

Figure 1: From MGA

Montfortan Global Associates - August 20

MGA

August 9, 2020

Abstract

MGA stands for Montfort Global Associates. MGAs are sprouts, offshoots from the trunk of Montfort - evolved into trees in Montfortean Garden of Spirituality and Forests of Social Action - transplanted across the globe consistently over the last ten decades to take paths untravelled with out the protection and boundaries of the walls of a community .

MGA colleagues have come forward to foster connectivity and bridge these islands of Montfortean spirit.

Our colleagues from different places have expressed their desire to stay connected cutting across time and distance.

Special to this edition of MGA Snippets is the Experience Sharing from Sebastian Vattakunnel. He is from Kanjirappally who joined the Kazipet Juniorate in 1963 along with his cousin Late AV Sebastian. He belongs to the 1966 Eachinkadu Novitiate batch. Consequent to his first profession in 1968 and Post Novitiate, he had his graduation from Loyola Madras. Sebastian was in Montfort Yercaud when he responded to his Second Calling to the African Continent. He is one of the few who was led to the deserts of African continent and his mission continues to inspire the lives of many in South Africa. Sebastian Vattakunnel was honored with a Papal medal called Benimeranti by the Papal Nuncio in February 2020 - to the best of one's knowledge, probably this being the first among MGAs and in the Congregation till date.

The Newsletter begins a new section " Random Rememberances" from Jo Pathyil. He takes you through the river of time to encounter with persons who made lives meaningful to themselves and people around with their inspired living. Jo Pathyil needs no introduction- a role model for many across the globe.

Zoom Call on 8th August keeps up the connectivity visually and digitally .

1 MGA Zoom Meeting 19.00 Hours IST 8th Aug 2020

MGAs from different places kept up their promise to hold their pre-decided Zoom Meeting on 8th August 2020. There were 24 participants 50 percent more than earlier meet.

The Participants included Jo Pathyil, Fr Abraham (Avarachan),PD Wilson, Dominic Chackonal, Jimmy Eapen, Thomas Kappen, D Joseph, Benny Augustine, BO Sebastian, VJ Joseph, Gracious Joseph, Sebastian Vattakunnel, Lawrence Alva, Peter PJ, Jacob Kavungal, Jacob Antony, Jacob MG, Jolly, Philip K, Suresh Reddy, Augustine, Mathew K Mathalikunnel, John from Nagpur, Luke and three more MGAs. They all Zoomed in at the scheduled time from different continents and countries - America, Canada, Muscat, South Africa, India .

2 MGA News Letter

As suggested in July20 Zoom Meet, a sample MGA News was circulated soon after the July Meet. Next edition is expected a day after the August MGA Meet. In this edition, we begin a new column - Random Remembrances from the Vetran Jo Pathyil and Experience Sharing from Sebastian Vattakunnel

3 Interaction

PD Wilson introduced the new participants and expressed hope that the MGA meet would generate greater participation and involvement as time goes by.

Jo Pathyil set the tone for the interaction by expressing joy at seeing many new faces attending the meeting.

He brought out the common characteristics of MGAs that runs thru each one - common formation, community living, unique cursive Palmer Method Handwriting and Gabrielite accent of speech - and that come across while each one being individulistic and yet part of a group.

4 Keeping Connected

Everyone who were present expressed the need to be regular touch and suggested that regular Zoom Meeting takes place and would continue with the "Each One bring One MGA" movement in all forthcoming meetings.

All new participants introduced themselves to the group. It was a joy to see and hear every participant in active recall mode of their experiences while in the congregation and life thereafter.

Narration of Benny from UK and his tryst with Covid and Covid Patients was facinating and effused courage to one and all.

His one line advice - to drink warm water to drown phlem and bacteria to the stomach rather than drive it to the lungs- was an eye opener to one and all.

An expression of appreciation was accorded to PD Wilson and S others who are the active regulars in the Whatsapp Groups.

5 Action Plan-To Continue

To hold MGA Zoom Meeting on the 2nd Saturday of every month.

Next MGA Zoom Meet on Saturday,12 September,2020.

To come out with regular MGA News Letter.

Members may contribute with their experiences, memories to MGA News Letter

To get connected to those who are yet not in our group.

”Each One bring One MGA ” to next Zoom Meeting.

6 Your Response to this Report

Kindly send your response with inputs for improvement Kindly send the salient Experiential slice of your lives to share your joys and sorrows with fellow MGAs - to inspire,relish and cherish Your Sincerely.

