

INTERLINK

TEACHERS' TEAMS – INDIA

FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

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EDITORIAL

Our readers will probably be shocked when they read that we have taken the “**Call To Holiness**” as the theme for our current issue of *Interlink*. Is not that call reserved to priests and religious? How is it possible for lay people, especially for teachers, to become saints? That is the question that some of us try to answer in the testimonies they share with us today. In other words, they tell us that the call to holiness can be answered also by lay people in the concrete circumstances of their lives.

Roger Landry shows us, through the example of Carlo Acutis, that holiness can be attained even if one is making use of the most modern means of communication. Holiness is not a goal that was meant to be pursued only by people in the past, but by people of all ages also, including our times. However, it is a goal that can be attained only with **God’s help**, in the occurrence with the help of the Eucharist, as Carlo did when he prepared a website on Eucharistic miracles. A saint is a person who relies more on God’s help than on his/her own abilities. That is what led Carlo to say, “the Eucharist is my highway to heaven.”

Holiness is essentially a **matter of love**. Jesus said, “there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” That is what Gianna Beretta Molla chose to do when she preferred to sacrifice her life so that her baby might live. It means that one becomes very sensitive to the sufferings of others, whoever they may be. To be a saint is to recognize Christ in the disguise of those who suffer: “I was hungry, and you gave me to eat.”

Following Jesus on the path to renouncement will always be demanding. In some instances, it may go to the extent of shedding one’s blood for the love of Christ, as Deva Sahayam did. In other words, to be a saint is to **love Christ** more than anything else. It is basically a matter of preference, as Deva Shantini underlines in her article on the saint.

Finally, as our dear friend Thankamma showed us in very simple ways, to be a saint is to do **God’s will with a smile**. That was the definition that Mother Teresa gave of a saint. It is a person whose main concern is to do what the Lord is asking him/her to do, and to do it with a smile.

Thus we can understand that one need not be a priest or a religious to become a saint. One has only to be open to the promptings of the Spirit and put the Gospel into practice in one’s life. For us, teachers, it means to make our teams authentic communities of true disciples.

May the Lord show us the way.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BECOME A SAINT?

If you ask any friend of yours what it means to be a saint, he/she will probably say that, in order to achieve that goal, one has to be very pious and quiet all the time. But that is not what Jesus is telling us through his Church. You may have a surprise when you come to know that a sad saint is a poor saint. If you really want to become a saint, "let God's grace work in your soul by accepting whatever he gives you and giving him whatever he takes from you. True holiness consists in doing God's will with a smile." (Mother Teresa)

That is why the Church teaches that holiness is a mysterious thing: the greater it is, the less it is noticed.

We read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity." (*Lumen Gentium* 40 #2). All are called to holiness: "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt 5: 48). In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that . . . doing the will of the Father in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus the holiness of the People of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church through the lives of so many saints.

In the waters of Baptism, we have been "washed . . . sanctified . . . justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6: 11). Our Father calls us to holiness in the whole of our life, and since "he is the source of (our) life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and . . . sanctification," (1 Cor. 1: 30) both his glory and our life depend on the hallowing of his name in us and by us. Such is the urgency of our first petition.

By whom is God hallowed, since he is the one who hallows? But since he said, "You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy," we seek and ask that we who were sanctified in Baptism may persevere in what we have begun to be. and we ask this daily, for we need sanctification daily, so that we who fail daily may cleanse away our sins by being sanctified continually.... We pray that this sanctification may remain in us.
(CCC, nos 2013 & 2813)

"This holiness to which the Lord calls you will grow through small gestures. Here is an example: a woman goes shopping, she meets a neighbour, they begin to speak and the gossip starts. But she says in her heart: 'No. I will not speak badly of anyone.' This is a step forward in holiness. Later, at home, one of her children wants to talk to her about his hopes and dreams. Even though she is tired, she sits down and listens with patience and love. That is another sacrifice that brings holiness. Later she experiences some anxiety, but recalling the love of the Virgin Mary, she takes her rosary and prays with faith. Yet another path of holiness. Later still, she goes out onto the street, encounters a poor person and stops to say a kind word to him. One more step."
(Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, no. 16)



"The teacher is like a candle which lights others in consuming itself."

