

SOLA Community

India Link



APRIL 2010

VOL. XVII NO. 1

Editorial

Our life is a series of meetings and partings. Here at SOLA as the academic year comes to a close, we have the painful duty of bidding farewell to people whom we have come to know and admire over the years. However, when saying goodbye to the fathers it is not the number of years that we have been together but rather the close relationship that we have shared.

After spending 7 years as Rector of SOLA, Fr. Cor is leaving for his beloved Ethiopian community to continue his missionary work. We thank Fr. Cor for: his dedication and hard work; his example of punctuality; his commitment and his loyalty to his vocaiton. These have touched us all very deeply. "Our pryares will accompany you Fr. Cor."

Fr. Martin is another live wire whom we will miss enormously. His constant encouragement, his music and his joyful attitude to life has won him many hearts in Bangalore. We will certainly find it hard to fill the void that will appear in our community. Yet life must go on and we have to say "thank you and good-bye" while we pick up the pieces and move on.



Fr. Biju John, MST has been with us for the last 3 years. In that time he has shared hard work and the ups and downs of community. Along with Fr. Martin, he had to move from Bommasandra to Carmelaram. With this change, he had to adapt to a new environment. He has filled his role admirably well and we join our hands to say "thanks and good-bye." Our prayers will follow him in his future mission.

The past few months have seen many "comings and goings." Fr. Tom left SOLA for his home town of Washington, DC, United States, but because we are short of staff he has returned to SOLA for two more months. "Welcome, Fr. Tom."

We are happy to announce with great joy the impending ordination of Fr. Filianus in Chhattisgarh. He has completed his theological studies in Nairobi, Kenya and he will be ordained on 5th May 2010. We await this event with joyful expectation. We hope to give details of his ordination in a future publication of INDIA LINK. Our student, Robin Level who is presently doing his novitiate in Burkina Faso

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Farewell Party for Fr. Tom



Stephen Raj Family, Frs. Cor, Tom, John Gould and Jean Pierre

Invitation of Bro. Filianus

PRIESTLY ORDINATION
 5th May 2010, 7.00 a.m Wednesday &
FIRST HOLY MASS - 6th May 2010, 7.00 a.m. Thursday
 AT CATHOLIC ASHRAM, PHARSAKANI &
 JHALER BAHAR VILLAGE

FILIANUS EKKA MAfr.

"You did not choose me, it was I who chose you and sent you"
 Jn. 15: 16

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agrees with Mr. Kuruvilla that others outside of the staff at SOLA also can be of help with INDIA LINK. One suggestion is proof reading prior to publication. We here at SOLA do not claim to be experts in our publication efforts. Any help would be gratefully appreciated and we thank Mr. Kuruvilla for his help in this edition.

The Staff of India Link would like to thank Fr. George Parappillil for his very generous donation to our publication. Fr. Parappillil gave us Rs. 300 towards our publication costs. For this we thank him. We also wish him well as he celebrated his 50th anniversary to priesthood last year as well as his 75th birthday. Fr. George, we will keep you in our prayers.
– Fr. Leo

With a Heart full of Gratitude



One, who has a clear vision of his mission, can do amazing things in his life. This life would certainly impress others. As a formator, Fr. Cor de Visser came to India with a clear vision of his mission. Fr. Cor contributed so much to the growth of the

Indian project because of his missionary zeal and enthusiasm. As rector Fr. Cor easily acclimatized himself to the rich culture and tradition of India because he was interested in knowing them well. This interest helped him to explore the Indian way of formation with more enthusiasm. He toiled hard to form future SOLA candidates by giving them both Indian and international level of formation. In his honesty, Fr. Cor shared his knowledge of the mission; that is, what was both pleasant and otherwise. Although a foreigner, this was no obstacle in his relationship with the candidates. Fr. Cor fitted in nicely. He was a friend of all. His simplicity and humbleness facilitated his ease in community with staff and candidates alike.

