

The BDA supports programs in and around Bodhgaya, in Bihar state in India. Bihar is one the poorest and most corrupt states in India. It also has a high level of violence. Just last year, after our annual newsletter was written, bombs went off in the market area of Bodhgaya, injuring two Buddhist monks and others.

Over the years the main project we have supported is a school, called the Prajna Vihar School. There are currently 560 students at the school and we provide around half the recurrent funding. Kerstin Liebchen-Meades, one of the BDA management committee members, spent time in Bodhgaya last year, leading a professional development program for teachers along with other kinds of work to help the school. A report from Kerstin with some reflections is on page 2.

We have also supported other programs and for the last few years we have funded a regional life skills program for low caste women and girls, called Nari Jagran Manch, literally *Campaign for Women's Awakening*. Low caste women are generally illiterate and teaching is done by talking, discussion stories and pictures. The girls who go to school are supported to counter the difficulties they face in having no-one at home who can help with reading, writing or homework.

The initiator and driving force behind Nari Jagran Manch has been Sr Mary Lobo, an outspoken Catholic sister who dedicated her life to helping the poor and doing what she could to counter the oppression of women in India. Sr Mary didn't follow the common practices of Catholic sisters: she did not wear clothes that identified her as a sister, she included broad family planning in life skills programs and she lived for most of the time on her own. She was also an ardent supporter of the ordination of women in the Catholic Church.

In early 2013 Sr Mary was actively overseeing her programs in Bodhgaya, supporting another program for tuberculosis in Jharkhand, a state to the south of Bihar, and taking on administrative roles for her order. She found she had thyroid cancer. She had surgery in April 2013, followed by months of chemotherapy. She died in the company of

sisters in her order in Pune in late February this year. She was 73. Just before she died, despite being very weak, she went back to Bodhgaya to say goodbye to people she knew there.



Sr Mary Lobo, 1941 - 2014

It is common to say that someone has been an inspiration to you, but for those of us in the BDA who knew Sr Mary, this was truly the case. Sr Mary was very selfless, she lived very simply and her heart was wide open. There are reflections on Sr Mary on page 7 and an obituary on page 8.

We have ongoing contact with Sr Mary's order to see if there is someone who will be overseeing Nari Jagran Manch programs. Some of the programs have been taken on by a Sr Manisha, from another order, and Kerstin covers

this in her report below.

We intend to continue funding programs which support low caste women and girls.

Many thanks to all of you who have supported our programs in India. It's not just schoolkids and low caste women who are helped by the funds we

provide, but teachers, teachers' families, builders, and even parents. Our hope is that increased literacy and life-skills will help transform some of the villages in and around Bodhgaya.

Victor von der Heyde
BDA Chairperson

Reflections from a visit to Bodhgaya and the Prajna Vihar School, October to November 2013

The first time I glimpsed the shining, newly painted building across the putrid waters surrounding our beloved PV school in October last year, I stopped and paused to take in the scenery. I had walked along the dirt road through Mastipur village from the Daijokyo Temple Guesthouse where mata-ji (aka Kiran Lama, member of the school management committee) was looking after Rick and me with much care and support for the PV school. As I held up my camera to take some photos, village children came running towards me with time on their hands as the school was closed due to a series of festivals taking place at this time of the year. Rick Peterson (whose compassionate concern for the low caste children of Bodhgaya started the PV school in 1990), Sister Shobha (school principal) and I had travelled together to Bodhgaya from Dehli where we had attended the Prajna Vihar Society's committee meeting the previous week.

Arriving in the school grounds, I found Rick and Sister Shobha sitting in her sparsely furnished office pouring over photos of students who had trained in Varanasi in special classical dance lessons during the school break in July. Sister led us into the next room where students' art project work was on display.

All art had been made of recycled materials, with the creatively presented pencil shaving pictures easily making it to my favourites' list. We then proceeded to look around the school buildings, with Sister pointing out the potential new building site, the boundary wall with its narrow foot path leading to the neighbouring Korean temple and monastery buildings, and the totally inadequate



Kerstin and PV School principal, Sr Shobha

toilet block consisting of four toilets for 560 students. During the next three weeks, Rick and I together with Sister Shobha, Kiran Lama and Princey (P.R. Dwyer, also on the school management committee) worked tirelessly to advance the administration and policy development, as well as the short and medium goals for educational and training outcomes of the PV students. This included:

1. A visit to Patna to see the work of the Jesuits of [Tarumitra](#) to gain insight and draw inspiration from their approach to architecture and [sanitation work](#) for our upcoming building upgrade.
2. Setting aside a room for computer instruction, fitting it out with appropriate furnishings and computers, a data projector and internet



PV student with letter from student in Australia

connection as well as employing the services of Jackie Vishwakarma who will be in charge of IT instruction.

