

Pilgrimage to Kolkata, India ~ October 22~29, 2008

*MAKE us worthy, Lord, to serve our
brothers and sisters
throughout the world who live
and die in poverty and hunger.*

*GIVE THEM, through our hands, this day their daily bread;
and by our understanding love, give peace and joy.*

*LORD, make me a channel of Thy peace that,
where there is hatred, I may bring love;
that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness;
that where there is discord, I may bring harmony;
that, where there is error, I may bring truth;
that, where there is doubt, I may bring faith;
that, where there is despair, I may bring hope;
that, where there are shadows, I may bring light;
that where there is sadness, I may bring joy.*

*LORD, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted,
to understand than to be understood;
to love, than to be loved;
for it is by forgetting self that one finds;
it is by forgiving that one is forgiven;
it is by dying that one awakens to eternal life.*

How did this pilgrimage come about?

Vicki Schmidt, Executive Director of Theresians, suggested a pilgrimage to Kolkata, India would be an excellent educational and spiritual experience for Theresians to have as an optional trip after the Theresian International Conference in October 2008. Having served in leadership for the Co-Workers of Mother Teresa from 1986-1995, Vicki has many contacts that make a pilgrimage such as this possible. Upon reflecting on the history of Theresian World Ministry it is also significant to note that the Ministry Dimension of Theresians came about because of a meeting that Rita Metyko, member of Fifth Dimension Community in Houston Texas, had with Mother Teresa in the 1970's. When Rita asked Mother Teresa what she thought of Theresians and the four dimensions we had at that time she challenged Rita to encourage Theresians to a fifth dimension of ministry. Upon returning home and sharing that story with Theresians the organization decided to add Ministry as our fifth dimension and subsequently, Rita and her community chose to name their community Fifth Dimension.

This link to Theresians is an important one for our own historical purposes and also the fact that Mother Teresa chose her name after St. Therese of Lisieux. Inside Mother Teresa's private room at the Motherhouse in Kolkata, a picture of the Little Flower is prominently displayed.

What is the purpose?

The purpose of the pilgrimage is to experience first-hand the vocation of the Missionaries of Charity, the order founded by Mother Teresa in 1950 in Kolkata, India. (The Indian people chose to return to the original spelling of their city several years ago. During British rule it was called Calcutta.) Their vocation is to provide free and whole-hearted service to the poorest of the poor and to live a strict vow of poverty themselves. Since founding the Missionaries of Charity (M.C.) in 1950, the order now has over 5,000 sisters,

450 Brothers and 90 priests in over 800 houses throughout the world. Just since Mother Teresa's death in 1997 the order has opened close to 90 additional houses around the world.

It is important to accentuate the concept of pilgrimage. This week in Kolkata will not be a tourist excursion in any way. It will be a Journey of Awareness in every sense as each day will begin with Mass at the Motherhouse Chapel at 6 a.m. each morning. This holy time in the early morning will set the tone for each day as we travel around the city visiting various houses run by the Missionaries of Charity. More than 100 sisters and novices live at the Motherhouse and we will be joining them for Mass.

The work of the Missionaries of Charity includes many beautiful acts of charity and service. They are most known for taking care of the most vulnerable in society, those who are dying, abandoned infants and children, the frail elderly, the severely handicapped, the homeless, those living with AIDS, and mental illness. The Sisters, Brothers and priests live these ministries with great joy. It is their life of prayer that gives them the strength they need to care for so many desperately poor. During our stay we will visit the following ministries:

- Shishu Bhavan orphanage
- Nirmal Hriday Home for the Dying at Kalighat
- Gandhiji Prem Nivas Leprosy Center run by the Brothers at Titagarh
- Home handicapped men at Howrah Station run by the Brothers
- Udayan, a home for children of lepers
- Ankura Ankala Women's Center – provides safe haven for abused and abandoned women

In seeing their life's work in person you will see rooms full of the most vulnerable, infants that have been abandoned, the dying they have picked up from the streets, profoundly handicapped children that have been left at their doorsteps and the physically and mentally handicapped adults. You will have an opportunity to pray with those who are dying and hold the children that need the warmth of human touch. It is important to know the poor, to pray with them and to let them know they are loved.

It is a profound experience to bear witness to this poverty that the Missionaries of Charity serve. It puts us in touch with our own vulnerability and challenges us to see how we can best reach out to those around us. Mother Teresa would often say, "You do not need to come to Kolkata to serve the poor, you need to serve them in your own neighborhood, your own family." It is my hope that this will be a time of transformation for you, a time when you will reflect on your own poverty as well as be witness to the poverty of others. There is so much to see, even daily living on the streets of Kolkata is an incredulous human story that unfolds right before your eyes. The people of India, the poor of India, live with an attitude of acceptance of their poverty and they live with great joy. I'm quite sure you will be deeply touched by their spirit.

Where Will the Group Stay?

Those sharing in the week will stay at the historic British owned, Fairlawn Hotel in Kolkata. It is a short ride to the Motherhouse by taxi. Many missionaries who come to volunteer in Kolkata will stay somewhere on Sudder Street.

Fairlawn Hotel (Be sure to read about their history – really cool !)