Fr. Cor taught not only in word, but also in deed. This was shown in his punctuality, especially in our prayer life together. We candidates achieved success in our studies because of Fr. Cor's interest and strictness in academics. Liturgy was a favorite subject for Fr. Cor, and he passed this love onto his candidates.

His many years in India were a big plus for the Indians involved with him at SOLA. With a heart full of gratitude, we thank Fr. Cor. His commitment and his willingness to work tirelessly in spite of his old age helped the Indian project to blossom. We wish him all the best in Ethiopia.

– Jisho George
3rd Year Student

Une Experience Enrichissante

I, Regin Bose, just completed my initial formation at SOLA in Bangalore. Before leaving, I would like to share a couple of my enriching experiences in this article. I also learned french and I would like to write a few thoughts in french.



What did I learn in my four years at SOLA?

I spent part of our Apostolic formation or training assisting some physically and mentally challenged people. This took place at Ashe Niketan in Bangalore. The members of this unique community accepted themselves as there are. This attitude taught me to be happy with who I am and my own limitations.

Secondly, Africa Day - I was able to meet many Africans who are studying in Bangalore when they came to SOLA for Africa Day. Africa Day was meaningful because our guests shared something of their life experiences with us from their home countries. This exchange between ourselves helped to confirm my calling at SOLA. Now I look forward to Africa and continuing my education as SOLA and eventually working for the Church in Africa.

J'ai passé les quatre dernières années à SOLA. C'est une maison où on peut apprendre de belles vertus comme l'amour, la tolérance, l'humilité, la foi, la compassion. C'est aussi un endroit où on découvre comment gérer les choses d'une manière responsable et prudente. C'est un lieu où j'ai mûri. Cette communauté m'a aussi aidé à grandir physiquement et spirituellement. La vie en équipe avec d'autres jeunes, la prière et l'apostolat, tout cela m'a donné de vivre de riches expériences.

Chaque année, j'ai été envoyé dans un endroit différent pour réaliser mon apostolat. Cette année, je suis allé à l'Ashanikentan. Là, j'ai rencontré beaucoup de personnes handicapées, physiquement et mentalement. J'ai été touché de voir que, malgré leur maladie, elles paraissaient heureuses. Leur joie a suscité en moi une question : comment est-ce possible ? Malgré leur maladie, elles paraissent contentes alors que moi, je ne suis pas heureux malgré tout ce que j'ai ? Cette rencontre m'a enseigné à être heureux comme je suis.

Ma meilleure expérience à SOLA est « la Journée d'Afrique » ! Malgré le fait qu'elle se produit chaque année, elle est chaque fois différente. C'est devenu un grand événement pour ma communauté et, je crois, pour nos frères et sœurs d'Afrique qui y participent. Leur présence ajoute de l'authenticité et de la beauté à ce moment. Elle m'encourage dans mon espoir d'être, un jour, missionnaire en Afrique. J'attendais ce moment depuis quatre ans. Il est arrivé ! Je suis très content d'aller en Afrique comme missionnaire, pour réaliser la volonté de Dieu dans ma vie.

Robin Leveil writes from Bobo



How are you? I am fine and happy. I hope that the same goes for you. By the way, I have completed my retreat of election to say “yes” or “no” to continue with SOLA. I still continue to feel that the Lord Jesus invites me to continue with SOLA and after an eight day retreat with the Lord Jesus, I said “yes” to the Lord. I am very happy

about it and I hope that this news of mine adds to

your joy. I am happy to share with you the news that I am appointed to the Parish of Kaye in Mali.

The Holy Week is approaching as well and I like to take this opportunity to wish you a beneficial Holy Week. I shall surely keep you in my prayers and thoughts to the Lord. I am sure that you also will continue to pray for me.

I wish you a Happy Easter. May we live in our lives like the people who encountered the risen Lord, with full of energy and enthusiasm, to serve Him and our neighbors. Let us be really living beings who have met the Lord in our lives; fully alive by following his ways.

– Bro. Robin

Our SOLA candidates spend every week-end helping in one of the many institutes that care for the old, the physically challenged, the disadvantaged, the runaways, or rag pickers. The experience will assist them in their own future apostolate in Africa.

