years in a factory. Prior to the factory, I had been in the diocesan seminary, but I had left the seminary. When working in the factory, I did not feel satisfied in the business world; I did not want to be a businessman.

**Ed** – How did you find out about SOLA?

**JS** – A friend of mine told me about SOLA and then I found a magazine with an advertisement of SOLA. I wrote to Fr. Martin and he came to visit my family. [Fr. Martin was the Rector of SOLA in Bangalore at that time].

**Ed** – Where did you do your Regency?

**JS** – Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

**Ed** – What challenges did you find in DRC?

**JS** – The challenge for me was the languages. I had to learn French and then I had to learn Swahili. I had to learn French while I was in the Regional’s house in DRC and then I had only 10 days for Swahili. I did study French in SOLA, but there was a 2 year gap between studying French and then applying it in DRC. The gap was because I did the novitiate in Kasama,

Zambia. We spoke only English in Kasama. Now, I know both French and Swahili.

**Ed** – How was your prayer life in DRC?

**JS** – My personal prayer was at night. This was in addition to my prayer with my community.

**Ed** – What advice would you give to those who are thinking of joining SOLA?

**JS** – We need to remember that we are not a tourist when we do our pastoral work (Regency). Life is not easy. We have to adapt to different cultures, climate, learn new languages and be open to challenges.

**Ed** – Adapt how?

**JS** – Praying is more active in DRC whereas here in India it is calm. Dancing is part of the liturgy in DRC. The liturgy is alive. The people also mix. Couples sit together. Men and women sit together as opposed to having the men on one side of the church and women on the other side of the church.

**Ed** – I guess “culture” would also include the food, correct?

**JS** – Yes, food is part of one’s culture. We ate dogs, cats, rats, snails etc. Once I went to buy a snake for our meal, but someone else got to the seller before I did. Monkeys and ants are also part of our diet.

**Ed** – Where was your parish located?

**JS** – Our parish was in a very remote place called “Kipaka”.

**Ed** – So now you are on home leave and where will you do your theology?

**JS** – I will study in Nairobi, Kenya.

**Ed** – When will you leave for Kenya?

**JS** – I will leave on 28th July.

**Ed** – Johnson, thank you for giving me your time and I wish you all the best in your studies and eventually being a SOLA priest.



## Prospective Aspirants with Fr. Leo

What does it mean to be with SOLA? Would it bother you to work among people who are very much different from yourself? Do you have a desire to learn African languages and the cultures of these people? What are your feelings about eating food that is different than what you are accustomed to? For example, different African tribes eat a variety of items that you may not even consider as food: snails, rats, dogs, cats, flying ants, caterpillars, etc.? If this description has not discouraged you, then read on!

What is necessary for someone to join SOLA?

To become an Aspirant with SOLA you will need to have: a plus two with division two minimum; the age limit is 25 (or younger). You need to be able to do 2-3 years of philosophy with us. What this means is that if you have completed your studies in Philosophy, we will not be able to accept you. The two-three years that you will be studying philosophy with us are also years for you to know SOLA better (Is SOLA the life for you?). We at SOLA can also get to know you as well, and if you have a vocation to work in Africa on the SOLA team.

Following your Philosophy studies at SOLA, you will do a year's novitiate or spiritual year somewhere in Africa. What is the novitiate or spiritual year? The novitiate is a year to know yourself better, to know

about prayer, and spend time in prayer. It will be your first experience of mixing with other nationalities from: Africa, The Americans, Asia, and Europe.

Upon completing the novitiate, you will have the opportunity to apply some of what you have learned with SOLA. For two years you will live in a SOLA community in Africa while studying the language and culture of the African people to whom you are sent to.

This time is called "Regency."

After Regency, you will get some home leave, and then if you are a priest candidate, you have four years of theology before your ordination. Your studies of Theology will be done either in: Kenya, Ivory Coast, D.R.Congo, South Africa or Jerusalem. If you are a brother candidate, basic theological studies and then vocational training will be discussed with you as to where to study and what to study.



*Fr. Leo with prospective Aspirants*

Here are some things that we at SOLA are interested to know about you:

Do you have at least one brother who can provide for your parents in their old age, or sisters who are willing and able to assume this responsibility? Does your Parish Priest know you, and can he give us a report on you? Finally, you and your parents must be Catholics. Still interested? See the page 7 for information on how to contact our Vocation Director.

## Benches for Volleyball and Basketball

When not playing basketball, why not sit and enjoy watching your friend play basketball? Actually this was one reason for the benches around the basketball court and volleyball court. Some would prefer to play basketball or volleyball while others would like to watch their friends play. Or again, some might just want to



relax whether there is a game or not in progress rather than standing with no place to sit and relax. It was when we asked ourselves that question of "why not" and the brainstorming that followed that the benches became a reality. Where to place the benches seemed obvious, close to the courts! We put the benches close to the court where the action is taking place. See the result of our efforts in the photo.

