

THE Catholic Spirit

THE OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE DIOCESE OF METUCHEN

OCTOBER 23, 2014 • VOL. 19 NO. 19 • \$2.00



This issue was mailed on Oct. 21
Your next issue will be November 6

Members of the procession carry a statue of Our Lady of Good Health, Vailankanni, at the the Cultural Mass for the diocesan Indian and Sri Lankan Apostolate at St. Bartholomew Church, East Brunswick. Story on page 22.

— Ed Koskey Jr. photo

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Members of apostolate express strong faith at inaugural liturgy

By Chris Donahue
Associate Editor

EAST BRUNSWICK — Faith-filled, colorful elements of the mosaic that is the universal Church were displayed by worshipers at the inaugural Mass for the diocesan Indian and Sri Lankan Apostolate at St. Bartholomew Church Sept. 27.

Msgr. William Benwell, diocesan vicar general and moderator of the curia, served as principal celebrant of what organizers hope was the first of annual Masses intended to unify the various communities, especially among Catholics of Indian descent, as well as the Sri Lankan community.

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Father Antony Arockiadoss, parochial vicar, St. Bartholomew Parish, and coordinator of the apostolate, gave the homily.

Before the Mass, which was coordinated by the diocesan Office of Multi-Cultural Ministry, the faithful prayed the rosary.

The procession included worshipers holding umbrellas and a statue of Our Lady of Good Health, Vailankanni (Vailankanni Arokia Matha) holding the baby Jesus.

A statue of and an icon of St. Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception, the first native Indian to be canonized a saint, and Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a Carmelite priest born in Kerala, India, were displayed in front of the ambo.



Above, girls wait for the procession at the diocesan Indian and Sri Lankan Apostolate Mass at St. Bartholomew Church. Right, Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Father Antony Arockiadoss gives the homily near an icon of St. Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception and a statue of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara. — Ed Koskey Jr. photos

In addition to English, elements of the Mass were spoken in native languages such as Sinhalese, Gujarati, Tamil and Konkani.

Msgr. Benwell welcomed the faithful, including worshipers who were visiting from other dioceses, and expressed thanks for the gift the Indian and Sri Lankan Apostolate is for the Church.

In his homily, Father Arockiadoss said he was delighted when he received a letter from Bishop Paul G. Bootkoski appointing him coordinator of the Indian and Sri

Lankan Apostolate in 2013.

"My head was spinning in all kinds of directions, which reminded me of my seminary days," he said. "My only goal before joining the seminary was to become a saint. After a month in the seminary, I quickly realized that it was going to take a while.

"As I held that [bishop's] letter in my hand," he continued with a smile, "I felt like my time has come, that I was going to die a martyr. Uniting all Indians was not possible. Adding to that, Indians and Sri Lankans."

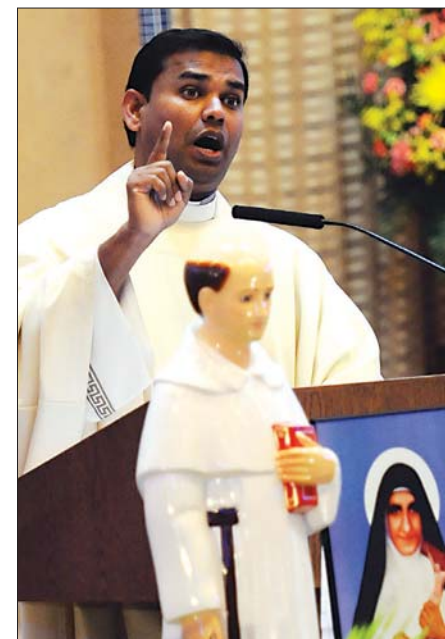
Because many Indians identify themselves strongly by factors such as their place of birth and language, he encouraged them to use the example of Jesus as a spouse of unity and peace. He noted how past presidents, including Abraham Lincoln and Dwight D. Eisenhower, had cited the importance of God for the welfare of the country.

"In the Gospel reading [Luke 6:12-16] today, the apostles come from different backgrounds, fishermen who worked alongside a tax collector. A zealot who worked alongside a traitor, but they shared a mission," Father Arockiadoss said. "Their intellectual capacity, psychological maturity, emotional maturity, financial backgrounds, intentional variations were all different. Their interests were not the same. The same differences I see in this group, in this apostolate."

Father Arockiadoss said there was much the apostolate's communities should celebrate: deep faith, successful careers, good educations, housing and "multiple opportunities to excel and live the American dream."

However, he said the faithful must avoid evils such as bias and language supremacy. He asked the worshipers to raise their hands and resolve to inspire and educate people in their communities; expand their horizons; look beyond caste and color and creed.

He also asked them to teach the truth that caste, financial groups, language groups, their comfort zones are not sources



of unity, but God is.

Groups credited with helping organize the Mass were: Sri Lankan Catholic Association; United Tamil Catholics; The Goan Association of New Jersey, Inc.; Mangalorean Catholic Association-East Coast; Gujarati Catholic Samaj of USA; Tamil Catholic Association; Telugu Catholic Association; Vasai (Mumbai) Catholic Community; Syro-Malabar Catholic Community and Mission of the Holy Eucharist.

Many have a close identification with their state or origin. Because each state has its own dominant language, many of the associations meet regularly for prayer and fellowship in the main language of that state.

A reception featured traditional cuisine and music. John Sakkariyas, a member of the coordinating committee who is a member of St. Bernadette Parish, Parlin, came from Tamilnadu, India, to America in 1999 to work. He enjoys celebrating Mass once a month with his association as well as attending picnics in May and going on annual pilgrimages to the Blue Army Shrine, Washington, or St. Joseph Shrine, Stirling.

Jaggadish Christian of the Gujarati Catholic Samaj of USA Association, said he hopes an annual Mass for the Indian and Sri Lankan Apostolate will help unite the communities and provide support through ways such as housing, jobs or prayers for someone is sick, all in the name of God.

Christian added that engaging in faith-related activities with people of similar backgrounds makes it "more exciting and feels more like home."

"Some emotions, we are not able to express in English," he said. "We get together three or four times a year and celebrate Christmas and Easter and prayer meetings and go to someone's house for stations of the cross," he said.

"In May, we go to a different house to pray the rosary and at Christmas we go Christmas caroling. We start at 8 a.m. and finish at midnight.

"We are very thankful people and people of values and faith."

Marion Mission (TWO NIGHTS)

Immaculate Conception Church, Somerville
35 Mountain Ave., Somerville

Presented by Dr. Edward Sri
Creator of Symbolon

November 11 & 12, 2014

7-9pm



During these two evenings Dr. Edward Sri will be presenting four talks on the Blessed Mother

Pre-registration is suggested by Nov. 9

\$20 for both nights

(\$5 additional at the door)



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