Asha Niketan



Edward Minj cleaning up

the building might be described as small, there is no feeling of being restricted or cramped, and the trees abound.

This House of Hope was founded by Jean Vanier about forty years ago. Asha Niketan offers hope to thirty-five people who are mentally or physically challenged. The care that these people receive at this House of Hope is terrific, and we of SOLA were given the opportunity to be part of that hope.

I was pleasantly surprised to see that the members of Asha Niketan try to provide for themselves by making and selling different types of handicrafts like pen/pencil holders for one’s desk, cotton weaving bags (loom

work) for holding outgoing mail, scarves, tie and dye, bead work, batik, etc. I think our sacristan might be interested in the different types of candles that are made by the members of Asha Niketan.

One Sunday I was with some candidates from SOLA doing some pastoral work in Bangalore. While there, I learned some Sanskrit. The two words are “Asha Niketan” means “House of Hope.”

The architecture for this “House of Hope” is rather unique. I guess the best way to describe it is “openness” to air and spaces. Although the

work) for holding outgoing mail, scarves, tie and dye, bead work, batik, etc. I think our sacristan might be interested in the different types of candles that are made by the members of Asha Niketan.

On this particular Sunday we helped to clean up the leaves that had accumulated around the house. After this we took a walk (talked and shared) to the park which is not far from Asha Niketan. Upon returning from the park, it was time for lunch. On this particular Sunday we celebrated the anniversary of Karnataka being recognized as a state. Following the main meal we had ice cream to celebrate.



L-R: Edward, Jisho and Bose

Dishes and other utensils connected with making this wonderful meal had to be cleaned. Washing dishes comes naturally to us as we ourselves wash the dishes after every meal at SOLA. Upon complet-ing our washing up, we said “good-bye” and journeyed back to SOLA. We had a wonderful day and celebration at Asha Niketan-The House of Hope.

– Fr. Tom

Christmas at S.O.L.A.

A day before Christmas Eve, there was quite a bit of activity. One group of SOLA Candidates was busy making the nativity crib for our chapel. Second year Candidate Rijo (Karnataka) and first year Candidate Shiby (Kerala), used grass and some small branches to construct the nativity crib. I was pleasantly surprised at their creativity in using what was at hand in their construction.

In the courtyard was another scene of great activity. Final year candidates: Prahbu (Karnataka), Bose (Tamil Nadu) Sukanta and Ratnakar (both from Orissa) were working with the second year candidates Bipin (Chhattisgarh) first year student Steven Raj (Karnataka). Our driver Mr. Taji was very obliging in giving technical advice about the internal décor of the nativity cave.

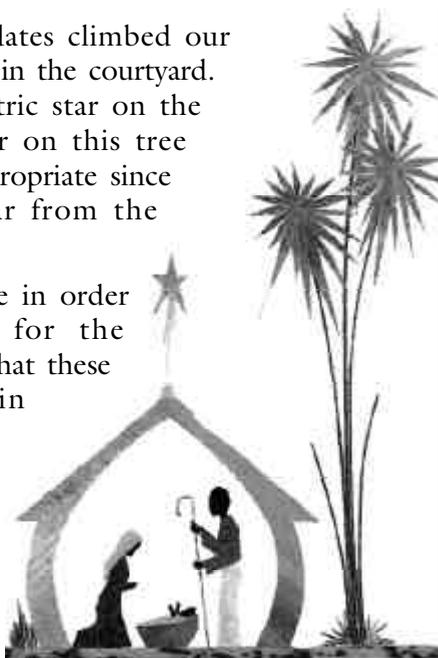


Fr. Jean-Pierre near outdoor nativity crib

One of our candidates climbed our six meter pine tree in the courtyard. He placed an electric star on the top. Having a star on this tree was considered appropriate since the tree is not far from the nativity scene.