PD WILSON AND TEAM

7 Experience Sharing - The Joy of Living by Sebastian Vattakunnel

Sebastian Vattakunnel was in Montfort Yercaud when he responded to his Second Calling to the African Continent in 1976. He is one of the few who was led to the deserts of African continent and his mission continues to inspire the lives of many in South Africa. Read his experiences in his own words as narrated to our PD Wilson.

Dear Wilson Bro. Paulose Mekkunnel, my batchmate asked me to share my thoughts and deeds after changing the course in 1976.

My time is spent on meetings and workshops of different nature like Catholic Education, Principal’s Forum, Social development forum, for the opposition political party called United Democratic Movement to fight against corruption and maladministration, etc..in South Africa.Those meetings are State and National levels. Now because of COVID I am involved in online, group workshops etc. used me to bring CMI fathers and FCC sisters to South Africa. When you go to a new place, if you have some friends then life will be much easier. Me and my family helped those Rev Fathers and Sisters to settle in South Africa like so many other Indian Teachers to find their feet here.

7.1 Second Calling - 1976 Exodus Begins

This is Sebastian ! I don't know where to begin.

Many years have gone and many things happened. I followed the new calling in 1976, after working 4 years in Monffort School Yercaud. I Worked for one year in a private school in Delhi then moved to Zambia worked on contract till 1982 in one of the schools of Marist Brothers. It was a Government appointment.

7.2 A step into the Unknown

You know by nature I take risks and not afraid to travel through unchartered waters. When the economy of Zambia was down, at the end of the contract many Malayalees moved to Nigeria but I decided to move to South Africa. I had no friends or relatives to help I was alone and came to Transkei-one of the Self-proclaimed independent Homeland created by Apartheid government. It was only for black people.

When I applied for a job they gave me a wonderful welcome. While in Zambia I met my wife Sara, from Vadaserkara, near Ranni. After her contract, she moved to Muscat but I tried to see life in South Africa.

7.3 More joins the Exodus

In 1982 I was posted to one of the old schools, which was in ruins. Within three months I managed to raise the standard of Science in that school..Many Principals of the place asked me to get more science and Maths Teachers for their schools. I contacted some of my friends and many came. The Government was happy with Indians. The Principal and the community was afraid that I might leave them and move to cities so they made me Deputy principal of the school i decided to stay in the rural place, made a lot of changes, and improved the school. My two girls were born there.(1984 and 1986).

When my first daughter was ready to go playschool, I wanted a change. The community took the initiative and got a job for my wife in one of the clinics near to the school She was the first Indian to get a job without knowing the local language. She managed to learn within six months. When I wanted to move due to my daughters study the community let me go and they found a school and a house for us in Town and they moved our belongings about 250 kms away, free of charge. I got postings in one of the Catholic Schools, after one year they also made me Deputy Principal.

I worked hard and made changes to the school result improved and the parents and department took note of my hard work. I worked there from 1989 to 1993. Education among black people was very poor. All facilities and money were given to whites-only schools that was called apartheid, which means separate development. Me and my family had no problem to live with black people and work for them. They are treating us like one of them. We are part of them today.

7.4 Exodus Builds up Momentum

In 1993 a group of people approached our parish priest to assist them to start a school in their area. The Church agreed to help them but there was no building and no facilities to start a school. No body wanted to do it and I also declined the request finally due to the pressure of the Church authorities I agreed. I 1994 I started a school in one of the buildings of an outstation church. I put conditions to Church that I am not looking for 100 percent pass rate, the admission will be first come first served. Then, before Independence, mathematics was an optional subject in South Africa. I said that I will make maths compulsory and it will be English Medium First, it was a big struggle but I managed to get 98 percent pass rate from the very first batch.

7.5 Synergy of the Diocese

The Church gave me some money to build 5 classrooms but I took over the building part. By using local builders and local people I managed to construct 8 classrooms without ceilings with that money I was the contractor, principal, teacher and accountant after some time I had to fight legal battles against teacher unions, government officials because they wanted to hijack the school and send me away. But the parent community was with me. Even the church told me to leave the school and go but I refused. Through the court, I could have made the school in my name but I did not do it.

I made the school to be purely private before it was state-aided school. Now I have a school of 1365 students from Grade 8- Grade 12. 65 highly qualified teachers from 6 different countries including a few from India., 35 classrooms, a media centre, 3 computer labs (120 computers) two science labs, a big library with over 15000 books and a school hall where 1500 people can be accommodated, Internet facilities for all computers. There are two school buses and a pickup van for the school and there is no loan or debt for the school. I did not get any funding from outside Our fees is very low compared to many schools. slowly I found that Government is trying to give quality education for the people so I decided to go for middle-income parents to give quality education.

