



KARUNALAYA *Christmas Tidings*

20
25

50 *Years*
OF HEALING,
DIGNITY,
AND HOPE



FIFTY YEARS AGO, on a quiet morning of 1 June 1975, Father Marian Zelazek SVD, himself a survivor of the Nazi Concentration Camp, arrived at the Catholic Church in Puri as its first SVD Parish Priest. The Catholic community was small then, mostly a few families from outside Puri living on the church premises. Yet, from the very beginning, Father Marian won their hearts. His gentle presence, his warmth, and even his unique accent made people pause. They sensed something different about this foreign priest: an inner radiance, a zest for life, and a compassion that knew no limits.

What touched everyone most was the way he reached out to those whom society had long forgotten, especially the leprosy-affected people living in pain, filth, and rejection on the streets. While many looked away, he walked toward them. His tender hands touched their ulcerated limbs; his smile lifted years of silent suffering; his presence restored their dignity. To them, he became BAPA: a father who understood, accepted, and loved them. In time, these scattered, wounded individuals found a home and a family under the name Karunalaya; a true "Home of Compassion." Through Father Marian, "God becoming human" became a living, tangible reality for those on the margins. For them, Christmas arrived not once a year, but every day.

As Karunalaya celebrates 50 years of this new dawn with the theme **A GOLDEN JUBILEE OF EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ACCEPTANCE**, we remember a remarkable soul who walked among us carrying God's love in every step. Nineteen years have passed since BAPA began his heavenly journey, yet his mission continues, carried forward quietly and faithfully by friends, collaborators, and well-wishers across the world. Their dedication keeps his legacy alive and makes every day a celebration of Christmas. **Together with all who found hope through this man of God, Karunalaya wishes you and your loved ones A BLESSED CHRISTMAS and assures you of heartfelt prayers for the Saviour's abundant blessings.**

COTTAGE OF MERCY & COMPASSION



KARUNALAYA LEPROSY HOSPITAL's short-stay facility offers solace to elderly and infirm persons affected by Hansen's disease. Guided by its motto, **Empowerment through Acceptance**, it provides compassionate care, dignity, and terminal support. With a dedicated doctor and staff, it remains the region's only haven offering timely treatment and peaceful final days. By and large, this is the only leprosy care facility of this nature in the district and its neighbourhood.



MERCY KITCHEN

TODAY, every civic administration tries to make the city 'beggar free zone', by creating isolated settlements for them. Father Marian envisioned it long ago. Moved by the sight of leprosy victims begging for survival, Father Marian began offering free cooked meals each day; a simple act that soon grew into a compassionate movement. With friends joining his mission, a permanent kitchen was built in the heart of the colony, giving birth to Mercy Kitchen, where the only rule was: "Do not beg." Inspired by this noble work, Mr. Sandro Bottani rallied TRE PINI, Massango, which has faithfully supported the kitchen for four decades, ensuring nourishing meals for 30 people year-round.



BEATRIX SCHOOL



BEATRIX SCHOOL remains the lifeline of the organization; a visionary initiative Father Marian began under the open sky in 1979 to offer inclusive education to children of leprosy-affected families. Establishing the school away from the settlement proved transformative, helping dismantle stigma across the city. True to its motto, **Empowerment through Education**, it is now cherished for its academic excellence and character formation. Upholding Father Marian's dream, Swami Nirvanananda Saraswati Ji steadfastly supports the school's growth through the Shanti Puri Friends Foundation and Shanti Onlus.



BEATRIX HOSTEL



FORMERLY known as Karunalya Children's Home, this haven is truly a home away from home for children from leprosy-affected families residing on the school campus. With free stay and education supported by World Assistance Foundation, Italy, and MAITRI GDANSK, Poland, it has, for four decades, lovingly nurtured countless children and guided them into the mainstream of society.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR KLCC



Karunalya Leprosy Care Centre (KLCC) will complete 50 years in 2026. From its humble beginnings, it has grown into a trusted refuge for leprosy-affected persons in Puri. With leprosy gradually disappearing nationwide, KLCC faces a defining moment: adapt meaningfully or fade into history. To honour the selfless legacy of the Servant of God Marian Zelazek and ensure KLCC remains future-ready, an ambitious **Strategic Planning** process began on 15 November 2025. A committed team of SVD members and external experts is working toward sustainability, supported freely by renowned development trainer Shri Rama Krishna Surdeo and his team. A total of 20 members participated in this first meeting which included SVD Confreres who had served KLCC and Ishopanthe Ashram in the past, confreres who have been experts in the field of social work and administration. This initiative seeks to help KLCC rediscover itself as it turns 50.

HUMAN memory fades quickly, and we often need tangible moments to keep the past alive. Honouring the Founder of Karunalaya and Beatrix School is our way of cherishing his presence among us. On 30 January 2025, on **Father Marian's 107th birth anniversary**, Prof. Purna Chandra Mahapatra and Shri Ramdas Mahapatra, two senior Servitors of the Shree Jagannath Temple, fondly recalled how he crossed religious boundaries with ease and became a respected guest in the homes of Temple Priests and Servitors.

This year, for the first time in nineteen years, his death anniversary and the sacred Akshaya Tritiya coincided on 30 April 2025. It was on this very day, during the Asto Prahari celebration, that Father Marian bade farewell to his beloved Jibaram Colony and began his eternal journey. The festive meal offered that day honoured "Bapa," who restored dignity and integration to countless lives. Following the Puri tradition of commemorative bhajans, a heartfelt Bhajan Shradhanjali was organized at Beatrix School. Led by Shri Ashish Kumbhar and his team from Arnold Vikas Sanchar, Jharsuguda, the soulful hymns, especially those composed on Father Marian's life, left many in tears and deep reflection.



ISHOPANTHI ASHRAM

TRUE to its vision as a Centre for Search of the Divine, Ishopanthi Ashram welcomes people of every faith into its serene embrace. Its calm setting hosts retreats, spiritual animation, and training programs alike. The Ashram's gracious hospitality and the gentle presence of its inmates leave every visitor deeply touched.



THE PULSE THAT SUSTAINS OUR MISSION

THE steady flow of financial support Karunalaya receives from friends across the world remains the lifeline of our mission. Without these trusting partners and collaborators, our work would simply not survive. The quiet generosity of donors who meet every need of this large endeavour humbles us deeply. We remain committed to honouring their trust by faithfully carrying forward this mission of compassion.

Donations from India may kindly be sent to: **KARUNALAYA LEPROSY CARE CENTRE,**
A/C NO: 20273174975, INDIAN BANK, DAL MANDAP SAHI BRANCH, PURI, IFSC: IDIB000P689



MERRY CHRISTMAS & A BLESSED NEW YEAR 2026

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