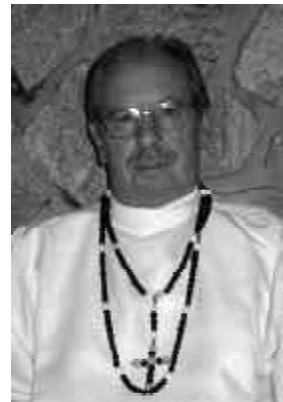
Congratulations are in order to one and all for the outstanding work that these Candidates did in remembering the birthday of Jesus our Lord and Savior.

- Fr. Tom



Interview with Fr. John Gould

Fr. John Gould is one of five children. For inspiration, he has an uncle as well as a cousin who are SOLA. With this environment, it is easy to understand why his family would be favorably disposed to Fr. Gould's desire to join SOLA.



Fr. John was in Zambia for 18 years, then he was with Candidates for two years in London. He remained in London assisting the SOLA who were sickly or aged. Following this he became the Provincial. In all he was 8 years serving the needs of SOLA in his home of Great Britain.

When he finished his work in London, he went to Uganda to be in charge of a house of studies.

ED - Fr. John, what advice would you give to those young men who are thinking of joining SOLA?

J.G. (John Gould) I would advise those who are thinking of joining SOLA to be prepared to live with those who are completely different than you are...also, to be open to receive from the people as much as you are giving.

ED - What do you see are the challenges in Africa?

J.G. - The challenge is to work without a sense of succeeding. Seeing any change coming about because of one's efforts is not easy; we need a willingness to share what we are living.

ED - What advise do you give to SOLA from your African experiences?

J.G. - SOLA needs the ability to live in isolation and be confronted with loneliness.

ED - How has prayer life influenced your vocation?

J.G. - My parent's faith influenced my prayer life. You cannot live without deep prayer life.

ED - Prayer life is very important. We cannot tell others about Jesus, if he is a stranger to us.

INDIA LINK thanks Fr. John Gould for giving us some of his time and his efforts.

- Fr. Tom

St. Thomas Church - Dharmaram

Fr. Dr. Mathew Koikara, CMI, with the people of this parish, **St. Thomas Forane Church** in Bangalore, saw a need. What do you do with the homeless people that lived on the streets around their parish? In 2005, **Blessed Chavara, Dharmaram** was founded. Those responsible for the day-to-day running of **Blessed Chavara, Dharmaram** are the good **Sisters of the Destitute**.

So who are the homeless in the parish of **St. Thomas Forane Church**? Fr. Koikara said that the people are from different parts of India. **Blessed Chavara** welcomes those in need regardless of their religious beliefs. One of the Sisters told me that the twenty-two men and women who occupy this home away from home speak a variety of languages, although the Sisters are accustomed to *Malyalam*.

The one thing that all the residents of **Blessed Chavara** share in common is the need for love, shelter, and food. This is provided to them by the good people of **St. Thomas Forane Church**.



Bro. Sukant Nayak making a bed

SOLA candidates help in whatever capacity they are needed. On one particular Saturday **Sukant Nayak** gave his assistance in changing the men's sheets. While he was

doing this, **Ratan Mohanayak** listened to the story one of the residents shared with him. Both **Sukant** and **Ratan** are from **Orissa**. While there I noticed that a seminarian from CMI was giving a shave to one of the men. These kinds of care will be always needed, and who knows, maybe next time instead of changing sheets and being a listener, SOLA candidates will be giving a shave to one of the residents.

The average age of those in **Blessed Chavara** is fifty plus. I was told that there is one lady who, if she is not one hundred, is close to it. The lady concerned is not sure of the date of her birth!

All of the residents of **Blessed Chavara** are given the comforts of a home, and they are assured of having a peaceful dignified death when the time comes for them to go home to Our Father in Heaven. SOLA candidates are glad to work with Fr. Koikara and the people of **St. Thomas Forane Church** in this much needed apostolate.

- Fr. Tom



Bro. Ratan listening to a resident

Bosco-Mane



Prabhu with street boys

Bosco Mane is one of the places where Candidates of SOLA assist as part of their pastoral work. This is done on Sundays.

