

A joyful journey

For one year we had been excited for the day to come! We could finally board the plane, fly over to India and visit Fr. Franklin, Fr. Attley and their fellow Fathers.

We have heard so much about their projects and how they try to make their worlds a better place. Our students had already been told all we knew about them through stories they and Jürgen Fluhr told us and through pictures they showed to us. Their spirit and happiness has touched us from the day we met in Germany.

Our first stop was to Fr. Attley's Parish in Howrah, Kolkata. The city greeted us with honking cars and the remains of the Durga Puja processions. But never before have we been welcome so heartily. We were stunned how determined the Pilar Fathers follow Mother Theresa's footsteps by providing one meal a day to those who have nothing left in their lives. Not only do they feed a hungry mouth, but also they spend a nice word and kind smile. Among these poor there are people they have been knowing for a long time.

All Pilar Fathers made us feel like home and were such nice company, when singing and praying together. How much we enjoyed sharing our views of the world and our home countries. The intercultural exchange was also hands on, when Augustina, the Parish cook, taught us how to make Chapati.

The next stop was Ranchi, Dibadih, where we visited our partner school. Once more we were stunned by Fr. Stanley's welcome and how nicely and neat his staff and students set up everything for us. There was so much joy and cheerfulness in all the performances having been presented to us by the youngest and the oldest students of this prospering school. Like a merry circle of friends we all ended up dancing with students and teachers alike. Fr. Stanley puts so much passion into making every student progress even when they come from poor or illiterate families. Because the circle of students at our school ranges from very privileged children to refugees from Syria it was easy for us to bond with our partner school and to understand their needs and joy.

When we handed in our students' letters to class 5, we were rewarded with the most beautiful letters by the Indian students in return. Meeting the students in their classroom and playing with them on the pitch offered us an authentic insight into their everyday school life. Moreover, we will never forget the laughter and joy we shared with the Fathers at dinner table. We are thankful for all the lovely memories we can now share with our students and colleagues at home. Thus, we are proud to call the Father Agnel School in Dibadih, Ranchi, our partner school.

After saying farewell to Fr. Stanley and Fr. Attley, Fr. Franklin took us to New Delhi and Agra for some wonderful sight-seeing. What beauty this country provides!

When heading to Bhopal we were all excited to see what Fr. Franklin and Jürgen Fluhr have been talking about the past years. What we saw and experienced exceeded our expectations. By setting up so many schools, by providing a home for the many hundreds of children and by caring for the sick and hopeless, Fr. Franklin and his fellow Fathers and Sisters have definitely their share in making kingdom come. When we thought to have experienced the utmost joy, Fr. Kishore and his students topped it all by their beautiful welcome, a parade, impressive performances and dances. The boys and girls were so open and made us dance along tunes and step our feet in a way unknown to us. What fun we had!

In Bhopal we met three German girls from our diocese, Antonia, Joana and Stephanie, who volunteered to spend a gap year with the children. We admire how calm and content they master everyday life in the hostels.

Furthermore, in Bhopal we enjoyed the company of the fathers in the Parish. When watching Germany losing Iran in the U17 football match, Fr. Valerian was there to comfort our broken German soccer hearts. Everybody made us feel home and hosted us very cordially.

Mumbai was our final destination. Even up to this lively and crowded city Fr. Franklin accompanied us like a shepherd. Through him we have been given an insight into India which not only bonded us to India because of its beautiful sights and landscape but because of its people, their joy and their disarming candor.

Despite all the sadness and poverty we have surely seen too, we took home the most valuable experience: If you harvest the vinyard you have wine and humanity overcomes borders!

Thank you Juergen Fluhr, Fr. Franklin and Fr. Attley!

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