

“Extraordinary revolution” as Jesuit Mission turns 70 in the Ignatian Year.

It's no coincidence that Jesuit Mission's 70th anniversary falls on the Ignatian Year, which celebrates 500 years since St Ignatius' cannonball wound and his subsequent transformation to a life of total service to others.

The foundations of Jesuit Mission began in 1951 with the first Australian missionaries sent to serve indigenous communities in India's north-eastern Jharkhand state. These men were answering their vocation and following in the teachings of St Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus.

As 31st July marks the feast day of St Ignatius, today's Jesuits reflect on the global impact of the burgeoning mission in India. Now a Jesuit Province, the work of those early missionaries in Hazaribag has been instrumental in delivering essential education, health and advocacy programs with the support of its Australian benefactors.

“Those early missionaries were committed to serving the local people with a sincere heart, that allows them to thrive across many marginalised communities and countries today,” says Fr Quyen Vu SJ, Australian Jesuit Provincial.

Fr Quyen served on Jesuit projects in Timor-Leste and Cambodia before his appointment as Provincial at the beginning of this year. He says the commitment displayed by those early Australian missionaries in India seven decades ago has inspired similar projects elsewhere, and has demonstrated the Australian Jesuit's influence in modelling lasting change among those living on the margins.

“I think because we are an island, we think we are isolated, but we can influence and contribute a lot to Southeast Asia and the Pacific and beyond that,” he says.

“We have all these wonderful resources, people, legacy and institutions. I think that's the main idea for the Australian Jesuits to assist our neighbouring countries, because they are starting anew and they lack resources.”

Those resources were first deployed by the six Australian Jesuits, who travelled to India in 1951 to assist their Belgian counterparts with the mission they'd established in Ranchi in the late 19th century. After working collaboratively for several years, the Australians took over the northern part of the Belgian mission and renamed it Hazaribag.

In the ensuing decades, numerous Australian and New Zealand Jesuits followed in those early missionaries' footsteps, committing to a life of service among the region's



dispossessed tribal and lower-caste people. Their first school, established in 1951, catered to a handful of children from Kolkata and the children of mine workers in Bihar state.

Today, the Jesuits are leaders in education in India, educating tens of thousands of students across primary, secondary and tertiary facilities. They also advocate on behalf of workers and the many tribal people dispossessed of their land, offer pastoral services in remote communities and, most recently, have played a crucial role in the delivery of COVID-related health services.

"It's been an extraordinary revolution, really," reflected missionary Fr Phil Crotty SJ in an interview before his recent death at the age of 89.

"It's made [Jesuits] more human. It's not me to you, it's us. It's not that I'm giving you something, but we're sharing something together. [But] it takes a long time – you've got to learn the language, you've got to learn the culture, you've got to grow into something."

The Hazaribag Jesuit's many programs have been largely funded by the generosity of Jesuit Mission supporters for the last 70 years. The organisation's major fundraising events (Jesuit Mission Bazaar in Sydney and Maytime Fair in Melbourne) would have also celebrated 70th anniversaries this year, but sadly had to be cancelled again due to COVID restrictions. These community-driven events have been instrumental in supporting vulnerable people overseas for decades, and will continue to do so in the future.

"The wonderful cooperation and support that we're feeling from Jesuit Mission – not only financial support, but feeling that we're part of one particular team, and all working together – I think it helps us a lot," says Fr Bob Slattery SJ, one of the Australian Jesuits still working in India.

St Ignatius' teachings continue to inspire the work of Jesuit Mission today across 15 countries in South East Asia and Africa. To find out more visit jesuitmission.org.au

-END-

Media Contact:

Zach Martorana, Communications Officer, Jesuit Mission
zach.martorana@jesuitmission.org.au 02 8918 4109



CAPTION: Young student's sharing a smile at the Jesuit-run St Joseph's School in Tarwa, India. The school provides quality education for Dalit children, one of the most marginalised groups in India.

Supporting Links:

Jesuit Mission Home page

- jesuitmission.org.au

About Jesuit Mission

Jesuit Mission works in over 15 countries across Asia and Africa to uphold the innate dignity of people living with the effects of poverty, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable. Funds from our supporters:

- Break cycles of poverty through teaching and education
- Protect the health of communities by providing medical care and programs that improve access to clean water and toilets
- Develop independent, sustainable communities through livelihood training and income-generating projects
- Provide vulnerable individuals with pastoral care, social inclusion and advocacy
- Support refugees in crisis
- Enable effective disaster response and relief.