3. Initiating computer and IT software program instructions outside of school hours which will be run by Jackie Vishwakarma.

4. A two day professional development seminar for the teachers of PV school and the teachers of the SRA sisters' school just outside of Bodhgaya. I placed the emphasis of the first day on critical and innovative teaching strategies and the second day on computer assisted learning and teaching methodologies.

5. Meeting with our scholarship recipients Pushpa Kumari and Upendra Kumar and following up on their future pathway. Pushpa has finished her early childhood teacher training in Hazaribag and is currently teaching at our school. Upendra has work in Delhi teaching at an Indian Government Institute.

6. Finalising a scholarship application document for future recipients so the process of application

and tracking of recipients is easier.

7. Delivering handwritten letters from Australian students, teaching English with the help of these culturally rich personal exchanges and collecting and redistributing PV students' letters in Australia.

8. Meeting with teachers and discussing staffing and salary structures for the 2014/2015 period.

9. Collating, designing and printing a faculties' staff introduction poster so that visitors to the PV school know 'who's who' at our school.

10. Employing the services of a new accountant, Mr Anajan Barua which will be of immense help to Sr Shobha.

11. Employing the services of a reputable builder and architect Mr Sukhdev and Mr Manoj Kumar who are currently involved with the extension of our KG class rooms and additional toilets.

12. Producing a PV school newsletter with links to building plans; staff profile; committee introductions; finance reports; building reports and Calcutta school excursion reports.

As in previous times, my experiences when working with and being amongst members of the Bodhgaya community leave me inspired and exuberant. Access to education for the families at the PV school has much impact on their present life and their children's future; and so this is how we progress:

"We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love." Mother Teresa

For many years the BDA has supported outreach projects which were co-ordinated by Sister Mary Lobo. During Sister Mary's illness and cancer treatment in the South of India, some of these projects were supervised by Sister Manisha, a social worker, and like Sister Shobha from the [order of the Sisters of the Queen of the Apostle](http://www.dharma.org.au/bda).

The journey to a Dalit community took us nearly two hours by rickshaw along dirt roads to the village only 20 km outside Bodhgaya. As we left

behind the more developed township of Bodhgaya, I felt transported to another place and time entirely. The settlements along the way had no electricity, no sealed roads, and no access to town water. Those children, who do attend school, do so in some of the government schools scattered along the way. Often these schools are schools by name only and do not have teachers in attendance on a daily basis. The families of the village we went to live hand to mouth and can't even afford the few cents it would cost them in travel expenses.

With the support of the sisters, the villagers have started a little one room school. When not being used as school, this room is someone's house and is vacated daily so that some very basic education can take place. 40 children of all ages are instructed by one of the women whose basic literacy and numeracy skills give her the confidence to take on the role of teacher. After listening to the children learn some basic hygiene information via song and seeing them write on their small slate boards, the women gathered outside in the shade of the hut and invited me to sit with them. Sister Manisha translated my questions and communicated the answers back to me. The only paid work these villagers can get is in the fields as day labourers. There is no equal pay for women and often payment received is in form of rice. One rather old and fragile looking

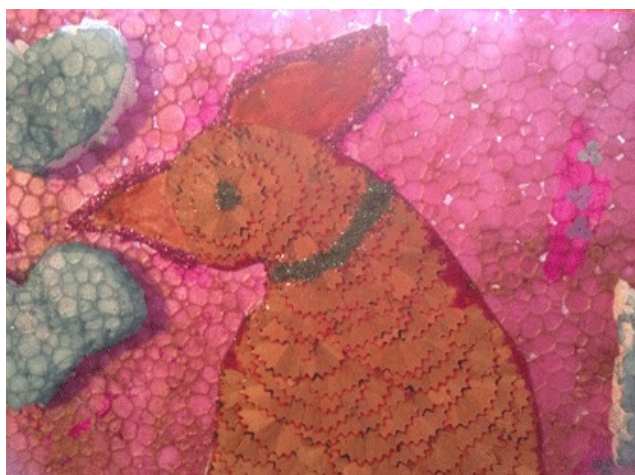
man approached Sister Manisha asking her to help him file his state pension entitlement. More often than not entitlements of these disadvantaged low caste or Dalit communities do not trickle down to them.

