



Newsletter by the Friends of Fr. Bill Christensen

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Details
About Farewell
Party For Fr. Bill

Mission

To create a model of
integrated rural
development
for Bangladesh.

Father Bill Visits Europe

The Institute of Integrated Rural Development (IIRD)

Fr. Bill Christensen founded the IIRD in 1986 for the purpose of developing a model of integrated rural development for Bangladesh designed to eradicate poverty. IIRD's people are mainly the landless poor, women, children of the poor, the homeless, the unemployed, and marginal and small farmers. The work includes:

- Educating children
- Training adults
- Housing the poorest
- Providing sources of drinking water
- Providing tools for improved sanitation
- Bettering the social and economic condition of women
- Providing micro-credit
- Improving methods of agriculture
- Creating and improving industry and employment
- Planting trees
- Cultivating fish stocks
- Providing poultry and livestock
- Developing rural infrastructure
- Providing land for the landless
- Resettling landless families

Every three years, Father Bill leaves Bangladesh to visit supporters throughout Europe and the U.S. In addition to visiting his many supporters, he spends much of his time educating people on the plight of the poor in the world and gaining support for IIRD. Father Bill had a very successful European visit from March 19-May 9, and this newsletter provides a summary of that trip. Many individuals shared their homes, found opportunities for Bill to share his work, and committed their time and funds to support the work of IIRD. Father Bill is grateful to have so many loyal supporters, and sends his blessings and

appreciation to all of you. The following is a summary of his European tour in his own words.

Father Bill's Journal *Italy: March 19-24*

I was warmly received by Javier Anso of the Marianist Generalate in Rome when my flight from Dhaka arrived on the morning of March 19th. I was a guest of the Marianists, one of the four major donor organizations for the work of IIRD. The Marianists presently provide grants of \$70,000-100,000 per year. During my stay, I made my first presentation in Europe, which was to a combined group of about 40 persons from the Marianist Generalate and Seminary Communities. It was especially great to visit with the three Indian Marianist Seminary as I helped initiate the foundation of our

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religious order in the South Asian subcontinent. Javier proposed that I visit Marianist development works in Kenya and Malawi to suggest ways for them to become more self-sustaining in promoting these works. He also indicated that Mondragon, the largest cooperative in the world and located in the Basque Country of Spain, might assist IIRD in the future with technical and financial support.

Austria: March 25-April 3

On the way to Austria, I had overnight hospitality from the Marianist Community in Zurich, Switzerland. From March 25-27, I was hosted by the very special Gasser family of Dornbirn. This family is a model of sharing, having sacrificed possessing their own home and ownership of

automobiles, so that they have more to share with the poor of the world. The Teilen Gruppe or Sharing Group which they established assists many implementing organizations in poor countries, including IIRD. They recently donated another 320,000 Austrian Schillings or about \$21,000 for IIRD's work. I made presentations to 26 adults learning English and to the 18 members of the Teilen Gruppe. At the home of a special friend, Marlies, I was given a new pair of shoes to replace my aged, air-conditioned ones. Gunter Roy, a professional in the textile industry and group member, offered to assist in marketing IIRD's silk products.

On March 28, I interrupted my journey towards Linz, Austria to stop for a day in Memmingen, Germany with the family of Christian Maier, presently a volunteer with IIRD. I made presentations to 8 family members and to a group of 37 people at a public meeting organized by Christian's mother, Ingrid. People at the meeting donated DM 600 or

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Sweat Shops

Unfortunately, on August 8, 2001 at 9:00 a.m., there was a tragic fire in a sweatshop in Bangladesh. A fire alarm sounded at an eight-story factory in Dhaka, but both the northern and southern exit gates were locked. In the panic, 23 workers, 14 of whom were women, were crushed to death. 100 workers were seriously injured, some critically, and the death toll is expected to rise. The southern gate was not opened by security guards until 15 minutes after the alarm sounded.

