



News & Views

August 2021

President's Message

Dear Esteemed members,

Hope all of you are fine and safe.

The other day Fr Suresh Mathew, our Secretary, had WhatsApped a few photographs to me, showing how termites had wreaked havoc in Barrett Bhavan, our administrative office in Delhi. Two wooden cupboards had been attacked and almost destroyed.

The devastating attack came from within, leaving a false impression outwardly that everything is fine and durable.

It was not.

Fr. Suresh had to initiate a 360 degree kind of salvage operation with my knowledge and consent. Fr Joby Mathew, our treasurer, was duly informed too.

What the pictures showed was indeed horrendous.

Suddenly those pictures turned symbolic to me for our Nation and the Church, as contemporary images of both began to flash through my mind as if in a contextualized stream. The global Covid-19 pandemic, the gloomy prospect of its third wave, reign of relativism raging within the Church and the world legitimizing greed and selfishness, democracy deteriorating as mere majoritarianism, smothering of dissent, the martyrdom of Fr Stan swamy S.J. etc. etc.

I am sure these images and the issues related to them haunt your conscience too. As evil, divisive and exclusive ideologies are being fast-tracked, our personal and collective response as Christian Communicators and Citizens of this great land becomes imperative, in the form of committed action.

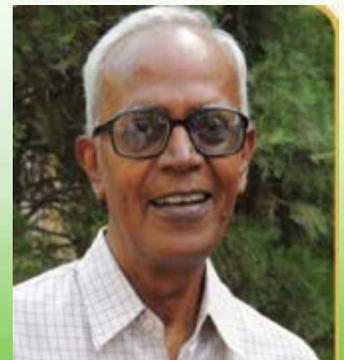
One effective way to face the travails of this turbulent times is to stay connected sharing news and views — even personal ones. Here is yet another Newsletter of ICPA.

This issue is focused as a commemoration and tribute to three of our dear departed members — Fr Varghese Paul S.J., Fr Lijo Thomas Mampoothra and Fr Cherian Nerevetil who represented ICPA as an Institutional member. We lost the first two to Covid and the third one in an accident. Then came the custodial death of Fr Stan Swamy. Stan was not a member of ICPA. But his confrere and co-activist Fr Cedric Prakash is. So also Dr. John Dayal, another co-activist of Stan. Moreover through his work, sufferings and martyrdom Fr Stan has emerged as a role-model communicator of Gospel values and the values enshrined in the Constitution of India.

I bow my head to the revered memories of these dear departed. May their lives inspire and challenge us in our mission.

— Ignatius Gonsalves

Your President in the service of The Word.



**ICPA Executive
Team
2019-2022**

President: Mr Ignatius Gonsalves (M: 9447964232 | ignatiusgon@yahoo.com)
Vice-President: Fr Sunil Damor (M: 8637216529 | sdamorsvd@gmail.com)
Secretary: Fr Suresh Mathew (M: 7042562963 | sureshcapuchin@gmail.com)
Joint-Secretary: Sr Tessy Jacob (M: 8904768159 | tessyvm@gmail.com)
Treasurer: Fr Joby Mathew (M: 7045340899 | jobyssp@gmail.com)

North-Rep: Fr Jacob Kani (M: 9818716160 | jacobkani@gmail.com)
South-Rep: Mr Sebastian K. (M: 9744428698 | sebank7260@gmail.com)
West-Rep: Dr Roman Bhatia (7042562963 | drromanbhatia@gmail.com)
North-East-Rep: Fr Vincent Carmel (M: 88003 36062 | vincentssp@gmail.com)
Institutional Rep: Fr Valerian Fernandes (9880851674 | raknno@gmail.com)

Ecclesiastical Advisor from the CBCI: Rt Rev. Bishop Salvatore Lobo

Covid-19 and Beyond...

Editorial

On 21st April 2021, I sent a message to Fr Lijo Thomas, requesting if he could check out for some photographs of ICPA AGM which was held in Nagpur in 2017. It was at this AGM Fr Varghese Paul had received an ICPA Award. Fr Lijo texted me back, saying, "Not possible at the moment; I am in the hospital with COVID. Sorry for the inconvenience". Minutes later, he was shifted to ICU and on the second day he succumbed to COVID!

The second wave of COVID- 19 has snatched away thousands of people, including our own dear and near ones. ICPA family has lost two of its members to COVID-19 — Fr Varghese Paul SJ, the veteran ICPA member and Fr Lijo Thomas, a young active priest. Fr Cherian Neereveetil, an Institutional member of ICPA, had a fatal accident and died while on treatment. Fr Stan swamy, became a martyr for truth and justice. We remember and cherish the memories of our beloved members and all our dear and near ones who are called back to eternal reward. Let us also pay our respect to men and women who have laid down their lives in service to those most in need.