HOW TO BECOME A SAINT

No Christian has the right to be unhappy. Because we believe that the Spirit is present in our lives and is constantly at work, no one of us is a Christian who does not exult for joy. How can we believe that God is given to us, that we have him in our hearts, and not be happy?

He who speaks of Christ and does not do so passionately, speaks unworthily. Today, Jesus charges each one of us to speak of him, to announce him with the power of the Spirit. We are the ones whom he sends forth today, as he sent the apostles from the Cenacle. We have been invaded by a Spirit of strength and wisdom, by a Spirit of joy and of faith.

We have to stop for a moment... Then the Spirit will make us aware that we are the children of God. The Spirit cries out in us: "Father, I love you, I have placed all my hope in you."

It is a joy to think that this all-powerful Spirit is at work everywhere in the world. He works, stimulates and inspires every heart. It is his presence which gives strength and humility. The Church teaches us that we do not perform a single act of true faith, true hope and true love without being inspired to do so by him.

If only we could learn to see his action in others and in our own souls. Then we would truly be what the Lord desires us to be: his witnesses. We would see him at work

- In that young man of 20 years of age, a victim of AIDS, who has accepted death with the certainty that he will live forever
- In that young woman whose heart shrinks within her whenever she chances to see a marriage in the church, but who is giving herself to God by joining the religious life without a second's hesitation.

- In that poor sinner who crouches upon the bench of the confessional and who breaks down before the priest at the thought of his many sins.
- In that mother at the bedside of her dying child, who accepts this death and thanks God for having allowed her to have him for only a few hours.
- In that teacher who spends time giving free tuitions to the children in her class who are slow learners.



Yes, the Spirit is at work. He never ceases to act in our lives and in the world. He travels by obscure paths. He overturns obstacles, fills up the pits, overthrows all the fences that we could erect.

Hervé Morissette, csc

Every team member is invited to spend a few minutes in silence and identify the charism or the gift he/she received from the Spirit and decide how he/she is going to put that gift at the service of the school community to which he/she belongs.

Now let us look at the lives of a few saints who were lay persons

SAINT DEVA SAHAYAM

Lay Martyr Saint Deva Sahayam – An Inspiration To Lay Apostles

September is the month that brings an important day in teachers' life. On the fifth day of the month, we celebrate Teachers' Day. Teachers are honoured in their work places and select teachers are awarded by the government and social organisations. On the same day, we remember Mother Teresa whose life was full of teachings of love to people all over the world.

This article highlights what we learn from the life of the first Indian lay martyr saint, Deva Sahayam. People of Kottar take much pride of him, as he is the son of our soil. His life, suffering, and martyrdom inspire the lay people to renew their standards of Catholic faith.

Deva Sahayam was originally a Hindu, known as Neelakandan Pillai, an official in the court of King Marthandavarma, Travancore, and held responsibility in their temple too. He happened to hear the word of the Lord from his war prisoner, the Dutch military naval commander, Captain Eustachius De Lanoy.

He realised there was only one God and all are equal before Him. He learned all Catholic prayers and doctrines thoroughly and approached Fr. Buttari for baptism, the basic Christian sacrament. After observing his steadfastness for a considerable period, Fr. Buttari christened him Lasarus, Tamil equivalent to Deva Sahayam. Later on his wife Bhargavi also met the same pastor for the sacrament and he christened her Theresa, the Tamil equivalent to Gnanapu.

People accused Deva Sahayam for joining the alien religion which they categorized as the religion of fishermen, low people and untouchables. The king and the Hindu priests called him back to Hinduism. Deva Sahayam was determined and expressed his desire to live the life of Jesus who is the Light, the Way and the Truth.

Prayer was his breath. He prayed more for people who hatred and humiliated him. He never discriminated people as high and low;

rich and poor; friends and foes after his conversion. All were rungs of a ladder for him.

Consequently he had to renounce all his positions and possessions in the kingdom. He was humiliated and tortured in untold ways, but he remained humble and said fervently, "I am carrying the yoke of my Lord. My yoke is easy and my burden is light".



Seeing his virtuous and exemplary life many people of his community embraced Catholicism. People rushed in veneration to wherever he was taken.