## Interview with Fr. George Abraham, M.S.T.



Fr. George, M.S.T. has agreed to help us in the Aspirancy program at Carmelaram. He replaces Fr. Biju who has gone to Rome for further studies. SOLA is happy to welcome Fr. George.

Editor (**Ed**) Fr. George, where is your home, and how old are you?

Fr. George Abraham (**GA**) I am from Kerala, and I am 30 years old.

**Ed** – How long have you been a priest?

**GA** – I have been a priest for 2 years and 3 months.

**Ed** – Why did you join MST and not join the diocesan priesthood?

**GA** – As an altar boy, I wanted to work as a missionary. My diocese is famous for having missionary priests. I was also an active member in my parish of CML (Cherupushpam Mission League). The motives of this movement influenced me very much. The diocesan priests wanted me to join the diocese, but this was not my vocation. Finally I realised that if I wanted to be a missionary, then I should join MST. After I was in the seminary, I learned more about MST. I am happy with MST.

**Ed** – Did you want to be a missionary by going abroad?

**GA** – No, I wanted to work with non-Christians in my own country.

**Ed** – How did you learn about prayer and what is prayer like with the MST?

**GA** – From childhood on, prayer has always been part of my life. All of the families where I live, pray every night at 7 p.m. when the church bell rings. We all kneel and pray. We say the rosary and then some other prayers. We pray to a different patron every month. We pray for about 45 minutes. We also have devotion to the Sacred Heart. In our parish we pray and focus on prayer with the youth.

As MST, we pray four times a day in community. We have morning, mid-day, evening and then at the end of the day.

**Ed** – What advice would you give to SOLA, Aspirants?

**GA** – I would encourage the Aspirants to spend time in prayer each day. We need prayer in our life because we cannot tell others about someone we don't know. In prayer we can meet and experience the Lord.

**Ed** – How did you come to SOLA?

**GA** – My superiors asked me to come to SOLA. They needed someone for formation and accounts. I was in four different parishes as a seminarian, and later on as a priest worked with youth in these parishes.

**Ed** – Fr. George, I thank you for giving me your time, and I am sure that our readers will be happy to hear from you.

## Students Cooking

SOLA students are able to adapt to the circumstances, whatever it may be. From the smiles of our students in this photo, you see SOLA students demonstrating their cooking skills. Why cooking if you are going to be a missionary? Our Students have to try their hand at cooking from time to time, and this is true whether one is in Bangalore or in the missions in Africa. Our Cooks have off on Saturday and other holidays, and this is when SOLA rise to the occasion and fill the void. The two students in this photo are ensuring that our community does not go without food. SOLA students know the fundamentals of cooking for small groups (5) when students are out for the day to large groups when all are present in community (up to 24).

Everyone gets a chance to cook. With the schedule of pastoral activities that take place on Saturday, some may not cook for one term, but not to fear, the next term they will grace our present with their culinary talents. We are truly blessed that our students possess this generosity and each time improve their art of cooking.

Does this fit your understanding of what it means to be a member of SOLA?



*Jayanth & Nilu cooking*

## Interview with Fr. Sabu



Fr. Sabu has just returned from Ethiopia where he worked in a parish for three years. He replaces Fr. Martin as the superior of the Indian Project. Now he will be working with Fr. George MST, and Mr. George at Carmelaram with our Aspirants.

**Ed** (Editor) – Where are you from?

**Fr. Sabu (FS)** I am from Cannur District, the northern part of Kerala .

**Ed** – How many are you in your family?

**FS** – We are six boys; three are married, one is a student at home; one is in seminary to be a Carmelite. I am the 2<sup>nd</sup> born.

**Ed** – How did you find out about SOLA?

**FS** – I first heard about religious vocations from priests who visited our school. Initially I was interested in the Salesians. My family gets a magazine called Life in Truth. There was an advertisement for SOLA, and I contacted Fr. Mathew. Fr. Mathew, who was in charge of vocations at SOLA, invited me to meet him. I liked what Fr. Mathew had to say. So I joined SOLA. All of this happened when I was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of university.

**FS** – What was your family's reaction when you told them that you wanted to join SOLA?

**FS** – My family asked me why I didn't become a priest for India? I told them that I wanted to work in Africa, and they supported me in this decision.

**Ed** – How long have you been a priest?

**FS** – I have been a priest for five years.

**Ed** – Where did you do your Regency?

**FS** – Ethiopia.

**Ed** – Who was in community with you when you were in Ethiopia?

**FS** – There were five of us: one priest from Uganda, one priest from Spain, and then two diocesan priests who were Ethiopian, and myself.