What is Bosco Mane? Bosco Mane is a transition home for boys who are street children. It is operated by the Salesians of St. John Bosco. The word Mane means "Home", and it is home for many children who have run away from an abusive environment, or maybe just had a misunderstanding with their parents. The Salesians who run Bosco Mane have a staff of people who assist these children in finding out the best course of action for them. SOLA Candidates interact with these boys

playing games like basket ball, volley ball, cricket or just throwing the ball from one to the other. This contact with these boys who are anywhere from 8 to 14 years of age give the boys a sense of worth. This is something that they have not found in their home or on the street. Their self-image has been affected, and this has, in some cases, brought out the worst in these boys in the form of aggressive behavior. Playing with the boys helps to give them a sense of self-discipline as well. The games also help the children to work off some of their frustrations as well as have some fun which life on the streets deprives them. Of course playing games with these boys is also enjoyed by the SOLA Candidates.



Alex teaching basket ball

Joseph Prahbu (Karnataka) says that language is no problem really since whatever game is being played, the rules are known. Joseph says that the roles that SOLA play are a combination of guard, policeman and teacher all rolled into one (Joseph could have also added T.L.C. as in tender loving care.)

In the photos, you can see Joseph Prahbu playing volleyball with some of the streets boys. Alex Micheladima enjoyed himself with the boys playing volleyball. For some of these boys, basketball is a new experience. From watching them try to get the ball into the basket, I get the idea that this game is a new sport for them and one that they seem to enjoy. Alex

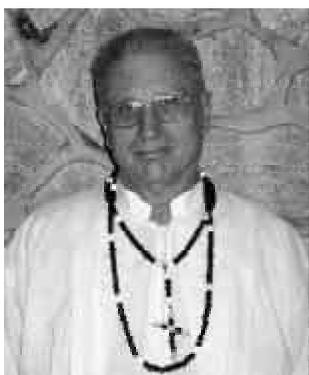
showed these boys the finer points of how to get the ball into the basket. A few more lessons seem to be called for!

Also in this category of Street Children are rag pickers, and child laborers. These children have been rescued from adults who exploit these children paying them very low wages.

For the SOLA candidates to get to Bosco Mane, they need to take two buses and walk about 10 minutes from the last bus stop. Bosco Mane is situated in a residential area away from the heart of the city, and I think this is an apt description of the location of Bosco Mane.

– Fr. Tom

Interview with Fr. Jean-Pierre Roth



SOLA was happy to welcome Fr. Jean-Pierre Roth. This is Fr. Jean-Pierre's first visit to India, and he is the first Swiss to be in SOLA. From Jean-Pierre's viewpoint, India is the first Asian country for him to do his apostolate as SOLA. Fr. Jean-Pierre adds India to the other countries where he has already lived: Burundi, Zaire, Ethiopia

(Africa) and Mexico in North America.

Fr. Jean-Pierre was born in 1947 in the village of Vevey, Switzerland. His parents were landscape gardeners. He has one older sister. He had a brother, but, unfortunately he died in childhood. Fr. Jean-Pierre was ordained in 1976.

EDITOR (Ed) – *Fr. Jean-Pierre (JP), what was your parents' reaction when you expressed a desire to join SOLA and eventually work in Africa?*

JP – My parents' initial response was shock. This was because they had hoped that I would assume responsibility for our family business. In addition, my father's knowledge of SOLA, as well as Africa, was limited and so he was somewhat cautious in accepting my vocation. Eventually both of my parents enthusiastically endorsed my decision. Since joining SOLA and working in Africa, my father has visited me on three occasions; my mother had to remain at home for health reasons, but she wanted to join him on these visits.

ED – *What advice would you give to those who are considering joining SOLA as well as to SOLA candidates?*

JP – The attitude of SOLA members who are assisting Indians in recognizing their vocation is one of trust and openness. This attitude is very important for SOLA

candidates as well. For those who want to join SOLA, they too need to be open and trusting in their questions. When you think about it, only in an atmosphere of mutual openness and trust is growth possible for all concerned: SOLA priests and SOLA candidates.