My visit left me quite emotional. I reflected upon the underlying social, economic and political inequalities that were evident in the narratives of these people. This brief encounter reassured me that the support given to the BDA allows for a response by local organisations best equipped to address these historical and structural injustices faced by communities in Bihar state.

Though our work for the PV school is our primary project, these smaller outreach projects are very important to us and if anything we are hopeful to fund more of these. All work undertaken by the BDA is volunteer work. Committee members travelling to India and working with members of the Bodhgaya community do so at their own expense.

There is [photo show here](#), a visual reflection of my time in Bodhgaya.

Kerstin Liebchen-Meades
BDA Management Committee



PV Student artwork. Note the bird feathers are made from pencil shavings.

The PV School now has both a website (www.pvschool.in) and a [facebook page](#) (type in Prajna Vihar School to facebook). If you go to the school website you can click to the school facebook page without logging into facebook. The website was set up and is managed by the BDA in Australia at the request of the school management committee. The facebook page was started by the new PV School computer teacher. You can follow the construction of the new classrooms on the facebook page and see posts on school activities. There is also a [BDA facebook page](#).

Prajna Vihar School
Expenditure 2012, Budget 2013, Expenditure 2013*

	Category	Expenditure 2012	Budget 2013	Expenditure 2013	Expenditure Australian \$ 2013
1	Books , Periodical & Educational Expense	108612	150000	4818	85
2	Salary & Bonus	1067100	1180000	1263539	22304
3	Phone	1800	6000	2000	35
4	Water	186	500	187	3
5	Electricity	14018	36000	16710	295
6	Stationeries & Functions	70154	80000	40131	708
7	Travelling & study Tours, seminar, training	33370	80000	2820	50
8	Milk Snacks & Fuel	12578	15000	13666	241
9	Building and Furniture	0	20000	73829	456
10	Audit & lawyers	24944	30000	26039	460
	Total	1332762	1635500	1443739	25485

*There were some additional payments outside the budget for recurrent costs. These were for superannuation lump sum payments for 5 teachers who left and one-off additional building maintenance costs. In total they brought the outgoings for the 2013 calendar year to around A\$32,000.

Various people and organisations have helped provide funding for the Prajna Vihar School over the years. At the moment recurrent funding comes primarily from (1) the efforts of Felix Helg in Switzerland, (2) a school supporter with the One World Children's Fund (OWCF) in the US and (3) the BDA here in Australia. We have been providing the biggest slice of the annual funds. We have recently heard that the funding from OWCF will be cut back from the middle of 2016, to the extent that the PV School (or us) will have to find an extra A\$8,000 to A\$10,000 per year. While we have some funds in reserve, we are looking for both people and organisations who can help with this.



The greenery around the school is starting to grow up. The school is now a far cry from what was once a tent in a field.

Sister Mary Lobo

We had the great good fortune of meeting Sister Mary Lobo in Bodh Gaya in January of 1999. We had just been in Christopher Titmuss's 10 day meditation retreat and at the end, he invited in local non-profit leaders to speak and invite us to spend two days with them learning about the work they were doing in Bodh Gaya and the surrounding villages.

We immediately said yes! And our lives, and many others, were changed in that moment.

We spent the next few days following Sister Mary through the fields, learning about Nari Jagran Manch and its impact on local women's lives. We visited women's consciousness raising workshops in village homes, hearing the songs they sang to teach each other about issues like ending child marriage, saving money for emergencies, supporting their daughters in going to school and more. We saw the small schools NJM was supporting in many villages where no school existed, meeting the teachers and children. We visited women who had taken small loans as part of the village micro credit campaign and witnessed the difference these loans had made in their lives. Sister Mary lived a simple life, in one small room with a single burner to cook her food. She shared everything with those in need, inspiring them to new possibilities and inspired by their resilience and courage to bring change to



their lives.