We are living in a time of crisis. The basic rule of a crisis is that if you get through it you come out better or worse, but never the same. Although we see rays of hope in the form of vaccine and improved medical facilities to face a third wave, the need to hold firm to our faith in God is even greater.

The many incidents in our country remind us to be fearless prophets of journalism. With the mighty power of pen and words, let us constantly work towards a better India, a better world!



Sr Tessa Jacob SSpS
Joint-Secretary

We welcome your feedbacks and suggestions for the growth and expansion of ICPA activities in the New Year 2021-22.

Kindly write to us at indiancatholicpress@gmail.com

Condolence Messages from Ignatius Gonsalves

Dear members of ICPA,

It is with deep sorrow that I formally inform you about the passing away of Fr Varghese Paul SJ, a veteran in the field of Christian Communication and the senior most member of our organisation.

He is a much awarded author in Gujarati. Among the more than fifty books he has authored on various topics only four are in English. All the rest are in Gujarati. The contributions of this prolific writer for Gujarati language and literature will be ever cherished.

Another area of concern for him, where he was deeply involved was training of young Journalists. He was the live wire leader of the two international training programmes that the ICPA conducted in collaboration with UCIP, the world body of Catholic Journalists.

Fr Varghese Paul truly valued his ICPA membership and used to joyfully announce: “I have never missed an AGM”. The last AGM he attended was at Jharsuguda.

Despite his ailments he wanted to come to Delhi for our last AGM. But his superiors who were quite concerned about his health had to prohibit him.

I am sure, memories of this communicator par excellence will surely inspire us in setting our future agenda. Our heartfelt condolences to the Jesuit family of Gujarat and his family members in Kerala.

— *Ignatius Gonsalves*
President, ICPA
10 April 2021



Dear Friends,

How sad, ICPA has lost one more member to Covid-19 pandemic. First it was Fr Varghese Paul a seasoned veteran. Now it is Fr Lijo Thomas, a young priest of all possibilities I would say.

He hails from the parish of Pookkunnassery, near Pulinkunnu, in the Archdiocese of Chengannur, Kerala. He was ordained priest on 27 April 2011. His father Thomas passed away a few years back. Mother Lamma is alive.

Fr Lijo had gone to Rajasthan for M. Ed Examination and he fell ill there. He returned back to his mission and was admitted to a hospital. Sr Tessa informed us last week about the serious condition of Fr Lijo and we prayed for his speedy recovery. But God has another plan for him. He was called to the Lord on 23 April 2021 and was laid to rest on 24 April.

My heart goes out to his Mother and other family members. Heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family, the Archdiocese of Nagpur and Fr Lijo 's countless friends.

He was the local organiser of Nagpur AGM (2017). ICPA has lost one of its future leaders. Incidentally,

Archbishop Abraham Viruthukulangara host of the Nagpur event, Fr Pinto one of the main resource persons, and Fr Varghese Paul one of the achievers honoured that year — have all gone ahead of Fr Lijo.

I believe that they are having a brainstorming editorial session at the pearly gate!

Fr Lijo's "untimely demise is also a personal loss to me on many counts. " I am a fan of your Manorama writings", he used to tell me. Lijo, now pray for us!

— *Ignatius Gonsalves*,
President, ICPA
23 April 2021



Dear Members of ICPA,

The Indian Catholic Press Association (ICPA) deeply mourns the passing away of Fr Cherian Nereveetil (49), former Chief Editor of *Sathyadeepam* (Light of Truth), an Institutional Member of the Organisation.

He died this afternoon from head injuries sustained in a road accident two weeks ago. ICPA salutes the standards he has set and the edifying witness he has given both as a media person and a pastor.

Though his life was literally short and his career in the media even shorter, Fr Nereveetil has left a trail of class and commitment that will be cherished by all for a long time to come. As a communicator he showed a level of maturity and Christian charity much beyond his young age.

Those who knew him even casually would testify that he lived what he communicated. Donating one of his kidneys to a needy person years ago, is just one example. The zero-distance that he strived to maintain between word and deed as a Priest and Communicator endeared him to one and all, especially the Youth. For a while Fr Nereveetil has served the Jesus Youth's International Council as its Chaplain. He was also an accomplished singer.

The hallowed memories of this always smiling, soft-spoken Priest-Editor would be a beacon of light for Media persons and Pastors alike — motivating and inspiring to be prophetic.

He was born on June 8, 1971, as the second of three sons of Joseph and Mary Nereveetil, in Edappally, Kochi. After his training in minor seminary, studied Philosophy at Carmelgiri and Theology at Papal Seminary Pune. He was ordained a priest for the archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly on January 1, 1997.