7.6 Multiple Roles

I am being pulled into so many associations and committees, like the National Independent Schools Association, Principal's forum, Catholic Education, group etc all of them in the state level and moving to the National level. Since I am not accused or suspected of any corruption or mismanagement the community and the country recognize me.. They also pulled me to one of the opposition parties of the country which stands ot against corruption and mismanagement. My name was put up by the party for National assembly when the news was out, the whole school community, parents, teachers and others worked against me because they did not want me to leave the school. But still, I am in the National Executive Committee of the party. I helped students to build houses for

4 deserving poor people. During Lent, the students collect food and distribute them to the poorest of the poor. This gives awareness to help the poor people around us.

When the HIV- AIDS was sweeping through Africa, we were not spared. When I saw the plight of one of the children of a worker I started an AIDS orphanage for the HIV infected, affected, abandoned, abused or neglected infants. Now it has 36 infants and toddlers. I managed to get Franciscan Clarist Congregation (FCC) sisters from Bharananganam to help me in the school and orphanage. They are managing the children's home. Since I am in so many committees I rub shoulders with top people of the party, government, and Church. I always raise awareness among them to help the poorest of the poor. Since I stand for truth and justice, caring for the poor most of my demands are met by authorities. I get subsidy for school students and I use that money to develop the school and I also get subsidy for the orphanage.

7.7 My Little Family

About my family. My first daughter completed Grade 12 here and got admission to a very good Medical College and she enjoyed scholarship. She is a medical doctor, married to an IT guy and settled in Australia. My second daughter completed Grade 10 here and then we got Green Card for USA. I sent her to study in New York, my wife moved to USA to be with the daughter, the mother passed RN in America and she started to work and supported my daughter in her studies. The daughter completed Accounting and Finance from Boston College (a leading Jesuit University in Massachusetts).

After her studies she got campus selection and worked for KPMG in New York for three years. I had visited USA more than 10 times and in one of my visits, I met the previous Principal of Kazipet, Eugenius. None of my family want to work or stay in USA. We are very happy to work with local black people. I did not renew the Green Card and instead took up South African Citizenship.

My second daughter is working for a corporate company called Bain and she got a promotion transfer to Australia so both my daughters are in Australia. Both my daughters do not want any money or property from me. They are grateful that I gave them a good education and they are efficient. I used my Provident Fund and Pension to buy about 10 acres of land for the Children's Home to build some buildings for business, the rent from that venture will support the orphans. I bought another 10 acres of land to build a Junior school which should be managed by the Rev Sisters.

7.8 A Surprise from the Vatican

I did all these without expecting any reward or recognition but this February I was honored with a Papal medal called Benemerenti by the Papal Nuncio, I believe that is the highest honor given by the Pope to an ordinary faithful for outstanding work. I am handing over this school, which is one of the top schools in State and one of the top 100 schools of the country to the Diocese and move

on to build the Junior School. My name is a Brand Name among Education in the country. Since I am in so many committees there are numerous meetings I have to attend I enjoy it because of the training I received from my home, and from Montfortain congregation. I am the only Indian who is known like this. It is not my merit but His Grace. God has different plans for each of us. God helped me to survive two major accidents, one was a car accident and the other was a Stroke, a blood clot in my brain. I am unharmed and I believe that God has a plan for me.

Usually I do not write anything about myself but some of you asked to write something for others to read I sure you all have much better storied to tell They are not our merit but His Grace. Bye Sebastian Love from South Africa.

8 Random Rememberances - Jo Pathyil

8.1 Brothers in India in the 40's

When I joined the Juniorate in May, 1947, Brothers had only a handful of institutions in India. Montfort Anglo-Indian School, in Yercaud, All Saints High School in Hyderabad, St. Patrick's Anglo Indian School in Secundrabad, Industrial School in Tindivanam, St. Joseph's High School in Ooty and St. Antony's High School in Coonoor. In addition a Juniorate for youngsters ("Juvenate" was the name used at that time.), Novitiate, and scholasticate for newly professed brothers were also located in Coonoor.

Apart from Bro. Paul who was the Rector of All Saints, and Bro. John of God, the headmaster of St. Antony's, all the other superiors were French. In fact India was a district under the French province. The superior of about forty brothers in India was called "District Principal". Bro. Eugene Mary who was district director and a capitulant to the chapter in 1946 had died in France before the chapter started. Bro. Eleazar, therefore, was appointed as District Principal, much to the chagrin of older French Brothers.

