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## St. Bartholomew's Priory and the Northern Mission, India

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### LETTER FROM THE PRIOR

While it is unusual for the SSPX to found experimental priories, establishing St. Bartholomew's Priory in Vasai, 15 miles North of Bombay in August of 2008, was a necessary strategic move. The Northern circuit ministered from South India for more than 20 years, required long hours and days of travel; it made community life difficult and left little time and energy to establish necessary contacts with the indigenous Catholic clergy. At the same time, the faithful souls in 'the North' who called upon the Society could not be taken care of with great solicitude.

The mantra of the American business-

man – 'It's all about location, location, location!' – is happily realized at St. Bartholomew's Priory. Situated in St. Gonsalo Garcia Ashram, the priests of St. B's live in the bosom of the historical and famous Bassein Fort. This Portuguese stronghold built in 1536 to defend the Arabian Sea coast, became the second most glorious and prestigious Portuguese possession in India, being known as 'the chief city of the North.' Besides the heroic stamp of its conquering soldiers (space precludes relating their exploits), saints have graced its premises. St. Francis Xavier visited the Fort on three occasions and the first and only canonised saint of

India, St. Gonsalo Garcia, was born in the fort itself, very close to the ashram. Needless to say, these saints (together with St. Anthony—highly venerated in India), are frequently called upon for their assistance in overcoming the daily difficulties that are the bread and butter of missionary progress.

Unlike most SSPX priories, besides existing on land sanctified by several saints, it is the additional boon of St. Bartholomew's to be planted in the middle of an already existing and growing Orphanage and School. Through the generosity and industrious ministrations of Norbert D'Souza – respectfully called "Sir Nor-



*Rev. Fr. Timothy Pfeiffer in front of St. Gonsalo Garcia School for morning assembly.*

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*Some paint even landed on the walls.*

bert” by the boys – the Society has been asked to take care of the abundant spiritual needs of St. Gonsalo Garcia Ashram and School and perhaps eventually to take over its supervision. Originally founded in 1926, the subsequent survival and growth of the orphanage, particularly through the hard times of the conciliar revolution, were the fruit of Sir Norbert’s perseverance and hard work. Presently nearly 80 boys live on the premises. Many boys are part-boarder and part-orphan having only one parent while about a dozen are complete orphans the real orphans are clearly recognisable during vacation times when their sad faces reveal that they have no other place they can call home. Though the majority of the boys are Hindu, all the boys attend and sing the Mass, say the Rosary daily and participate in all the other prayers of St. Gonsalo Garcia’s. Serving Mass is the privilege of the 9 Catholic boys, but several Hindu lads are always eager to help out in the sacristy. For priests who love boys, St. Bartholomew’s is the place to be.

It requires little imagination to see in the mind’s eye the varied activities of a combined Orphanage-School complex. Prayers, meals, studies, work and play

succeed one another with what closely approximates regularity, while occasional accidents, adventures and visits from guests or benefactors sprinkle the daily routine.

St. Bartholomew’s also covers a broad area of 8 dependent missions with an attendance of roughly 750 per Sunday. Directly dependent upon the priory in Vasai are four Mass centres, three in the Bombay metropolitan area and one in the beautiful colonial State of Goa, which is served once a month. Each Sunday, the Prior of St. B’s offers three Masses in three different locations for an average attendance of 160 souls. The priory’s very pro-active assistant Fr. Joseph Pfeiffer boards the plane weekly for the two hour flight to the South-Eastern coast landing in the metropolis of Madras (Chennai) to handle the second portion of St. B’s Mission run. Fr. Joseph covers the three Mass centres that are in and around Madras

while a fourth weekday Mass centre in Bangalore is served once a month. The average Sunday attendance of this South-eastern portion of the Northern circuit is a very promising 550 – 600 (It is much higher for certain festivals). The details of the history and apostolate of this circuit deserve special treatment in the annals of the acts of the Northern apostles, but suffice it for now that the Madras Mass centre rivals Vasai in that it is located less than 100 yards from Little Mount, the site of the Apostle St. Thomas’ last teaching and preaching and the beginning point of his *via crucis* ending with his glorious martyrdom. The priests of St. Bartholomew’s sometimes wish that their mission would put them on a similar course, but generally conclude that God prefers their sweat to their blood. In which case, may God send more labourers to spread the load!

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*Mr. Patrick Bell (brother to Bridgette) corrects homework with the boys.*