ICPA expresses heartfelt condolences to the Nereveetil family, his parishioners, the management and staff of *Sathya Deepam* Weekly, the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly to which he belonged, and his countless friends and admirers.

— *Ignatius Gonsalves*
President ICPA
27 May 2021



Obituaries

Fr Varghese Paul Chollamadam S.J. Epitomised the Indian Catholic Press



Sometime around mid-February 2020, as I was about to leave our residence 'Sughadpanth' in Ahmedabad, to go for a programme to Varanasi, Fr Varghese Paul came to the gate to say 'goodbye' to me adding, "see you at the ICPA Meet in Delhi after a few days!" When I arrived at the venue of the Silver Jubilee Programme of the ICPA's Annual Convention of Christian Journalists in Delhi on 28 February, Fr Suresh Mathew told me that Fr Varghese will not be coming since he was ill; I called my companions in Ahmedabad and was told that he was taken to our Province Infirmary to Baroda and would have to be there for a few days.

Varghese was looking forward to the ICPA Convention; he would often talk about his contribution to it, the early beginnings, and the many challenges he faced – particularly in getting Catholics: both laity and religious to be interested in journalism and to write! Varghese had booked his to and fro ticket to Delhi well in advance! So not making it to Delhi was indeed a big disappointment to him: that perhaps was a bigger anxiety for him than his own illness. After my return to Ahmedabad, I called to give him an update of the ICPA proceedings and to tell him that I brought him a file that the ICPA Executive Committee so thoughtfully asked me to carry. He was happy with the thought that he was remembered but during that call I could still sense his sadness of not making it to Delhi; "you know Cedric," he said "I have not missed a single ICPA Meet all these years!"

When I returned to my home Province in Gujarat in December 2018, after my three-years with the Jesuit Refugee Service in the Middle East, I was asked to continue to stay in a satellite community of the Pre-novitiate (I had already lived there for several years before I left). Varghese was transferred there a few months earlier. So, with the two other Jesuits who looked after a few pre-novices, we constituted a compact but happy group. Varghese's little office was besides my living room – so invariably, we had long chats on several issues: the problems that plagued the country, issues in the Church and of course, 'the catholic press'. Varghese constantly lamented the fact that there was a tremendous lack of Catholic journalists today: both laity and religious; also, that there was a dearth of quality journalism in general with fewer people writing books particularly on the contextual reality!

Varghese often referred to the fact that as a Scholastic he has sent by his then Jesuit Provincial ("that Provincial certainly had a vision", he would quip) in 1974-75 to do a professional course in journalism to the London School of journalism. He was earlier (from 1969-73) entrusted with the editing of the 'Doot' (the 'Messenger of the Sacred Heart' — in Gujarati); he was its Editor at two other periods for an additional eleven years. As an editor he made the monthly more readable to a community which needed quality and relevant articles on the faith and on life in general.

In many respects he was a pioneer in Catholic Communications not only in Gujarat but also in India. He was the Founder President of the Gujarati Catholic Press Association (GCPA), Founder President of the Gujarati Christian

Press Council (GCPC) and Chairperson of the Gujarati Lekhak Mandal (Gujarati Writers' Association). He was also an Executive Body Member of Indian Catholic Press Association, Vice-President, International Federation of Catholic News Agencies and International Catholic Union of the Press (UCIP). Over the years, he has authored 47 books in Gujarati, four in English, three in Malayalam and one in Hindi; besides, he has contributed (to dailies/monthlies/periodicals) more than a thousand articles in Gujarati and hundred plus in English. His love for journalism provided him to travel widely both in India and abroad!

He was also a great Jesuit priest: deeply committed to the Society and the Church. On 8 June 2014, felicitating Fr Varghese on his Golden Jubilee in the Society of Jesus, Fr Adolfo Nicolas, the then Superior General wrote, "you were able to bring a commendable sense of commitment, earnestness and interest to bear on the diverse forms of the ministry of writing. I am sure that the message you have communicate through your books will bear abundant fruit in transforming the hearts and lives of your readers. . In addition to the decisive mark, you have made as a Gujarati writer, your life authenticates an austere and ecologically sensitive way of being a Jesuit. This inspires and challenges others to avoid any form of use of natural resources greater than what is necessary."