When we left Bodh Gaya, we promised that we would raise money and help when we got home. I'm sure she thought that would be the end of it, as many people had promised but not followed through. But, we were inspired by her, NJM and brave people of the villages, and came home to start One World Children's Fund. We had no idea

that it would become central to our lives and continue to have so much momentum for growth 15 years later. We learned from her the importance of listening to local people to learn what they need and want, and helping them to get the resources they need to help themselves. That continues to be the foundation of One World.

We were blessed to visit her again in 2011 and again visit the villages and projects, witnessing the flowering of the work of Sister Mary and NJM. We were so happy to see each other again

Sister Mary: A Reflection

True to the spirit, Mary was visiting and encouraging people right up to her passing. Even though she suffered greatly from a very aggressive cancer she made one last trip to Bodhgaya to see her old friends and workers before she left her body. My personal reflection on Mary goes back over 20 years when I first met her during a meditation course run by Christopher Titmuss. Here was this wonderful Christian nun full of exploration of truth and love. She was inspired by "us young people" taking spirituality seriously but really it was the other way around. She was a bubbly bright woman full of love and



Sr Mary Lobo (left) with village store made possible by micro-credit program

and to rejoice in the partnership between NJM and OneWorld - and in our friendship which had deepened over time as we worked together to make the world a more loving place.

Sister Mary was the closest to a saint that we have know. She will be missed by so many!

Patricia Savitri Burbank and Michael Kilgroe, Co-founders, One World Children's Fund

service who had dedicated her whole life to giving and helping others in a most difficult environment; with little resources she accomplished so much.

I will miss her cups of tea and biscuits and jolly good talks. Her projects included micro finance and various women's rights groups, women's health, and education. She was an inspiration for the people she met, particularly women. She was truly a light in the dark. The BDA has been proud to sponsor Mary's projects for many years and we hope to continue to sponsor her projects.

Eoin Liebchen-Meades, BDA Management Committee



Villager with calf from Nari Jagran Manch community micro credit program

Eulogy for Sister Mary

If I have to think of Mary alive and present here amongst us this morning, she would be passing around her favourite Momos, laughing in her usual jocular manner and egging us on to remember her good moments and not the way we see her in front of us.

Our celebration of thanksgiving today is for the life of Mary - to thank God for the person she was, her characteristics, for being part of the Lobo and the MCJ families.

Mary was all of 73 years, born in Urwa Mangalore, was brought up in Bangalore and joined our Congregation of the Missionaries of Christ Jesus after being attracted to the Missions by our first sisters who visited Mangalore when she was still youthful and full of fervor and ardour to live life fully. Over the many years she has lived with us, she has worked in Indara, UP, was principal of our school Nirmala Convent School, Rajkot, went on to Bihar and has been working in Bodh Gaya for the last 17 years.

Mary as you may know suffered from a very aggressive cancer which won the battle in just ten months. She has been fighting it every inch of the way and every hour of every day. That in a nutshell will tell you the kind of person Mary is. She was a woman of Hope. She hoped against hope, and lived that Hope.

She was very keen on going there to meet her people, visit the places she had once been very much a part of. And we know the rest of the story

What made Mary a person of hope in her personal life?

When she tried her best to break the circle of submission and violence in Bodh Gaya, when she dried the tears and lifted the heads of the women she worked with as she fought to demand and fight for a more dignified and happy life for all she lived a life of HOPE.

When she got her women to unite in order to look for paths for united solutions, when she helped them put their hands together in order to change situations of pain and suffering for abundant life she sang a song of Hope.

When, with her women, they refused to assume those values of a patriarchal society that are dehumanizing and oppressive she along with them, walked the path of Hope.

And when the children of her study centres study and get ready to overcome discomfort, mistrust, prohibitions and complexities Mary helped them to understand what it means to live with Hope.

This is our Mary of Hope in the gospel of Jesus, a person who lived her zeal for Mission to the utmost and spread hope whether in Mater Dei, Rajkot, Indara, or Bodh Gaya. Mary believed and lived to love her neighbor, she lived with interior freedom without admitting compulsions, who took a stand in the face of comfort and consumerism, lived simply and was cheerful and always joyful, a specialist in welcoming, in her sisterly and gratuitous embrace everyone who passed by.

It is this Mary we want to celebrate today, this Mary we want to give thanks for, this Mary who will continue to remain in our hearts.

