

WHY THIS ASHRAM?

For God's experience..
experience of the "living God"

1. Experience of God in Nature

God in the handiwork of all his creation
His self-revelation, for generations of men
His outpouring of knowledge, wisdom, love, joy
His initial pedagogy of Faith and Hope
His restless, continuing activity to maintain
His invitation to share with Him that creative
joy, following His footsteps, building blocks
of the Universe..

2. Experience of Christ in the poor:

Jesus in His chosen, privileged human environment
among the simple, the poor, the wayward, humble,
among the labouring class, insecure and lonely
among the illiterate and less attractive,
among the barren hills, deserted strands,
in the hovels, huts, lean-tos, tents, sheds
"to whom He revealed the Father" what the
wise men could not understand.

3. The Spirit in the Community building:

The Spirit is the community builder, not only
between the Father and the Son, but among
all believers, sharers in the faith and searchers
for truth. As we pray here with all faith
He is for that reason the Church-builder,
not as a fortress for the safety of a few,
but as the haven of all who seek to find God
The future of Unity for the Church is his work
the real Pentecost of the Good News....

THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS 1985 - 2005

It was the slow penetrating action of the SPIRIT we believe
Who guided us, year after year, to find a progressive way for
the Spiritualisation of our social
commitment to the poor. This happened in
the course of the first ten years of our work
mainly during the annual "retreats" of
volunteers in various ashrams of India:
Bandra, Sitagarha, Bangalore, Hyderabad,
but mainly in the Shantivanam Ashram of
Fr Bede Griffiths. He guided us to a
Spirituality of the Poor and the *Bhakti*
Marga.



Fr Bede Griffiths

Next, the fishermen on the Eastcoast among whom we
were working for 10 years, insisted we should have an "inspiring"
place among them along the coast. A piece of coastal
wasteland was indicated, along the sandy shores of the
Buckingham Canal, with only a lone
palm tree here and there, but no water. It
was the Providential sign and challenge to
launch our ship. On
February 25th, 1985-



Fishermen of the area at work

as the Sun-rise position on that will forever guarantee- some
25 volunteers and villagers joined hands there.

It took only a few weeks for the Founder-Director, Fr.
Michael A. Windey, SJ to mark ways through the sand, plant
the boundary trees, set up a solar still (for drinking water) and
construct the first river grass-roofed mud houses for residence.

It was more of an adventure than of a pre-designed project, but by Easter we gathered around the Velangani Shrine to thank an enthusiastic beginning.

And for the unforeseen wholehearted support of SONNENHAUS, a small beginning ashram also near the old Beuron Abbey in the Donau-Valley of the Black Forest in Germany, where **Fr BERNARD SCHERER, SJ** had begun a few years earlier a “Third World-oriented ecumenical fasting and meditation centre, linked from the start with us as spiritual sponsors of “village renewal.”



Fr B Scherer, SJ

To find a “managing Director” for the infrastructural requirements of the yet nameless Ashram, out of the blue (heaven) one dedicated “mover” for the liberation of the poor, landed in Nellore and Sagar Sangam. It was **Bro Paul from Australia**- initiator and organizer of many leprosy centers in India. Seemingly in a flicker of the eye, he brought young helpers, built our elevated prayer-half circle, a kitchen, and a dozen other things to live by, before he traveled further in search of leprosy-care centers.



Bro Paul

By that time the Ashram had a name (Sagar Sangam: where sky and earth and oceans meet), a couple of wells, cattle and a workshop in the footsteps of Benedict and Bernard, a couple of octagonal halls for conferences and liturgical services and a couple of residences for villagers and volunteers. The big water-ponds were dug, a pony-cart carried us to town, and three windmills provided some saline water.

Fr. Ceyrac SJ, and Fr. Claude SJ were among the frequent spiritual guides.

The annual “spiritual camps” routine brought hundreds of volunteers and villagers, sisters and brothers, artists and novices, and with them came from the North a professional Ashram-builder **Swami Narendranand, SJ** from Bihar, who



Swami Narendranand, SJ



Fr T Koyippuram, sj

led the Ashram during 5 years, and was the first to have his tomb there in 1955. Meanwhile, another Jesuit-Spiritual Director **Fr Thomas Koyippuram, SJ** volunteered and won the hearts of the people, with “ his long beard and his golden heart” as was said. Their kindness and patience, and their simple lifestyle helped to make the Ashram what it is today.