Bro. Eleazar was only 39 years old, full of vision and vitality, a person who thought outside the box, and pushed for expansion and changes in the new, soon to be independent, India. He had opposed the plan of Bro. Eugene to recommend to the chapter the amalgamation of India, Singapore and Thailand in to one province. Instead, Bro. Eleazar and the council of the district had insisted that the chapter be asked to make India in to a new province.

8.2 Flash Back - The Beginnings

Let us hearken back a few years:

After the arrival of Franch Brothers in Pondicheery and later to other parts of India, a few Tamil recruits underwent their religious training in India, such as Bros. Louis, Andre, Francis, James, Augustine, Aloysius, Paul, while some others were sent to France for their novitiate. Thus Bros. Claudien, John of God, and Francis Xavier had their religious formation in France. Later in the

30's a few Malayalee recruits like Bros. Bernard, Denis, John of the Cross, Augustinose, George, were sent to Singapore for their novitiate.

Second World War had its consequences. French Brothers in Thailand ("Siam" was another name for the country.) had to leave, though the Spanish Brothers stayed on, as Spain under General Franco had declared neutrality during the war. Singapore was occupied by the Japanese.

Bro. Michael, A French missionary in Siam, principal of the famous Assumption College in Bangkok, was asked by his friend Bro. Eugene Mary, the district principal of India to join him. Bro. Michael was asked to be the Master of Novices for young men mainly from Travancore, recruited by Bro. John of God. Thus began the substantial expansion of the brothers in India.

Bro. Michael and Bro. John of God:

Bro. Michael and Bro. John of God were a good team, supporting and complementing each other. Bro. John of God was headmaster of St. Antony's. He would visit Travancore periodically and recruit youngsters to join the juniorate erected in Coonoor. If there were high school graduates, he would bring them to the new novitiate under Bro. Michael.

As the novices professed their vows, they had to be sent for further education. Bro. John persuaded the education department of The Madras Province to allow him to start an accelerated teachers training school in Coonoor to increase the number of teachers for the imminent independent India. Thus instead of a two year training programme, he was allowed to train them in twelve months. The newly professed brothers were the main beneficiaries of the programme. Thus Bro. Michael was the one in charge of the formation of the youngsters, and Bro. John recruited them, and educated them.

The salubrious weather in the Nilgiris in April, May, and June attracted thousands to the hill station. Early in May, when schools would be closed, almost all the brothers came to Coonoor for their annual retreat, followed by "vestition" and "profession" that took place on May 8. It was at that time that postings and appointments were announced.

8.3 1947 - A New Era A New Nation A New Province

May, 1947 Bro. John of God was appointed Rector of All Saints, Bro. Paul was sent as manager of St. Joseph's, Ooty, Bro. Amance was transferred to Coonoor, Bro. Jean Baptist was posted to Yercaud, While Bro. Marcel was sent to St. Patrick's. A few weeks before that, the district of India was declared a province and Bro. Eleazar was made the Provincial Superior.

This was the harbinger of a new dawn. Changes, reforms and new vision began with the creation of the new province. In 1948 half a dozen young brothers were sent to Loyola College, Madras for higher education. Bro. Paul was appointed director of Tindivanam.

Brothers of St. Gabriel had come to Pondicherry in 1903. St. Joseph's Industrial School, Tindivanam was the second institution that the Brothers ran under the supervision of Paris Foreign Mission.

The few Tamil brothers who were there formed a separate community, with separate timetable, separate kitchen, separate chapel service etc. in Tamil, while the French Brothers had their own community. When Bro. Paul took over Tindivanam he united the two communities, took over the ownership of the industrial school, took charge of the orphanage , secured large tracts of paddy field, secured admission for teachers training for the young brothers in the training school run by the priests.

Bro. John of God who had been appointed Rector of All Saints, established satellite schools in the vicinity. Thus began St. Peter's, St. Paul's and Little Flower schools. In addition, young brothers who neither went to Loyola, nor Tindivanam went to Hyderabad to be absorbed in these communities and study in Osmania University. These changes assured a steady supply of qualified brothers who would man the new institutions that were to be established in the 50's. The vision of Bro. Eleazar and council for consolidation and expansion, with the enthusiastic support of the senior brothers gave impetus and hope to all the province.

8.4 Looking Ahead..

Looking forward to those wonder poems collections with musical notations from Late Br Charles Garnier circulated in Coonnoor and Yercaud in the 1950 thru 1970s...

Inviting more Experience Sharing ...from MGAs to inspire and be inspired from...

Thank You...The Story Telling to continue ...

Bye till we Zoom Next on Saturday 12 September 2020. God Bless You all.

End