At the time of his misery, miracles happened. To cite a few, he was tied to a dead neem tree and that gave new leaves. A shepherd came to him with a dead sheep and said he wanted to die. He told the shepherd, "Your life is not

yours. It's God's and you have no right over it". With his prayer the sheep was back to life. People with long sterility got children with his blessings and prayers.

Miracles continue till now. A colleague of mine who belongs to the same community of the martyr married a Catholic. Her parents could not accept it. They heaped curses on her, burned all her clothes and banished her. Her husband did not have any job. But he got her a job with the help of a priest in a Catholic primary school.

They got six children, two boys and four girls. She had deep faith in the martyr. She used to visit his shrine frequently and pray to him. She educated all the children. One daughter has become a nun and the other five are married and well placed in life. She is a witness to the divine power of the saint.

We, teachers, learn a lot from the very brief sketch of Saint Deva Sahayam's life. We en-

counter selfish and ambitious people who stoop and swoop to any extreme just to win positions. We hear about adolescent suicides for not being able to clear eligibility tests and join courses of their choices. We are called to seed the words, "Your life is God's and you have no right over it" in their minds.

Teachers are the only professionals who get ample opportunities to build up self confidence in students teach moral incidentally and to promote unity with God in prayers. Taking the upright life of the saint as a model, we, teachers, should come forward to build up equality in the present scenario where discrimination shoots up everywhere and makes peace to collapse. This is the dream of our Pope too.

B. Deva Shanthini
TT. Kottar Region

ADDENDA

On 21 February 2020, Pope Francis recognized a miracle attributed to the intercession of Deva Sahayam, clearing his way to canonization. He is the first Catholic in India who is neither an ordained minister nor a religious to be officially recognized as a saint. The Vatican announced on 9 November 2021 that Pope Francis would formally canonize him on 15 May 2022.

In 1984, a group of lay persons from the diocese of Kottar, especially members of the Nagercoil Catholic Club, once again took the initiative to seek the beatification of Deva Sahayam. This is unusual for a layman, but he is regarded as one who was totally devoted to Christ. At the beginning of the 21st century, many Christian devotees were offering prayers at his tomb in St. Xavier's Cathedral at Kottar.

Professor A. Sreedhara Menon (1925–2010), a noted historian and writer on Travancore, said that no cases of persecution in the name of religious conversion were recorded in the history of the kingdom. P. Parameswaran, president of the Hindu spiritual organisation Vivekananda Kendra, accused the CCBI of an attempt to hurt Hindu sentiments.

Referring to the Travancore state manual, he insisted that Deva Sahayam was a palace employee who was executed after confirmation of sedition, because he had tampered with palace records and passed them to De Lannoy. However, Catholic records of the time state that the kingdom of Travancore did not tolerate palace officials converting to Christianity.

Deva Sahayam Pillai is the first lay person from India to be canonized by the Catholic Church.

Wikipedia

SAINT GIANNA BERETTA MOLLA

She Sacrificed Her Life That Her Baby Might Live

Saint Gianna Beretta Molla is a saint in the Catholic Church. She was canonized because of her heroic virtue. She believed in the Catholic teaching that all people have a right to life from the moment of conception, and she was willing to risk her life to give her own child the best chance at living.

Saint Gianna was born in Magenta, Italy, in the year 1922 and was the tenth of thirteen children. Her parents instilled a love of the Catholic faith in their children, and Gianna grew up inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi to live a simple life. She had a solid Catholic education as a child.

Saint Gianna decided to attend medical school as she believed this was the best way to serve people in both body and spirit. She graduated from medical school and opened her own clinic. Eventually, she focused her practice on serving women, babies, the elderly and the poor. She had wanted to serve as a missionary, but since her poor health precluded this, she saw the world of medicine as her mission field.

Saint Gianna was active in Catholic Action, a movement that was dedicated to both living out and helping advance Catholic social teachings in the world. Eventually, Saint Gianna met Pietro Molla. He, too, was a devout Catholic and was active in Catholic Action. They were married and went on to have four children.