**Ed** – Is the Ethiopian church different for you?

**FS** – Yes, the Ethiopian Church is Orthodox, but they are in union with Rome. The rite is different. Their liturgical language is Gheez.

**Ed** – What challenges did you meet, either as a student or as a Missionary Priest when you were in Ethiopia?

**FS** – The challenges were: language, culture and climate. It was difficult to enter into the culture. The culture is so vast and so deep. Rain is rare, and there is poverty.

**Ed** – Did you feel overwhelm at times by the poverty in Ethiopia?

**FS** – Yes, when we see the poverty and people having no food, where is a loving God in this? This affects one's prayer life in bringing this question to the Lord. How am I going to manifest this Loving God to the people in the face of all their problems?

I tried to incorporate what I was living into my prayer. Our prayer life does not end in chapel. We bring our prayer with us when we leave church.

**Ed** – How is the HIV/AIDS situation in Ethiopia?

**FS** – We do have HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia. Because of the poverty situation, AIDS is accentuated. There are young girls who are into prostitution. They want money for food.

**Ed** – Is there any advice that you would like to give to the SOLA students?

**FS** – Yes, there are three things that I would like to tell the SOLA students:

- 1) Have faith – faith in God, faith in oneself.
- 2) Be courageous – be the voice for the voiceless; challenge corruption.
- 3) Be humane – be sensitive to others, be compassionate towards others, speak up when you have something to say. Don't hide!

**Ed** – Thank you Fr. Sabu for giving us some of your time and sharing with our readers.

**For information on joining SOLA (Society of Our Lady of Africa) write/phone**

**THE VOCATION PROMOTER**

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## Fr. Martin's Farewell Celebration

We have had many celebrations at SOLA, and one that will be remembered for a long time took place on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2010, the Pentecost Sunday. The mass was solemnly celebrated by Fr. Martin. At mass we expressed our gratitude to Fr. Martin for his valuable service to our community over the last ten years. The Eucharistic celebration was a prayerful one, and he dedicated this mass for departed soul of Bro. Vinod Panachiyil as well as for the people who had died in air disaster in Mangalore.

After the Eucharistic celebration we had a different timetable than usual for Sunday. We had an un-usual cricket match between staff and students that was so friendly. The match was a thrilling one due to the presence of Frs Martin and Sabu. These two priests mesmerized us by their stunning batting. They scored forty runs from six overs. This gave the staff side eighty-two runs. When students started to bat, they underestimated staff's bowling and rightly the students were taken by surprise. They were able to score only sixty runs at the cost of ten wickets. Thus the victory went to staff. They staff shouted for joy at the students' poor performance.

After the match we had a delicious lunch which was prepared by our cooks. Following lunch the students were eager for revenge. The students challenged the staff to a volley ball game. The match took place at our Aspirants house at Carmelaram and it was arranged by Frs. Sabu and George, MST. Here too the fathers proved victorious. The key player was Fr. Martin who seemed to be an expert at volleyball. The students had to accept the fact that fathers are better players at volleyball...too!

After having a high tea, we spent some time with the Lord. We were guided by the inspiring words of Fr. Sabu, and we prayed in a special way for our beloved superior Fr. Martin. After the prayer we all gathered together in the courtyard; the guests were the SABS sisters who took part in our joyful meal. [The SABS' are our next door neighbors at SOLA.]

Fr. Sabu, with his welcoming words, opened the floor for the cultural evening. Cultural dances are always appreciated in our community, Fr. Martin, though a foreigner, likes the traditional dances of India joined our brothers in the dance. Our brothers expressed their gratitude towards Fr. Martin through a song in one of the Indian languages. And the next program was the north Indian traditional dance which entertained everybody at the party. After the performance, we gave Fr. Martin a gift which was an expression of our love towards him. We also remembered Fr. Leo for his one year anniversary of priesthood (Fr. Leo was ordained on Pentecost Sunday last year).

Of course any celebration is incomplete without a grand dinner. We had a delicious dinner prepared by our beloved cooks at Carmelaram. After the dinner all expressed their gratitude towards Fr. Martin and bid him good bye by wishing him all the best in his new ministry in Uganda. We all realized that this lovely day and a beautiful celebration were possible because of the great collaboration between the staff and the students and their appreciation for Fr. Martin.

*Bro. Alex, 2<sup>nd</sup> year Philosophy*

### *Bro. Kanto's Diaconate Ordination*



*Kanto with his friends in Jerusalem on the occasion of his Ordination*

### *Farewell Bro. Bose*



*SOLA community gathered to say Bye to Bose ( In Balck Suit)*

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