On 18 March 2020, I spent some time with Varghese at 'Jeevan Darshan' (the Province Infirmery) in Baroda. He was happy to have a first-hand account of the ICPA Meet and he was delighted to hear that many of his friends in the ICPA remembered him fondly. Varghese also seemed a bit down but was determined to return to Ahmedabad soon and to re-commence his normal life. Sadly, that was not to be! He continued to remain in the infirmary with periods of hospitalization for his kidney ailment and other complications. He was finally diagnosed with COVID-19 and succumbed to it 10 April 2021! His ultimate "yes" to the Lord!

Dear Varghese, for most of your 77 years of life on earth, you committedly and courageously epitomized what it meant to be Catholic Press in India! Thank you for the many lessons you have taught us!!! Goodbye and enjoy the eternal happiness till we meet in the next!

—Fr Cedric Prakash, SJ
Ahmedabad



A polygonal with layers of talents and loads of humour: Fr Lijo Mampoothara (1983 - 2021)

Romans 8:28 Says "We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

Fr Lijo Mampoothara was a native of Punnakunna Kerala and was in his 11th year as a priest, and had served in four assignments before he rested in the Lord last month. He was born on 1st January 1983 to a very religious parents namely M.J. Thomas and Lalimma Thomas.

Fr Lijo began his path to priesthood at an early age. He attended St Joseph's High School till his higher secondary studies. His studies toward the priesthood continued for 10 years. He first entered Ankur Kunj minor seminary at Kamptee, Nagpur. Thereafter he was sent to St Charles Major Seminary for his Philosophical Studies and graduation which culminated with a year of regency at S.F.S hostel, Seminary Hills. After Regency he pursued his priestly formation and entered theology again at St Charles Seminary. He was then ordained a priest on 27th April 2011 by Archbishop Abraham Virthakunlagara the previous prelate.



Fr Lijo has served in a variety of assignments since his ordination. His first mission being the assistant at St Francis De Sales, Cathedral Nagpur from 2011-2013. After which he was deputed for further studies at Christ University, Bengaluru for Mass Media and communication. He was the first in the Archdiocese to be a Post graduate in this stream. After his return from Bangalore he was made the PRO and communication centre in charge of the Archdiocese. His advanced tech skills certainly helped his ministry in the Archdiocese. Along with these portfolios he was also teaching at our premier institute St Francis De'sales School and was also the Priest in charge of St Alphonso Church Mahsala from 2013 -2015. During his tenure at Mashala he was also pursuing his Bachelors in Education.

He also took up various construction projects in this parish and was appreciated for his deeper service as a pastor. He was then made the Manager of St Francis De'sales School Narkhed in 2018 which sadly happened to be his last portfolio. Perhaps his most liked assignment being the choir master of the Archdiocese had its roots in his seminary days, when he was sent to learn Visharad Indian classical Sangeet at Pachmari. How can the Archdiocese forget his soul enchanting voice and the classical hymns which he composed such as Bas Jao Mere Dil May. This hymn will be a perpetual reminder of his contribution and presence in the Archdiocese.

He was polygonal with layers of talents and loads of humour. He could pep up any gloomy atmosphere with his jokes and wit. A very loving and caring person, the priest found in him a guide and friend. We could approach him not merely for the official guidance in scholastic matters but also on personal and general issues. His friendliness came across in the perpetual smile and a tinge of wit. He always had the willingness to be of assistance when his position or his expertise was required.

As a fighter he never fought a losing battle even when the time came to say good bye three hours before his departure he was happy to see three of us waving at him Fr. Thomas, Fr. Gonsalo and I. His valiant thumbs up and smile from the other side of the ICU makes our eyes numb. Nevertheless his abiding spirit enamoured us.

The people in the Archdiocese are still missing him, this is the feeling that has gloomed and ruffled us with him being lost. The Archdiocesan fraternity his Grace Most Rev. Elias Gonsalves. our beloved Archbishop, brother priests of Nagpur, the religious and the lay faithful offer our sincere empathy and affection to Fr Lijo's Mother, His younger sister Linju who was so dear to him, his younger brother Linu and the extended family members who are present with us virtually for this month's mind mass for the ineffable loss.

The Archdiocese of Nagpur will pray for the eternal repose of Father Lijo and for the solace of all who mourn his demise, especially his family. Those who knew him closer know and believe that he is enjoying the reward and the bliss he so richly deserves.

—Fr Vivian Lobo
Director Christian Life Commission
Archdiocese of Nagpur
26th May 2021



Sweet Memories

Fr Varghese Paul:

A man who kept ICPA close to his heart!

On the evening of March 30, I had a whatsapp message from Anto Akkara saying, “Bad News. Fr Varghese Paul is critical and semi-conscious. Kindly keep in prayers.”

