

## **Fr. Xavier A Dynamic Youth Leader**

**Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ**

Xavier Manjooran joined the Society of Jesus in 1962 and did his novitiate at Vinayalaya, Andheri Bombay (1<sup>st</sup> yr) and Mt Abu, Rajasthan(2<sup>nd</sup> yr). After his juniorate studies at Mumbai when he came back to Mt. Abu to study Gujarati in 1965 I was there as a second year novice. From then on I have known Xavier as we are both Jesuit missionaries in Gujarat hailing from Kerala.

As a Jesuit seminarian Xavier showed his dynamic leadership qualities and tenacious love for the down trodden people, called Dalits in India. While studying in the college and later as a boarding prefect for hostel boys he organized leadership and motivational study camps for high school and college going boys and girls. Thus from the seminary days Xavier established himself as a born youth leader.

Xavier conducted his first leadership camp for youth in 1969. It was followed by many more. Many of the youth who participated in his camps and formed Tarunoday Mandal (Youth Association) have done extremely well in life to become advocates, judges, teachers, professors and officers in government private establishments. They in turn contributed to the upliftment of their Dalit communities.

Recognizing his talents and abilities as a youth leader the Provincial of Gujarat Jesuits appointed Fr. Xavier to full time Youth ministry – a first the Province after his ordination as a Jesuit Priest in 1975. As time passed the Tarunoday Mandal camps led to the establishment an institution for youth ministry named Asha Deep, a Centre for Human Development.

With leadership and study camps, combined with job orientated courses through Asha Deep, Fr. Xavier helped good many young boys and girls from Dalit communities to qualify themselves and compete with the so called upper class youth both in the job markets and leadership. During these years Xavier stated another youth organization called All Gujarat Student Development Movement (AGSDM) for the students of marginalized communities, irrespective of any religion of other consideration.

This movement (AGSDM) was later affiliated to a national student movement called "All India Catholic University Federation" (AICUF) which is also associated with the international "Pax Romana". A few of the youth have done exceptionally well through Asha Deep services that they have attained national and international name and fame. Some young men and women trained by Asha Deep have become office bearers of national students' organizations and of international youth movements.

As part of Asha Deep initiatives Fr. Xavier started 'Ankur' a movement for school-going

boys and girls mainly of Dalits and marginalized communities. Promising boys and girls are selected and special coachings are given to them during vacations and holidays and are accompanied during the academic year through guidance and counseling. These boys and girls under 'Ankur' have done exceptionally well not only in their academic studies but also in other areas of extra curricular activities.

With his initiatives and dynamism Fr. Xavier expanded his youth ministry, first starting in Kheda District, to cover the entire Gujarat state and also whole of India and later the entire South Asia. Thanks to his initiatives Xavier became the first Secretary of Jesuit Youth Ministry in South Asia. As Secretary he persuaded all Jesuit Provincial Superiors in South Asia to appoint coordinators of youth ministries in their respective provinces and promote the youth, especially work among the unorganized and unreached youth of South Asia.

Presently Fr. Xavier is the Director of Rajpipla Social Service Society (RSSS) from 2000. RSSS was started by a Jesuit visionary and pioneer Fr. Joseph Idiakunnel in 1975-75 to train tribal people and to fight against their exploitation. The Free Legal Aid programme was started by Joseph in Gujarat as an activity of RSSS. Impressed by it the then Chief Justice of India, Justice Bhagavati studied RSSS Free Legal Aid programme and then promoted such programmes for the whole of India.

While continuing all the activities of RSSS to empower the tribal people, the ever dynamic Fr. Xavier has launched a post graduate diploma programme for tribal youth in Integrated Community Rural Development (ICRD) in collaboration with the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) in Hyderabad, under the ministry of rural Development of the government of India.. A number of tribal youth have already secured post graduate diplomas in Rural Management and are working for the liberation and development of their tribal communities.

While working for youth or in empowering the tribals, Xavier as a dynamic leader gives himself totally to the cause. Xavier's life and works show his love for the poor and the tribals. He is committed to the Ignatian ideal of the 'magis', the more or the greater glory of God and of his people.