

Missio Proma Promildon Lobo's Letter to Belgian Friends-Draft

Dear Friend,

Very happy to wish you all A Happy New Year and Hope-filled 2021!

I wish and pray that these few lines find you, your family and friends hale and healthy amid the anxiety of the Covid-19 pandemic all over the world. I am physically far away from you since June 6, 2019 when I left Belgium and returned to India for good, but every day, someone or something or the other of Belgium reminds me of our friendship and fellowship which I still cherish, recalling my stay, study and service in Belgium from September 2010 to June 2019.

Let me update about my life in India: I am the Pastor of St. Joseph's Church, Udangudi, Tuticorin diocese, Tamil Nadu State in the extreme south of India. There are five villages/substations attached to this parish. There are three schools: One Primary and two Upper Primary Schools. The learning of knowledge from Katholieke University of Leuven, earning of experience from my part-time pastoral ministry in Our Lady of Mercy (OLM) Parish, Waterloo/Uccle, and volunteering with Missio-Belgium as Asiadesk responsible during my stay in Belgium have nurtured my priestly life and I am grateful to each of you for being part of the process. God bless you all with good health and long life.

During those eight-plus years of my life in Belgium, I never had any financial constraint and I owe a lot to you all for taking care of me through scholarship for the study, supplementary scholarship for my voluntary service to Missio-Belgium and parttime salary from the State through the Archdiocese of Mechelen-Brussels for my pastoral ministry in OLM. Of course, I enjoyed a lot of your hospitality and thanks for your kind gesture in every walk of my life.

Among the three schools in my parish, situated in the remote and rural villages, two schools needed my immediate attention with regard to the infrastructures. As most of the people live below the poverty line and the school children belong to the dalit communities, we are unable to get the financial support from our people in the parish. Moreover, our diocese is not in a position to support such schools financially. These two schools will not be allowed by the State to continue to function unless the infrastructures are newly built and the schools certified for Sanitation and Stability.

My Belgium friends understood my situation even before my request and approached Proma office in Belgium (in Missio-Belgium Building) and discussed possibility of raising funds for a school project in my parish. So, I have already sent a project proposal for the new construction of School building for one of the two schools, which is St. Joseph Xavier Roman Catholic Primary School in Kulasekaranpatnam of Udangudi Parish, started in the year 1937. The project Reference is: '2020/78 – Udangudi School'.

This area was very much affected by Tsunami in 2004 and we have the neighboring village named as Tsunami Colony, wherefrom we have students coming to our school. The Importance of this project is that it caters to the educational need of children from disadvantaged groups such as BPL families and it will be a boon to the families of post Tsunami conflict areas. Due to different projects by the State and the Central Governments in the project area, such as Udangudi Super Critical Thermal Power Project, Construction of a captive coal jetty with pipe conveyor system for the coal logistics required for the abovementioned power plant in Kallamolly coastal village (@Tsunami Colony) and Indian Space Research Organization's (ISRO) new space launch pad at Kulasekarapatnam, there are more possibilities to increase the strength of our school when new settlers, especially the poor and working-class families get job opportunities. Mostly, they will be settling in and around Kulasekarapatnam due to availability of conveyance, religious centres, schools, and public utilities.

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At present there are 125 children studying in this school. All these children have to be accommodated in the existing building. Sometimes the teachers take the lessons under the trees because of the dilapidated condition of the building. During the hot and rainy seasons, we have no other accommodation except the existing poor and unsafe structure.

After the Tsunami in 2004, the Tuticorin Diocesan Association allotted some amount for the school building construction. For five years the new building construction is just remaining at the foundation level. Due to failure of monsoon, poverty of the people, unforeseen situation in the diocese, and currently the impact of Covid19 pandemic, the parish is not in a position to complete the construction of the building.

We are approaching Proma only for the construction of five classrooms for the school and the office room. I am trying my best to make this project a participatory project. The people of Kulasekarapatnam and the School administration have contributed by way of land for the school buildings and the playground. The Volunteers among the Parents Teachers Association come forward to contribute their physical labour, which, as local contribution, will certainly reduce the labour cost of the school building. Though the local Catholics are very poor they have generously agreed to offer Rs. 2,00,000/- (Rupees two lakhs only) which is equivalent to 2298 Euros towards the school building completion. The diocese of Tuticorin has already invested a sum of Rupees Ten Lakhs through Tsunami Relief and Restructuring Funds, which has been used in 2014 by way of raising the foundation for our school. We hope to approach the State Government's and Central Government's fund to grant us the financial assistance for the sanitary facilities and Library cum Computers respectively. As we are still in the COVID-19 lockdown period, we are not very much sure when normalcy will return, but we will be approaching the Government in due time.

The total cost of completion of Primary school building construction will come to Rs. 37,00 000/- (Rupees thirty-seven lakhs only) that is equivalent to 42513.00 Euros. The expected results of the project will be: the Children of Kulasekarapatnam will get standard primary education irrespective of Caste, Creed or Communities; the construction of the new building for the school will assure safety of the children and will assure the State Government's approval for its continuation in the coming years; when the State and the Central Government start the projects in this area focusing on the development of the Nation, people of Kulasekarapatnam will be better equipped, if needed with basic learning so as to find the alternative jobs other than their traditional fishing profession.

To sum up: So far, I never felt the need to ask for financial help, neither for me nor my people. Now, I am approaching you all as Good Samaritans to help my people in need. I am sure you would understand me and do your best to build the school building today so as to build the future of the poor children. I hope to make this project a symbol of our friendship and a close collaboration between India, my native country and Belgium where I rendered my service for the past 8+ years.

Wishing you all good health and looking forward to your positive reaction towards this project.

Rev. Fr. N. Promildon Lobo.

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