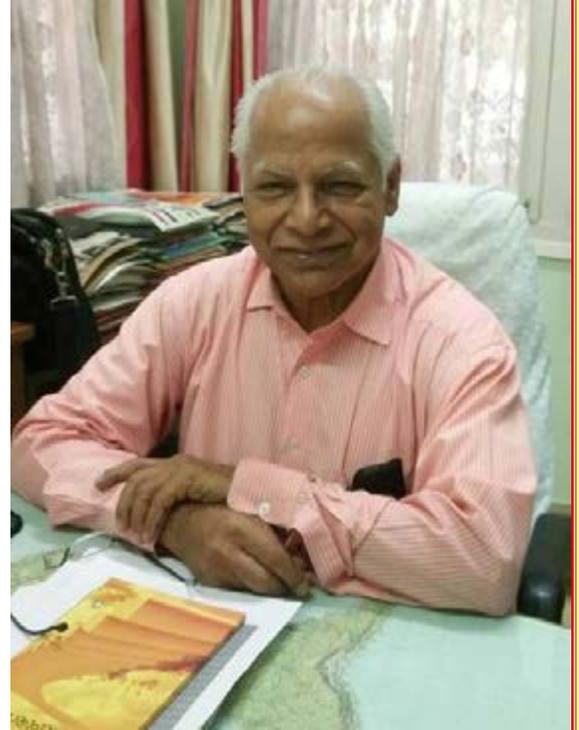
While offering my sincere payers for the speedy recovery of Fr Varghese Paul, it did not dawn on me that Fr Varghese Paul was readying to leave us soon. And finally keeping us all in deep sorrow, he left us on April 10.

The senior most member of the Indian Catholic Press Association, Fr Varghese Paul had not missed any of the annual general body meeting of the Association, but for the 2020 Delhi AGM. As ICPA Secretary, I have observed that Fr Varghese was almost always the first one to confirm his participation in the Association’s AGM.

Fr Varghese Paul also seldom missed the triennial world congress of the International Catholic Union of the Press (UCIP) held in one of the foreign countries. Delhi had the privilege to hold the 14th world congress in 1986. The 22nd and last world congress of the UCIP was held in Ouagadougou, the capital city of Burkino Faso of West Africa in September, 2010 which I had the opportunity to attend in which Fr Varghese Paul also participated.

As the first Executive Editor of the South Asian Religious (SAR) News, the ICPA owes it to Fr Varghese Paul for the news agency’s birth and growth. A bi-lingual writer promoting love and harmony in all his writings, Fr Varghese has written and published 45 books in Gujarati and 4 in English. His books were also translated in to Hindi, Malayalam and Bengali. As such, his death is a great loss to the Association. We will miss him a lot.

— Jose Vincent K. J
Ernakulam



Fr Varghese Paul:

A Missionary of the Word

When the erstwhile Edit aids of the ICPA published an ad in the *New Leader* of a journalism course to be held at Bandra, (then) Bombay in 1984, immediately I responded. Besides my longing to learn to write and the desire to see Mumbai first time, the course, accommodation and the TA were absolutely free. One of the persons teaching us journalism there was Jesuit Father Varghese Paul, whom I met first time here.

He asked the nearly 60 participants from all over the country to write the news from our regions to the *South Asian Religious (SAR) News*, and he also asked us to join the ICPA, which held its general body meeting there immediately after our course. That day I joined the ICPA and began to write for SAR News.

Over the years whenever I attended the ICPA, invariably Fr Varghese Paul was there with his smiles. No more we had then the teacher-student relationship, but as companions. Whenever he disagreed with any issue, he expressed it strongly. He always loved the ICPA and SAR News. Over the years he used to bring many lay persons too from Gujarat. This Malayali priest was then editing the Gujarati monthly Doot.

As I desired to meet Fr V. Paul during my visit to Gujarat, my UCAN companion Binu Alex took me to Father's office. The little room was congested with lots of correspondences with non-Christian Bible enquirers. Busy with his work, he seemed to be very dedicated to it.

At the end of our ICPA meet in Jharsuguda, 2020, we came to the railway station to board the same train; he was travelling to Ahmadabad, and I only four hours journey from there to my station in the neighbouring Chhattisgarh. Before we boarded our different compartments, with his usual unassuming smile he waved his hand, saying, "Bye. See you next year in Delhi."

His absence was felt in our last ICPA meet in Delhi. And it will be felt over the years.

Bye, Father. See you in heaven!

—Fr F. M. Britto
Raipur, Chhattisgarh

Fr Varghese Paul: An Authentic Christian Journalist

Father Varghese Paul who passed into eternity on 10 April 2021 will always remain etched in my memory as one of the staunchest and most committed members of the *Indian Catholic Press Association* [ICPA].