This isn't the first time workers have been locked in during a fire. On November 25, 2000 there was a fire in a sweatshop near Dhaka. Even more died in this fire—51 workers burned to death, including eight child laborers who were only 10-14 years old, *five of these children were under the age of 12.*

It is common knowledge that sweatshop workers are poorly paid (only a few cents an hour), work very long hours, and are often harassed, beaten and abused. What many don't know is how extreme the conditions truly are, and how these workers risk their lives in an effort to earn a wage that usually doesn't come close to feeding their families. Factory owners and the American and European retailers who buy

from them remain indifferent. The suffering of the workers and repeated tragedies, such as these two fires and the resulting 74 deaths, are ignored.

Hope For Sweat Shop Workers
IIRD has joined with the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative and the National Labor Committee (NLC) of New York in working to improve the situation of sweatshop workers in Bangladesh.

In October and November, NLC will be bringing some women garment workers and a translator to the U.S. They will be touring the country giving their first-hand experiences of the sweatshops. If you're interested in having them speak at a university, high school, club/organization or a public meeting, please contact them early. If anyone can provide some stipend to help defray the cost of the tour, it would be greatly appreciated. Please contact the NLC at:

National Labor Committee
Tel: 212-242-3002
Fax: 212-242-3821
Email: nlc@nlcnet.org
Website: www.nlcnet.org

It is our hope that by working with the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative and the NLC, we can improve the conditions for sweatshop workers and put an end to these senseless tragedies.

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about \$280. In the city of Linz and surrounding areas, there has been fine support for IIRD for many years from the IG Welt of Ottensheim, through the leadership of Waltraud Kapp, and Sozialkreis, sponsored by the Austrian Marianists. Besides presentations to 29 persons of these two groups, I gave the homily at the two Sunday parish Masses in Ottensheim, presented to seven classes of 148 students, aged 15-18 at the Stifter Schule in Linz and two presentations to 50 children aged 14 at the Marianum in Freistadt. About \$15,000 was contributed by the parish and two groups.

Germany: April 4-10

I was hosted during my visit to Germany by the Maerz family of the village of Hambach. Their son Tobias had spent a full year as a volunteer with IIRD and was now travelling in India and Nepal. Peter Maerz, Tobias' father, did a marvelous job of organizing for presentations and meetings. His older daughter Eva and her friend Melanie also helped with e-mail and some of the logistics. I made 8 presentations during the visit. Five of them were in 2 schools for 121 students aged 16-18. Three were public meetings with 122 people attending, about 100 adults and the rest children. Peter arranged for me to visit the Wuerzburg Fair Trade Shop; I obtained a good understanding of how to connect our marketing with the network of

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these shops and addresses of three German and an Austrian importer. Klaus Veeh of the diocesan development office was very friendly and has invited a small proposal for DM 5,200. I concelebrated two Masses. I received donations of about \$3,000 and the biggest donation of my travels in Europe when Stefan Soellner volunteered to come to the U.S. and help with driving for three months. On the way to Switzerland, I stopped for a few hours at the Frankfurt train station to visit with Fr. Stefan Hartmann of the Pallottines, who organizes and prepares the volunteers coming to IIRD from Germany.

Switzerland: April 11-16

On April 11th, I visited with the Ingenbohl Holy Cross Sisters and presented for 8 Sisters. This group

was one of the first donors for the start of my work in Bangladesh and has helped generously since. I spent the rest of Holy Week and Easter with the family of Albin and Elsbeth Schwarz. This family had spent 16 months as volunteers, providing medical assistance in Bangladesh; Dr. Albin has been a friend since my first visit to Europe in 1986. Besides excellent hospitality, another \$2,000 was donated for IIRD. The whole day of April 17 was spent in travelling to Brussels.

