

Each year the Social Action Office of the Diocese of Davenport selects one third of the parishes to receive mission appeals from certain, vetted, missions. This year, Immaculate Conception is one of the select parishes. This year, Fr. Merushan Henrick, will come to speak to us about the Church's mission in Sri Lanka and will ask for our financial assistance. Below is some information about the mission in Sri Lanka. Fr. Henrick will concelebrate Mass on Sunday, September 3 and will preside at our daily Masses the following week.

Thank you. Fr. Ron

A brief outlook; The Diocese of Batticaloa, Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka, which was known as Ceylon, is a small but beautiful island in the Indian Ocean. It is also named as the pearl of the Indian Ocean. It is a Buddhist country with two languages, three ethnic groups, and four religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. Christianity was introduced to Sri Lanka in 1505 by the Portuguese. At present, Christians are a minority of 7% of the total population, numbering almost 21 million people in Sri Lanka.

The diocese has an area of 2,854 sq. meters with a total population of 1,289,000. Batticaloa's diocese comprises Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians. Christians are a minority in Sri Lanka as well as in Eastern Province. The number of Catholics in the diocese of Batticaloa diocese is 46,138 (3.5%) of the total population of the two civil districts of Batticaloa viz, Batticaloa and Ampara. The Catholics have spread out of 30 parishes served by nearly 39 diocesan priests and 16 religious' priests. In addition, 93 religious sisters and brothers serve in parishes, schools, hospitals, colleges, and universities. Additionally, we have more than five hundred catechists serving in the diocese. Their role is very crucial in the diocese. Since the children are not taught the Catholic religion in most schools, the diocese has taken different methods to teach the Catholic faith at the parish level. The diocese is offering continuous training programs for these catechists through the catechetical center.

Sri Lanka has gone through 30 years of civil war as well as natural disasters, i.e. tsunami, cyclone, floods, drought, etc. The Batticaloa district is also one of the most affected by the civil war, tsunami, cyclone, floods, and drought. This area is very much prone to health hazards, including Dengue fever, Malaria fever, and diarrhea, due to which dozens of people die every year. Due to war, even today, hundreds of families don't have any information on their men folk, whose whereabouts cannot be tracked. We still have hundreds of women-headed families living in miserable conditions. Additionally, more miseries were added with the attack of ISIS on 21st Easter Sunday, April 2019, which killed 260 people and injured over 500 people in the country. The city of Batticaloa was also affected by this selfish religious attack. Due to the present economic crisis, people are suffering, especially children who are becoming malnourished due to lack of food.

Activities of the Diocese of Batticaloa

The diocese of Batticaloa has different offices; Catechetical Centre, Social Service Centre, Social Communication Centre, Office for Youth Apostolate, Office for Pontifical Mission Societies, Office for

Ecumenism, Laity Commission, Lay Theologate, and Office for Evangelization. Further, it has 11 apostolic associations. In Addition, it has ten orphanages for boys and girls, especially the diocese has an “Ozanam Center” home for handicapped female children. The Siloam Hospital is the diocese medical care center offering services to many people in the district. It is especially organizing many health awareness programs on prevention practices at the village level. The diocese has also made a special effort to serve the lepers in the district, which many organizations very much neglect. The Social Service Center is the social arm of the diocese through which the diocese is trying to implement some projects, Supplementary classes for children’s education, widow’s livelihood programs, and healing and reconciliation programs. Through the evangelization office and Laity commission, the diocese is giving formation programs for the laity. More focus is given to re-evangelization. Bible classes are given at the parish level. Further, the diocese is also doing border village evangelization activities amid a multi-religious society. Small Christian Communities are formed through which bible sharing is taking place. They are continually empowered through training programs. The diocese also pays more concentration to the lay catechists, who teach Sunday classes at the parish. Small parishes have about 100 to 150 children; in larger parishes, there are more than 500 to 800 children who follow the Sunday class. Since the diocese has more village parishes, the diocese provides breakfast or some snacks to poor children who attend Sunday classes. Due to financial constraints, the diocese is unable to pay a small stipend for the catechists who are very poor. Further, the diocese is facing a shortage of lay catechists with the increasing number of Catholics. The office for the Youth apostolate also trains the youth to become active leaders, new-evangelizers, and coworkers to take up various types of ministries within the parish and diocese.

Challenges

- The diocese is receiving more vocations for the priesthood but has no means to provide food and accommodation for the new seminarians.
- The diocese needs more lay catechists and more training programs. The catechists are very poor and need some stipends for their voluntary work.
- Education for the poor children in the village parishes– providing supplementary classes.
- OZANAM Centre – food and medical care for handicapped children.
- Dry rations and cooked meal support programs for poor people in the village parishes.
- Livelihood projects for widows.
- Healing and reconciliation programs and formation programs for youth.
- More re - evangelization programs are needed in border villages among multi-religious people.

The diocese of Batticaloa is a new diocese with immense challenges. The diocese is growing in many spheres and started the Missionary Cooperative Plan in the US in 2016. Through the mission appeals, we came to know different dioceses and their people’s generosity. The donations that we have received from these appeals helped us to cover a certain part of our projects. The Mission Cooperative plan is a wonderful opportunity given by God to share our experience and the difficulties which we are facing in our country. It also gives us great hope that we are not alone but part of the universal Church. The Diocese of Batticaloa would like to thank all of you for your spiritual and financial contribution.