ED – *What do you mean by "openness"?*

JP – By "openness" I mean when one has questions, then ask those questions! There is no need for fear when one inquires. We come to know about ourselves, about SOLA, about Africa when our questions about these topics are answered. When we genuinely want to know something, no question is foolish, and decisions based on those answers might help the person to know in what direction to go in his life whether with SOLA, or some other vocation.

ED – *I agree with you. If someone wants to have knowledge of a particular topic, then questioning is beneficial for all concerned. What advice would you give to a SOLA candidate who anticipates working in Africa; where might a SOLA candidate be challenged?*

JP – To understand the people, one must know the language and the culture of that people. Only when one has this knowledge can something like a rebirth happens for that person. This "new" person who has knowledge of culture and language skills can then work with the people and proclaiming the Good News is easier. The challenge is to understand what the needs are of the people, and in the context in which the people are living. Without proper knowledge of language and culture, proclaiming the Good News is not possible.

ED – *I thank you for giving INDIA LINK some of your time and sharing your thoughts with us. I am sure the perspective candidates as well as our candidates will benefit from the experiences that you have had in Africa, and you too can benefit from their shared experiences as well.*

– Fr. Tom

Letter from Fr. Jaya Bordinghan



A big greetings from Fr. Jaya. Fr. Bordinghan Jaya was with SOLA, India for one year after his ordination in 2005. Fr. Jaya is now settled in Mongu, Zambia. He writes that he has mastered the local language, Cilozi which is spoken by the BaLozi people.

The church in Mongu is very small and still very young. The people believe in God, but few are Catholics. Many people think that the Church belongs to the priest and the nuns; therefore, the Church is not theirs.

The people are poor and this places a strain on the youth. The young people struggle to get school fees as the education in Zambia is free up to a point (school fees alone cannot pay a teacher's salary as well as food; most students are boarders as the schools are located far from their homes.) Agriculture is a challenge because much of the soil is sand, but nonetheless, the people work hard at farming.

Most of the time there are two SOLA at the mission. On the weekend a third SOLA joins Jaya and his companion. This third SOLA works with the bishop in town.

– Fr. Jaya

We wish Fr. Jaya all the best in his mission and we remind him that he is in our prayers.

Bus and Train Station, Bengaluru

About eighteen years ago in 1991, The Salesians of St. John Bosco started a rescue operation. This operation is center at the Bus Station, Majestic and the Train Station here in Bangalore. Those who are rescued are children, boys and girls, who run away from their homes because of abusive situation, argument with father, looking for work or just to see what it is like to ride on a train! For the most part these children are between 10 to 18 years of age. SOLA candidates are working with the Salesians. When the local police are approached by relatives of lost children, the police refer these requests to the Salesians who have small offices at both the train station as well as at the bus station. About a 15 minutes walk from the stations is the house of the Salesians. Here the children are assisted if they want to return home or if they want to stay. If they stay, counselors try to determine what the causes are for the children to run away. Sometimes there is an abusive home atmosphere. Sometimes the children left home to look for work. Some have found work (child labor), but the employer refused to pay the child his wages. Then the employer chases the child away. With nowhere to go, these children sometimes head to the train station in the hopes that they might be able to get home. With no money in their pockets, their hopes are soon dashed until the Salesians come along.

The volunteers approach the child and explain who they are and that they want to help. Usually this works as the child knows that unaided, he will not be able to remedy his problem.



For Emil Tigga who is a first year candidate at SOLA, this experience of assisting lost children is quite rewarding. The number who run-away is increasing every year; 1023 in 2006 over 2093 in 2009. The Salesians really appreciate SOLA's assistance because they do not have the staff to accommodate all of these children adequately. The Salesians do make a valiant effort though.

With SOLA candidates eventually heading to Africa, there is always some apostolate for children. In Zambia alone, fifty percent of the population is 15 or under! Truly - eighty percent of the population in Zambia are 25 or younger, and most of the other African countries have statistics that are quite similar. With the opportunity that working in the Bus and train station in Bangalore, our candidates are getting some hands-on experience that will benefit them when they finally go to Africa.