Saint Gianna's fourth pregnancy proved to be complicated when she suddenly developed sharp pains. Upon further examination, it was determined that she had a huge uterine fibroid tumour that endangered the life of her child. She was given three options:

- Hysterectomy: This would remove the fibroid, but she would lose her baby as

well as any chance to have any other children.

- Abortion: This would preserve her ability to have children in the future, but would take the life of the current baby.
- Surgery: This was the most risky option, but this was the option she chose. The doctors successfully removed the fibroid and preserved the baby's life.



Saint Gianna continued on with her high risk pregnancy. Shortly before she was to deliver, she told her husband that, should the situation arise, she wanted them to save her baby's life over her own.

She attempted to deliver naturally, as this was the safest method for her situation. That attempt failed and she delivered her fourth child, a daughter, via caesarian section. Saint Gianna soon became quite ill with septic peritonitis. She was returned home, where she died on Saturday, April 28, at 30 years old.

Wikimedia

BLESSED CARLO ACUTIS

He Taught the Youth by His Deeds

On October 10, 2020, Carlo Acutis was beatified in Assisi. The Church celebrated his feast for the first time, on the 14th anniversary of Blessed Carlo's death of acute leukemia. The time between Carlo's birth into eternal life and his being raised to the altars was almost as brief as his 15 years of life on earth.

In that short span, however, Carlo not only experienced the "life to the full" (John 10:10) that Christ came into the world to bring, but became a **teacher** to his parents, peers, the poor and now the whole Church.

He may already be the most famous 15-year-old to die.



But now, just 29 years after his birth, Blessed Carlo is perhaps touching far more people than any of those great saints did when they were 29. And he's just getting started. Pope Francis penned three paragraphs about him in his 2019 exhortation to young people *Christus Vivit* and now thousands of articles and hundreds of websites tell his story.

When I first learned about him, I was impressed by his precocious hunger for God: He prayed the Rosary every day from a young age; made his first Holy Communion a year early and then

attended daily Mass thereafter; cared for the homeless each night; travelled regularly to Assisi; loved the saints; learned computers to design websites to spread his love of the Eucharist and Mary and to **teach** about angels and the four last things. I figured, frankly, that he must have come from a home similar to the one that produced, for example, St. Thérèse.

Instead he came from a home that, as his garrulous mother Antonia has humbly said in various interviews, wasn't even lukewarm. By the time Carlo was born, Antonia had been to Church only three times in her life, the days she was baptized, confirmed and married. Carlo, through his questions and zeal, eventually got her to take her faith more seriously, and she was just one of many converts. While Carlo's grandparents practiced the faith and he attended Catholic schools, it seems clear pretty clear that the Lord interacted with Blessed Carlo much like he did with the young prophet Samuel.

Several things strike me about his life.

Santa Subito = Canonize Her Soon

Thankamma teacher was a holy person. The Teachers' Teams in Kerala is totally indebted to her. She worked very hard to see the progress of the Movement. Although God has been testing her with a lot of trials, she stood firm and faced them all courageously with a beautiful smile. She became stronger with the pains that tormented her.



It was in 1973 that the world wide Movement, the Teachers Team took the shape of a sapling and got planted in God's own soil (Kerala). The peasant was embodied in the strongest person i.e. our Thankamma teacher.

She strived for its progress until her last breath. If it was not taken up by her, the TT would not have taken the present shape in Kerala. She poured water and manured so that it came up very fast. She travelled a lot in and out of Kerala with her mission. In fact a strong faith in Jesus Christ supported her in the ardent work.

Actually, it was after almost ten years, in 1982, that I came to know Thankamma whom I had never seen before. She was so loving to welcome us to the team. She kept me and all others close to her. She came to Vypeen, a remote island of Kerala, and started the Movement there. Her apparent love and commit-

ment kept all the members strong in the Teachers Teams.

I was lucky to accompany her to various parts of Kerala with the extension work. Some of the places where we went together were Trissur, Alappuzha, Arthunkal and Kottapuram. I realized that the secret of her commitment was Jesus, so that she never bothered about spending money, time or health. It was the Teachers' Teams through which she showed Jesus to others.

For me she was a teacher, a guide and a loving sister. When I went through heart-breaking moments, i.e. the untimely demise of my husband, Thankamma shared her personal experience to strengthen me. I could console myself, looking at her.