A stickler for rules, he strove to get all and sundry to know and understand the Constitution of the association and to observe it in letter and spirit. Firm in his convictions yet never aggressive in his approach, he endeared himself to all, thus making it easier for just about anyone to relate to him comfortably and confidently.

Though I already knew him as a fellow member of the ICPA for a while, my first personal encounter with him was at the Convent of the Daughters of Saint Paul in Ahmedabad where I was giving one of my earlier formation



sessions for the then prospective members of the Association of Lay Pauline Cooperators and he had come there to celebrate Mass one morning. He came through as a genial soul who, with his solid Jesuit background, seemed to understand well the Pauline charism in relation to the media apostolate and spoke encouragingly during his homily.

I was also fortunate that he took to me well and arranged to take me to Jesuit institutions several miles away from the Jesuit

house in Ahmedabad, passing through Anand where the Jesuits have their Publishing setup. At one of these locations whose name I forget, I was tickled pink to see huge Peacocks doing the jig!

Father Varghese Paul, though a Keralite, prided himself in his Gujarati background. Claiming to have written just one book in Malayalam at that time but some 40 books in Gujarati, he seemed to take great delight in considering himself more a Gujarati than a Malayalee! And as though proving the truism of this sentiment, the largest language group at most of our ICPA events was generally the contingent from Gujarat! He seemed like Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, "...all things to all men" (1 Cor 9:22b). Could there be a more distinguishing mark of a true missionary?

The 2020 meet of the ICPA was the only without his presence. But little did we know then that neither would there be a gathering in 2021 nor would we be likely to have Father Varghese Paul at the next ICPA event, whenever that happens. May his soul rest in the bosom of peace of the Divine Master whom he served so valiantly after the example of Ignatius of Loyola whose mainstay in the founding of the Society of Jesus were the words of the Lord Himself: "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole wide world and suffers the loss of his own soul?" (Mk 8:36) He may not have been one of those whose 'byline' appeared frequently in national periodicals. But knowing the kind of person he was, I guess he would agree that writing cannot be an end in itself whereby one basks in the ensuing limelight but must take the writer beyond the written word to spelling out one's convictions in action, action that involves directly confronting those in authority in relation to what one has written.

Requiescat in pace in nomine Domini dear Father Varghese! And do intercede for us before the Lord for the grace we need to face sincerely the challenges of authentic Christian journalism!

—Ladislau Louis D'Souza
Mumbai

Varghese Paul: A practical dreamer

I would not have been a journalist but for Fr Varghese Paul, who was the founder director of *South Asian Religious News*, or SAR News. He was in Europe to attend a UCIP meeting when I joined the SAR News office in March 1982 as an office assistant. Fr Paul was surprised to see a former Jesuit scholastic in the office on his return. I was recruited by Victor Karunan, who was the accounts office and second in command in SAR News.

My presence seemed to have given wings to one of Fr Paul's great plans — launch an in-service training in journalism. Within three months, he convinced the *Caritas India* to fund the project and started it with one more person — Tony Joseph, who was the younger brother of his friend. We had to attend to all office chores and do reporting and editing under the veteran journalist Vincent D'Souza, who was a former Chief Press Information Officer of India. We also had to help Teresa Furtado, the secretary, in typing the news reports that came in mail. Fr Paul took us for a sumptuous



lunch in a Chinese restaurant in Nehru Place in March 1982 to celebrate the first anniversary of SAR News, a tradition agency followed even after Fr Paul left the agency.

I still recall Fr Paul taking me for my first serious assignment — interviewing Fr Camille Bulcke, a Jesuit Hindi savant who was then admitted to Holy Family Hospital, Delhi. I was with Fr Bulcke for nearly four years. By the time my article was ready, Fr Bulcke had gone to his reward on August 17, 1982. D’Souza wrote a shorter version of my feature as one page news report that we distributed in person to all newspaper offices and news agencies. The Doordarshan used our copy in its bulletin that night. I was so thrilled when *The Herald* of Calcutta published my article in its edit page on September 3, 1982.

Besides the in-service training program, Fr Paul was also keen to develop a reporters’ network in South Asia. In UCIP, he had fought for a separate news agency for South Asia when Fr Bob Astorino, a Maryknoll priest and China expert, suggest a pan-Asian news agency. Fr Paul insisted that South Asia differed greatly with East Asia and South Asia — the main difference, he said, was that South Asia had a “hand” culture while the other two regions were “chopstick’ lovers.

I still remember of some of those people in the SAR News network — Hector Welgampola of Sri Lanka, Fathers Bony Mendis and Inayat Bernard of Pakistan. Among the Indians were Salesian Father C M Paul and George Plathottam, who were then in seminary, Jose Vincent of Hyderabad, Dominic Azavedo of Calcutta, Urban Fernandes of Bombay, Joyce Almeida of Pune, and many others.