Sr Noelle de Souza
Regional Directress,
Missionaries of Christ Jesus



**Bodhgaya
Development
Association**

Donation Form

You can transfer funds directly to our bank account:

Bank: Bank of Queensland
Branch Cannon Hill
Account name: Bodhgaya Development Association Inc.
BSB: 124-001
Account Number: 10142193

If you do transfer funds directly, please let us know who you are and how we can contact you.

Cheques or money orders can be made out to "Bodhgaya Development Association Inc" and sent to
147 Richmond Road Morningside Qld 4170

Name:

Address:

.....

Email:

Phone:

Amount:

Donation form on reverse

Scholarship recipient: Pushpa Kumari

Hi! I am Pushpa Kumari. I come from Mastipur village, Bodhgaya. This village is one of the very backward areas in Bodhgaya. I am born and brought up here. We are seven children. My father works in the temple. My mother is a house wife. My parents found it very difficult to educate all the children. Today we are all educated because of Prajna Vihar School. The school is also situated in Mastipur, not far from my house. I joined the school when I was five years old. For nine years I studied in Prajna Vihar School.

I finished my class ten from a government school, after class ten I join the Magadh University. Here I struggled and faced many difficulties due to poor financial condition. I finished my bachelor degree in 2011.

One year I was at home. This was the time I was searching for the guidance; I felt my future is unknown. I came in contact with Sr. Shobha and Rick uncle and told about my difficulties. It was time Victor uncle was in Bodhgaya. I met him too.

Sr. Shobha advised me to go for the Montessori training to Hazaribag. She did all the needful to get the admission. I was sponsored by BDA. On 22nd June last year I went to Hazaribag with my parents. They wanted to see where I am going to stay and study. I am the first girl from my village to go out for the training. For the few days I felt out of place. I was homesick. It was the first time I went out from the family. But very soon I adjusted. I found the course very tough because classes were given in English.

I had to work hard. We were almost hundred girls from all over India. I had to follow strict rules and discipline. It was good for me. Our teachers



were very helpful. All our needs were well taken care. Mentally, physically and spiritually. There I learned many things. I always felt very lucky. Golden opportunity was given to me to upgrade myself and make my life successful. I know my family would not been able to send me for this training.

Today I am very grateful to BDA, Rick uncle, Sr, Shobha for the guidance and support I experienced throughout my training period. I wish many more girls may get the chance to go for the higher studies.

Thanks to each and every one who made it possible for me. Many thanks to BDA members.

At present I am giving my service to Prajna Vihar school.

Pushpa Kumari

The BDA would like to thank [St Aidan's Anglican Girls' School](#) in Corinda, Queensland, for their generous support in printing this newsletter and covering printing costs. Their help is much very much appreciated.

BDA Financial Report 2013 - 2014

Total donations for the past year, March, 2013 to February, 2014, were \$14,298.40, and interest \$3,835.45, giving us a total revenue of \$18,134.25. This is a decrease of around \$2,600 from the previous year, but still allows us to continue our projects.

We wish to acknowledge the generous donations from BDA supporters, many of whom have been constant in their giving for many years. We would like to welcome also those first time donors to the BDA. Your support is received with appreciation and our warmest blessings.

There are minor running costs associated with transfers of money to India and bank charges. These costs are reimbursed by the committee members. Postage, newsletter costs and other administrative costs are gifted by the committee members. This ensures that all money raised and your donations go directly to the BDA projects.

We would like to acknowledge also the very generous support of our Auditors, GCY Accountants in East Brisbane. Their assistance has been invaluable and we cannot thank them enough for giving their time and energy to us.

Figures updated on 21st May, 2015, based on audited financial statements

	Funds received	Funds allocated
Donations from Cloudroom Use	\$601.70	
Donations - General	\$12,397.10	
Donations for PV School	\$1300.00	
Interest received	\$3,835.45	
Prajna Vihar School		\$11,128.01
Assumpta Society (Nari Jagran Manch)		\$2,775.72
Education Scholarship		
Totals	\$18,134.25	\$13,903.73

Thank you all,

Linda Meades
BDA Treasurer

The BDA has increased its funding to the PV School by one third from 2014. This increase is to bring teacher salaries a little closer to a fair rate and the rate for government schools. The PV School salaries have been low and the school has lost some of its teachers to government schools because of this low rate.

The BDA also hopes to have enough funds to help buy a small block of land in front of the school when it becomes available. This land would ensure good ongoing access to the school.



Woman with kids in Nari Jagran Manch life skills course