She inspired me so much that I never bothered about anything else. She would ring up every week to know the whereabouts and the progress of our extension work. My acquaintance with her made me a good and strong teacher and a helping person.

Thankamma took me to different seminars that were conducted in various parts of the country. These seminars motivated me to promote teacher-students relationship across the country. I am sure she renounced herself for the betterment of Teachers' Teams until her last breath.

The ever shining smile she spread would remain alive in my mind and inspire me in the days to come. I pray that the good Lord would reward her for the selfless, sincere, distinct and wholehearted works she undertook for the betterment of the Teachers' Teams. I acknowledge that her death was an irreparable loss.

Elsy John, Kerala TT

NEWSBITS

Latin America

Recibí *Interlink*, Teachers Teams, India. Gracias por las felicitaciones a nuestra América Latina y correspondemos con las mismas felicitaciones por sus 56 años en los Equipos Docentes en la India.

José Ramírez
Responsable de la página web de los EDO
Latinoamericanos y el Caribe

Kerala

The monthly meeting of the region was conducted at the house of Mrs. Sheeba Shibu, one of our TT members, on the 27th of August Fr. Antony Arackal chaired the gathering The inaugural prayer session was led by our Elsy teacher. Sheeba teacher welcomed the members.



Fr. Antony Arackal, being the resource person gave a brief description of Synodality. He emphasized the importance of dialogue in the context of our schools. We need to give time to listen to children. In the post-Covid scenario, children lack much in the areas of both studies and interpersonal relationships.

Hence we need to afford extra time to listen to them. In the context of the Synod, Jude said that communion among the teachers and communion among children are both important. Participation is more meaningful when the Headmaster or the Principal upholds the involvement of every teacher in the daily pro- grams.

We should allow children to enhance their leadership traits. Mission becomes meaningful when we can radiate Christ to those who relate with us. Fr. Antony Arackal enhanced the session with his timely interventions. Mary Ruth teacher

proposed a vote of thanks and the meeting ended with a final blessing from Fr. Antony Arackal.

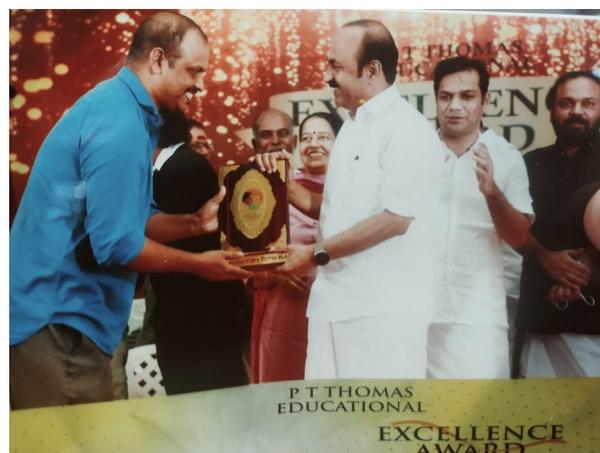
Monsignor Ambrose remembered

On September 5, TT members from Kochi, Kerala region, gathered at Avila Bhavan, where retired priests of the Archdiocese stay. There we offered Mass for Msgr. Ambrose. Msgr. Cletus Parambaloth was the main celebrant. Fr. Antony Arackal the Chaplain, Fr. Francis Koikkaramparambil and other senior priests concelebrated.

September 5th was his first death anniversary. It was in Avila Bhavan that Msgr. Ambrose spent his last days. Nobody can replace the person of Fr. Ambrose. He was a brave, holy and inspiring personality. Let God grant him eternal rest.

Anish Augustine awarded the best teacher.

Anish Augustine, a TT member from Ernakulam region, was awarded the best teacher of the Thrikkakkara assembly constituency. At present Anish heads the Social Science faculty of St. Rita's High School, Ponnurunny, Ernakulam.



Being an earnest TT member, he upholds Christian values in his career. He could support students from very poor background. He visited their houses and brought them to school. He could save children from drug abuse. Actually it was the students who voted him the best teacher. He can also contribute in the extra curricular activities.

Jude Varghese.
TT Regional Animator, Kerala