– Fr. Tom

S.O.L.A. Graduates

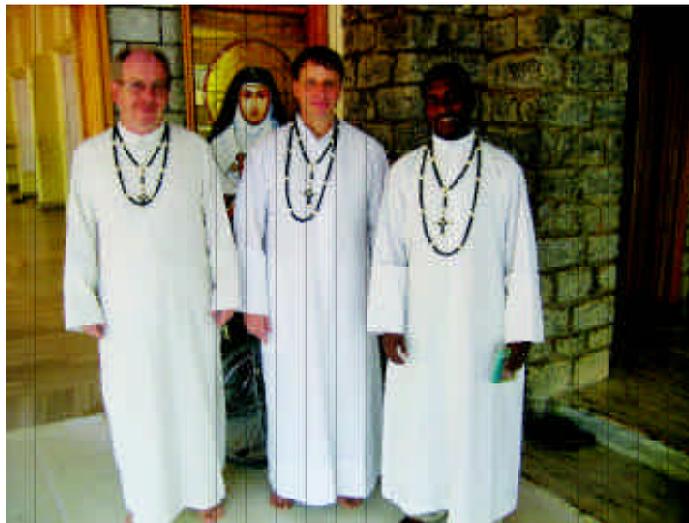


Prabhu, Jisho, Sukant and Bose

When we plant a seed we notice that it is small and we do not criticize it as 'rootless and stem less'. We treat it as a seed giving it water and care required for it to sprout. For the seed it was water and care but for us the final years of SOLA it was the classes given by Bro. Alckias Antony at the beginning of our Philosophical studies in 2007. His classes encouraged and helped us for our three year course at Suvidya. After these few days of classes we went to Suvidya as 'sprouts' but after three years we can now confidently say that we have grown like plants and yet to grow like big trees and bear much fruit. Yes dear friends, we the final years in fact had good time with all its ups and downs. Now we are happy to receive the reward of our hard work in the form of certificates during the graduation ceremony.

*– Bro. Prabhu Joseph
3rd Year Student*

For information on joining SOLA
(Society of Our Lady of Africa) write/phone
THE VOCATION PROMOTER
SOLA Study House
P.O. Box 1, Bommansandra Ind. Est. PO
Bangalore 560099
Ph: (080) 2783 3175
Email solastudyhouse@yahoo.in
Website: www.solastudyhouse.weebly.com
Cell: 0944 953 9322
0900 149 4213



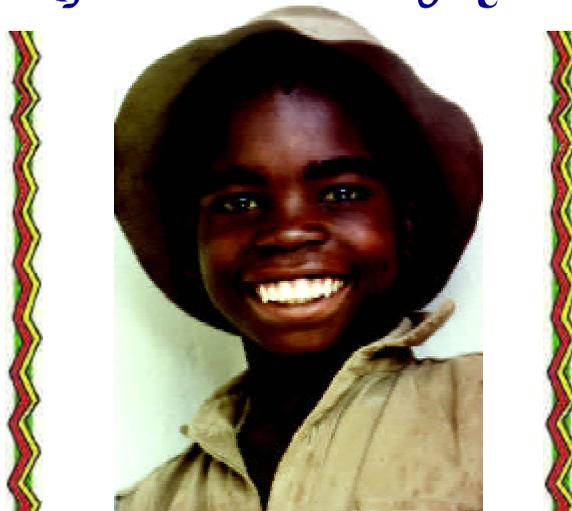
L-R: Frs. John Gould, Martin and Leo's visit to St. Alphonsa's grave

Caution necessary in our garden



Victorious Bro. Alex

Africa is calling you!



Edited by : Fr. Leo Laurence for Lavigerie (S.O.L.A. Study House), BANGALORE 560 099 India.

Phone: 080-2783 3175 Cell: 9449539322 e-mail: solastudyhouse@yahoo.in

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