Fr Paul had to leave SAR News a year after I joined the news agency. By the time, we had an office assistant — James. So, Tony and I were fully involved in journalism works. Fr Paul’s place was taken by Fr M J Edwin from Kottar diocese, another visionary. When our training ended in July, Tony Joseph went to Hyderabad to join the newly launched English newspaper of the Eenadu group. I was made a reporter-cum sub editor.

Many more joined SAR News as trainees — Joseph Chittilappilly of UCIP, Sr Joselyn (Lissy) Maruthanakuzhy, Jose Vet, Christopher Joseph and some others too.

Even after his departure from SAR New, Fr Paul kept a keen interest in the growth of the agency. I am sure his heart would have broken when it was shut down because of many reasons. However, the indefatigable Fr Paul continued his pioneering spirit in other fields after he left SAR News. I am sure he continuing that in heavens too.

—Jose Kavi
New Delhi





Fr Varghese Paul: Salute to the great writer-activist

Varghese Paul SJ was the first executive director of SAR News. The founder-director. I wonder if SAR News would have seen the light of the day had it not been for his hard, systematic and sustained work. He was an imaginative leader and courageous initiator.

And when he had to get back to his province for another responsibility he travelled to Kanyakumari, met my bishop and convinced him to make me available to succeed him. He met also the Jesuit provincial of Madurai and arranged for Jesuit to replace me in my parish while I leave for SAR News.

He started a journalism internship programme and his first trainees were Jose Kavi and Tony Joseph, both now well-renowned journalists.

In Ahmadabad, he edited, *Dhoot*, the Gujarati monthly. and the Catholic Information Center of Ahmadabad flourished under him.

Writing came very easily to him. He wrote profusely. Even when it came to administrative communications he never fought shy of writing as elaborately as required to do justice to the issue at hand. I don't think any day passed without him putting down anything on paper.

I salute the memory of this great writer-activist.

—Edwin M. John
Kanyakumari

ICPA Press Releases

Respect farmers, repeal farm laws: ICPA

The Indian Catholic Press Association (ICPA) salutes the farmers for maintaining their massive agitation focused and nonviolent. The Association pledges its support in securing their just demands. The Farmers' long march and siege on the borders of Delhi have won international attention and global admiration, both on account of the scale and the manner it is being conducted.

In solidarity with the farmers, who feed the Nation, the Indian Catholic Press Association demands the Central Government to see reason, uphold democratic values and repeal the controversial farm laws.

The government should shun ego and pay heed to the principal stakeholders, the farmers of the country. When the whole farming community has rejected outright the three laws, passed in haste in Parliament, there is only one way left for the government — repeal them.

A special session of the Parliament may be convened to re-enact them, taking the farmers into confidence and addressing all their concerns. Such initiatives would only enhance the democratic credentials of the country and the government.

The farmers and their supporters believe that the controversial laws will take away the state subsidies for agricultural goods, deregulate the prices of basic agricultural commodities and give MNCs de facto control on agriculture and its produce. It must be noted that the belated but concerted efforts of the government to paint a rosy picture have not succeeded, mainly due to trust deficiency.

We note with much concern the attempts to cause division among the agitating farmers, calling them ill-informed, misled, selfish and most despicably 'militants' remote-controlled by vested interests. Indeed, the folks who feed us deserve much more respect. Already thirty of them have died, in the open, in Delhi's extreme winter.

—Ignatius Gonsalves
President -ICPA
18 December 2020

ICPA demands review of Sedition, UAPA cases against journalists and social activists

The Indian Catholic Press Association (ICPA) appeals to the Central and State Governments to review all sedition charges and UAPA cases slapped on Media Persons and Social Activists like the 84-year-old sickly Jesuit priest Stan Swamy. Respecting and imbibing the spirit of the Supreme Court verdict that recently quashed the sedition case against veteran journalist Vinod Dua, the governments, in the best interest of democracy, are duty-bound to follow suit and withdraw cases filed under the 'black laws'.

Fully endorsing the views of Editors Guild of India, and other media organisations, we demand repeal of the draconian and antiquated sedition laws and UAPA as these are misfits in any modern liberal democracy.

It was a year ago that the Himachal Pradesh police registered a sedition case against Dua for uploading a video critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Government on YouTube. A division bench of the apex court consisting of

Justice U.U. Lalit and Justice Vineet Saran not only quashed the sedition charge against him but also underlined the need for Journalists to be protected.