Belgium: April 18-19

The two most regular and biggest supporters of IIRD financially have been the European Union (EU) and the Belgian Government. Both have been assisting since late 1988, with interruptions in between completion of one grant and approval of a new one. The EU presently provides \$1 million per year. The Belgian Government has been financing mostly through a private group

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The original watercolor paintings, in this issue, were produced by Kamrul Hasan, a village youth who received help to develop his art interest through IIRD since the age of 12. At 20, Kamrul has a passion for painting and shares his gift to support the work of Father Bill and the IIRD. During his European and U.S. visits, Father Bill has given his friends and supporters many of these beautiful paintings depicting scenes of Bangladeshi life.

Comide; a five-year new project to train and employ 1,515 women has just begun. The Belgian Government is also considering direct funding to IIRD. The two days in Brussels were spent visiting with Comide and Belgian Government representatives; IIRD works with the EU through their Dhaka personnel.

France: April 20-May 9

Andre Vernhes, a Marianist, has been the finest supporter of IIRD in Europe. He organized my visits to France as he has done each of the past visits there. Solange and PierreRouve of Requista drove me to several of the villages where I had presentations; they also provided hospitality for several days and other help. Their daughter Anne had worked as a volunteer with IIRD for three years; she is now employed by Handicap International in Cambodia. There were 18 presentations for 1,128 people. Seven of the presentations were in schools. Six of these were for 506 students aged 12-18 at the Marianist school in Antony, outside Paris. The seventh was for the full elementary school in Requista; 70 children aged 5-11 and 10 adults attended. One student in Antony, Marguerite Marie Daulon, aged 18, indicated that she wanted to give her life for the poor. Two presentations were for 18-19 year old scouts and their parents; 6 scouts

plan to visit Bangladesh and IIRD August 5-31. One presentation was for young adults in Antony and another a public meeting for 26 people at the Marian Shrine in St. Avold. 64 Benedictine Monks and Sisters attended the two presentations at their monasteries in En Calcat in the south of France.

LACIM is an organization which links French villages with poor villages in Third World countries. There is correspondence between the villages for building understanding and relationships. The French partner provides a fixed amount every three months, according to the ability of its members. The poor village has a committee which plans and administers use of the funds. I attended the annual General Assembly of LACIM and spoke to the approximately 320 persons there. I also visited three of the eight villages helping our IIRD villages and gave presentations to 98 persons who attended. LACIM officials indicated their interest to expand the program with IIRD.

Other activities in France included visiting with Andre, the kind donated medical help of Dr. Jean-Marie of Requista, a newspaper interview in Colmar and a long telephone visit with Christian Raymond, founder of Partenaires. We are providing logistic support to Partenaires to help them begin a street children's project in Dhaka and they are arranging some technical help for our programs. About \$2,000 in contributions was received during the visits and one more group committed to partner a Bangladesh village.

Vision Statement Signature Campaign

One objective of Father Bill's visits to Europe and the U.S. is to help promote a campaign to obtain 10,000 signatures for a vision statement for a more just world economy. The Center for Economic and Social Justice (CESJ) in Washington D.C. has initiated this campaign for a more just economy. There are three main changes needed, which can be briefly summarized as:

1. Making ownership a universal human right.
2. Democratizing credit.
3. Making new laws and policies to facilitate new productive assets going to the non-rich, without infringing on the fundamental human rights of the rich.

In Europe, 208 signatures were obtained, with France leading the way with 125, followed by Germany with 46, Austria 22 and Italy 15. For more detailed information on this petition and the CESJ, visit their website at www.cesj.org or e-mail thirdway@cesj.org.

Your Financial Help Is Needed:



Any financial support that you can provide will help Fr. Bill continue his work for the poor of Bangladesh. Please make checks payable to the "Society of Mary," note on the check "For Bangladesh" and mail your contribution to:

Society of Mary
P. O. Box 23130
St. Louis, MO 63156-3130

For more information about the IIRD or Fr. Bill's work in Bangladesh, please contact

Fr. Bill at
● iird@bdmail.net.

or

Peter or Bridget Desloge at
● (636) 537-5441 or
● pdesloge@watlow.com



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