

International Friendship Day
Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ

I am proud of one thing that I have a big circle of friends at international level. I have got the rare opportunity of living with friends hailing from many nations. I have lived international communities in England and Italy for my post-graduate studies. I was able to study French and Spanish in France and Spain respectively.

After studying journalism at London I got a rare opportunity of doing internship in the office of a family magazine St. Anthony Messenger (four lakh circulation) at Cincinnati, U.S.A. Then, as the Executive Director and Chief Editor of South Asian Religious (SAR) News Service, I visited more than once the countries in South Asia.

My journalism studies and work at international level led me to join the biggest international body of journalists: The International Catholic Union of the Press (UCIP) and brought me many friends around the world. As time passed I served 24 years as member of UCIP Council including three years as its Board Member and participated in eight World Congresses.

The responsibilities with UCIP helped me to participate many international meetings around the world and also organize / or conduct journalism workshops in countries like Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Through UCIP I got the opportunity to come into contact with the people of most countries of the world.

Today I can say proudly that, I will find a friend or at least a friend of a friend in any corner of the world! All the same, during the year, if I exclude my personal web site www.vpaulsj.org, I hardly find time to keep contact with my international friends.

So the International Friendship Day gives me a golden opportunity to remember my friends in my country and abroad. Still I won't be able to communicate through letters with all my friends abroad. But they certainly know that they have a place in my love, remembrance and prayers.

I am very grateful to the International Friendship Day that it reminds me to remember all my friends in a special way with love and pray for them. This year I plan to reach my friends by putting this article both in English and Gujarati in my bi-lingual, personal web site.

The International Friendship Day has its origin in USA. The country started the International Friendship Day as a holiday in 1935 to remember and honour the friends of America.

Now not only in America but the people all over the world celebrate International Friendship Day on August 3 every year. Today more than ever there is great need and also the facilities to celebrate International Friendship Day. In the striking world the globalization the borders of the countries are forgotten. Science and knowledge are no more confined with in the walls of the universities and the country borders.

On the one hand international communication and contact with people have crossed all borders and so also hate and crimes at international level! So there is great need to counter the evil culture of enmity and even wars between people and countries.

Now let us examine a few ways and means to establish and promote international friendship. First, a person can search for friends anywhere in the world in the internet according to his/her taste and interest or his/her field of specialization. Using search engines like google one can find and establish friendships with persons across the world.

In looking for friends in the internet one needs to be cautious and watchful. One cannot establish friendship with any Dick and Harry, John or Jane. One needs to look for a person who walks on the path of morality and justice. A long-standing friendship can be established only on true love with people who abide by ethics and law.

Second, another way to establish and maintain friendship at international level is by organizing one's holidays and visiting holiday places in one's own country or abroad. Thanks to the facilities of travel by road, rail and air, today many people travel across the country and the world. There are many holiday resorts and tourist interested places in our country like Taj Mahal at Agra, where foreigners as well as Indians gather in large numbers. Ancient palaces, museums, gardens and sea resorts are some of the special tourist attractions in India. These places offer opportunities to intermingle with people of different cultures and races; various countries and regions and establish friendships at international level.

Third, many colleges and universities conduct Students' Exchange Programmes for collegians. Enterprising students at graduate and postgraduate levels can make use of these opportunities for building up friendships and promoting them at international level.

Fourth, in our times of globalization, people who are working in multinational companies in India and in foreign lands, get ample opportunities to make friends at international levels. But many people do not rise above their caste and creed and confine themselves like frogs in a well to their own families and limited circle of friends in their caste and community!

One should remember one thing specially in building up friendship at international level. One should not nurse hidden agenda while looking for friends in far away places. All the same, there is much give and take in international friendships. International friends share and exchange many things like cultural values, religious views and social etiquettes. I believe that my international friendships have enriched me with a worldwide vision, abilities to intermingle with people of all cultures and races as my own brothers and sisters. I also got from my international friendships the spirit of tolerance, wide knowledge and wisdom, which come from extensive travelling.

How do I celebrate International Friendship Day? I am going to send an e-mail letter to many of my friends abroad. In the letter I will include "A-Z Friendship", which I got from a friend by e-mail. A sentence, which begins with each of the alphabet, says something interesting and specific about friends. For instance, the first sentence says a friend "Accepts you as you are." And the sentence, which begins with the last letter 'Z', says: a friend "Zaps you back to reality."

This year on International Friendship Day on August 3 is good occasion to read “A-Z Friendship”. You may read the whole “A-Z Friendship” in my web site field “Latest Article”. Click on it and this article and “A-Z Friendship” will appear on your screen. You can read the text of “A-Z Friendship” and find out what types of friends you have. You can also examine yourself what type of friend you are to others.

A-Z Friendship

A Friend ...

A ccepts you as you are.

B elieves in you.

C alls you just to say “hi.”

D oesn't give up on you.

E nvisions the whole of you (even the unfinished parts).

F orgives your mistakes.

G ives unconditionally.

H elps you.

I nvites you over.

J ust likes being with you.

K eeps you close at heart.

L oves you for who you are.

M akes a difference in your life.

N ever judges you.

O ffers support.

P icks you up.

Q uiets your fears.

R aises your spirits.

S ays nice things about you.

T ells you the truth when you need to hear it.

U nderstands you.

V alues you.

W alks beside you.

X -plains things you don't understand.

Y ells when you won't listen.

Z aps you back to reality.

Show your friends how much you care...

Send this to everyone you consider a FRIEND.

If it comes back to you, then you'll know you have a circle of friends.