We welcome and laud the apex court's judgment and hope it would bring in justice and relief to journalists and activists who are jailed under sedition charge and UAPA. The verdict also makes it amply clear that a journalist cannot be arrested just because he or she has criticised the Government.

The soul of democracy lies in voicing criticism and expressing dissent. If these rights are taken away from citizens, it would spell the death knell of democracy. The media will become public relation agencies if journalists are devoid of their right to report the voices from the ground even if they are critical of the government. Filing of cases and arrest of journalists in large numbers across the country send out a wrong message and bring out the ulterior motive of the governments.

ICPA, the premier organisation of Catholic periodicals, publishers and journalists working in secular and religious media, is well aware of prudence, objectivity and professional integrity with which the Media should perform its duty as the fourth pillar of democracy. At the same time it should be remembered that a 'trutho-phobic' media would herald the doom of human rights and eventually democracy itself.

—**Ignatius Gonsalves**
President, ICPA
08 June 2021

Fr Stan Swamy, a Martyr

The Indian Catholic Press Association (ICPA) is saddened, and shocked, by the demise of Fr. Stan Swamy SJ and we see it as martyrdom for a great cause. We join the countless number of people in India, and world over, who mourn the irreplaceable loss of a valiant soldier of human rights; on equal measure, he was a fearless activist who tirelessly worked for the tribals, the poor and marginalised.

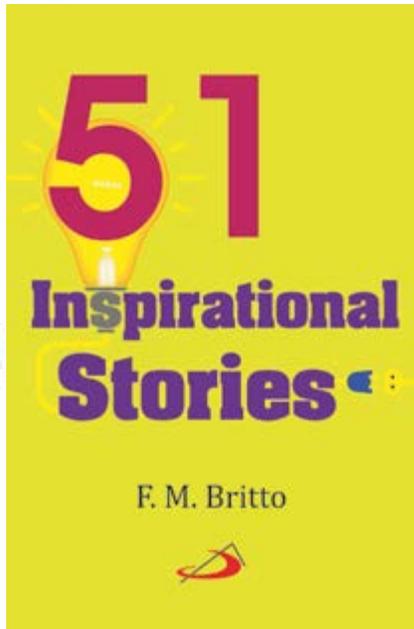
Questions regarding his arrest, incarceration, denial of bail and the sad circumstances of his death are going to disturb the collective conscience of the nation for a long time to come. The questions that beg for answers are: Why did Fr. Stan have to die as a prisoner charged under various sections of the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act? What did the octogenarian who was suffering from debilitating diseases do, other than serving the tribals and the poor, to be put behind bars, denying bail for months together? Wasn't his arrest a part of the strategy to throttle voices of dissent and outright infringement of civil liberties? All pillars of our democracy will have to answer these questions at some point of time.

In Fr. Stan, the marginalized sections had found their saviour. Now the poor are left poorer in his absence. He was a true disciple of Jesus Christ and a true Indian who was passionate about securing justice for all, especially the last and the least, as visualised and assured in our Constitution. In his heroic sufferings and virtual martyrdom he has emerged stronger and more relevant.

The ICPA repeats its appeal to the Central and State governments to review the draconian laws like UAPA, and numerous cases against activists, journalists and others who are languishing in various jails across the country. Some of the recent pronouncements of the Supreme Court and other courts should make any responsible government to take a fresh look at these laws. The sad and most unfortunate passing away of Fr Stan should work as a catalyst in this regard. That would be the greatest tribute to him.

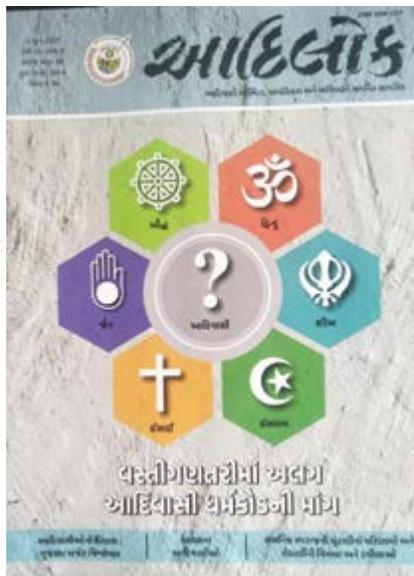
— **Ignatius Gonsalves**
President, ICPA.
06 July 2021

Congratulations!



Congratulations to Fr F. M. Britto for his 7th book titled "51 Inspirational Stories" published by Better Yourself Books, Mumbai.

www.betteryourselfbooks.com



Dr Roman Bhatia has joined as the Editorial Board member of Gujarati Magazine Aadilok. This magazine caters to tribal identity, rights, culture, problem and their uniqueness. Congratulations and best wishes to Dr Roman.