Following their leadership, and the unrelenting work of the Director, the services of the Ashram accelerated and the registered name “Ashram of the Holy Spirit” became a rather unique model of what the “spiritualization of the services of the poor” could mean and be. The range of services expanded annually, including also the foundation of a Children’s Village with the help of a Swiss **Mr. Jorg Gerster** that



Fr M A Windey, SJ

believes in “doing” more than in “talking” (2001) and in making children the instruments of peace in broken homes.

Successively some priests of the diocese of Nellore were offered by **Bishop Pudota Balaswamy**, the president of the

Sagar Sangam Executive Committee, to help in taking care of the ashram's activities. They are **Fathers Lourdu, Hrudayaraj, Balraj, Leo Charles and Arul Raj.**



Bishop P Balaswamy

Among the regulars to the Ashram over the years were **Fr Barry O'Loughlin, SJ** and **Bro Martin** from Sonnenhaus.

On a visit to the Ashram on February 22nd 2003 **Fr Barry** wrote: "I treasure the experience of being with Adult volunteers and small children in a multi-lingual, inter-religious, ecumenical sea-land-sky environment. The joy and peace I experience was a gift of the Spirit."

No doubt Sagar Sangam is an ashram of the Holy Spirit.

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SAGAR SANGAM : A PERSPECTIVE

1. The Origin and Basic Inspiration of the Ashram:

- provide a spiritual renewal and starting base for mostly young people who are serious about living, working, learning, with the poor particularly in a village environment.
- guided by the open (Christian) vision of VRO accepting the pre- and post-Christian view of prophetic challenge within each religion leading up to service-beyond self as faith.

2. Basic Characteristics of the Ashram & conditions

- a sincere search for social simplicity of life
- what Gandhi called "voluntary simplicity" and St Francis & St Clare, experimented with.

- a readiness for active service in villages, particularly the small and the weak ones to make them "signs" of social renewal.

2. The 5 Dimensions of the Ashram –service scope

A/1- the inner core: spiritual assistance, guidance for village-people, workers, leaders.

This means: spiritual camps, retreats, meets from 3 to 30 days, with a chosen "guide/guru"

A/2- the vocational assistance to young people in the "Sagar Sangam Seva Sangh" perspective for a period of up to 6 months, during which testing of attitudes, interest, skills is done.

B/3- the "religious historial" open-air-exhibition where the gradual religious awakening of mankind will be demonstrated through visual artistic representation (on B-territory)

B/4- the village service-activities among fishermen specially in VRO and other coastal villages (with a health-centre base; and school-range)

C/5- the Children's Village project for disadvantaged children from mainly rural areas, to make them future "family-supporters" and defenders, (age group 5-15) in some 20 "families."

Conclusion: An ashram that will work under an open-team system of religious and lay-participants, in the framework of village renewal objectives.

THE ASHRAM HYMN



SPIRIT OF GOD

Spirit of God in the dawn of Creation
Spreading the starlight all over the sky
Spirit of joy and of celebration
fill our hearts, put soul in our song
and help us along
blow blow till we all be
the voice of the waves that are born of the sea

Spirit of God in the glory of morning
spreading the starlight all over the land
Spirit of god in the flowers adorning

fill our hearts, put soul in our song
and help us along
blowing and blowing till we all be
like heavens that are driven by wind from the sea

Spirit of God in the burning hot noontime
chasing the shadows and warming the earth
Spirit of God in the freshness of springtime
fill our hearts, put soul in our song
and help us along
Come, come till we all be
like scent of the flowers of the first appletree.

Spirit of God in the quiet of evening
covering the earth with a blanket of peace
Spirit of God in the rush of the bright stars
fill our hearts, put soul in our song
and help us along
Show, show, show us the way
how loving to serve and with faith to pray

Spirit of God in the eyes of the failing
calling on us to be at their side
Spirit of God in the long hours of caring
fill our hearts, put sould in our song
and help us along
Come, come, and show us the way
how loving to serve and with faith to pray.

M A Windey SJ