13/A Sudder Street

Kolkata, 700016

Phone: 011 91 33 2252-1510 8766 or 8767

FAX: 011 91 33 2252 1835

Website: www.fairlawnhotel.com

The Theresian office will reserve all rooms of those participating. Upon checking out of the hotel on 10/29 each person can pay for their own rooms. Estimated Cost of Rooms - Double Room – 2 twin beds : INR2400 (rupees) plus tax or **US\$60.00** There are also triple rooms which we'll be utilizing for some of the women. The cost of the three bed rooms is less. Every room is en-suite. I do not have the final cost at this writing but believe it will be close to INR2400 (Rupees).

Airfare, Visas and Related Costs?

Those attending the Theresian International Conference in Bangkok, Thailand, October 17-19 can easily book an inexpensive flight from Bangkok to Kolkata. Since we will all be leaving from Kolkata together, the Theresian office will arrange for the flight for those who are committed to going on the pilgrimage. Vicki will let you know the cost later.

Please Note: When you are booking your flight for Bangkok, your return home will need to be booked from Kolkata on October 29th.

The cost of transportation during our stay in Kolkata will be by van or coach service. Those costs will be divided evenly among all of us. I do not have those costs at this writing but will inform later. The majority of our meals will be eaten at the Fairlawn Hotel and each person can charge their meals to their room.

India does require a Visa. When I looked into their visa process I discovered that the Indian Embassies have now outsourced their Visa process. To find out the new process visit the following website for instructions: <http://indiavisa.travisaoutsourcing.com/get-a-visa.html>. It is no longer possible to go through your local Indian Embassy to obtain a visa.

You can also use Perry Visa service and for a fee they can process the visa for you – www.perryvisa.com. There fees range from \$35-\$75. They are a firm in Chicago I have used before. Thailand does not require a visa for tourist visits of 30 days or less.

What about food and water safety?

We found it very easy to eat all our meals at the Hotel. It was a clean facility with friendly staff. After traveling around the city all day it was comforting to know that we could eat at the hotel. Water precautions are important. Bottled water was available through the hotel and it is important to drink and brush your teeth with only bottled water. And to keep you mouth closed in the shower!!

What about safety in general?

In any developing country where there are a large number of desperately poor people there is always the risk of being taken advantage of or robbed. We did not experience any problems but we were never out late at night and were very careful about our personal belongings when we were out. We kept what we carried with us to a minimum.

It is difficult to walk through the streets of Kolkata. Often you would be surrounded with a group of children begging for food or money for food. While sometimes children are used by adults to obtain money, more often they are just hungry children wanting to help feed their families. You can choose to keep small coins on you to give to them or just offer them a kind smile and a blessing. It can be an overwhelming experience to be surrounded by a group of very persistent children and sometimes adults.

Even immediately outside our hotel there were people living on the streets, women, men, and children. Every block is an unbelievable scene of humanity. They bathe on the streets, urinate in the streets, they pick through the heaps of garbage looking for food. It is a heart wrenching vision to absorb. And amazingly you will find them living with joy in the midst all their poverty. It is truly amazing. Always respond with love.

Deadline for Registration

The deadline for registering for this pilgrimage is **April 1, 2008**, however the trip is now full with **25** participants. The reason for this early registration is so we can all enter into a period of prayer and study

before making the pilgrimage. There are several books about the life of Mother Teresa that I will recommend for those participating in the pilgrimage.

Mother Teresa – by Kathryn Spink (www.kathrynspink.com) Harper Collins 1997
Available through Amazon.com

Come Be My Light by Fr. Brian Kolodiejchuk, M.C.

Works of Love Are Works of Peace – by John Collopy
Available through Amazon.com

Visit www.motherteresa.org, the official website of the Missionaries of Charity

Medical Precautions:

Please consult your physician regarding necessary medical precautions. You may want to inquire about the following:

- Malaria Pills
- Updated Tetanus
- Yellow Fever
- Asian Encephalitis (If you have respiratory health issues you may want to consider this.)
- TB update - The Homes for the Dying often have TB patients
- Hepatitis A – B – C
- Typhoid
- Pneumonia

Also, for those who have respiratory issues, the air quality in Bangkok and Kolkata could be an issue. I have mild asthma and wished that I had brought a mask with me, especially while riding in taxis with the windows down because of the heat. The exhaust from so many vehicles was overwhelming at times.

Participants:

1. Mary Elizabeth Anderson*
2. Mary Ann Burns
3. Bernadine Castagnola Carpenter *
4. Robert Wayne Carpenter *
5. Patricia Drake
6. Peter Edmonds
7. Kathleen Edmonds
8. Elizabeth Edmonds
9. Barbara Jean Erdmann *
10. David Erdmann
11. Denise Michaels Fredette *
12. Barbara Joan Fuhrwerk *
13. Mary Harnden
14. Camille Laperouse Jarrell
15. Edna Lucio
16. Ellen O. Middleton *
17. Charlene Miller

18. Anne Murphy
19. Mary Permoda
20. Elisabeth Ainsworth Rareshide *
21. Kurt Schleyhahn
22. Victoria Susan Schmidt *
23. Kathy Scott
24. Mary Elizabeth Staudt *
25. Jacquelyn Robbert Stich*

Questions?

If you have any questions about the journey to India please contact Vicki Schmidt at the Theresian office: (217-726-5484 or by email at vschmidt55@theresians.org).

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