



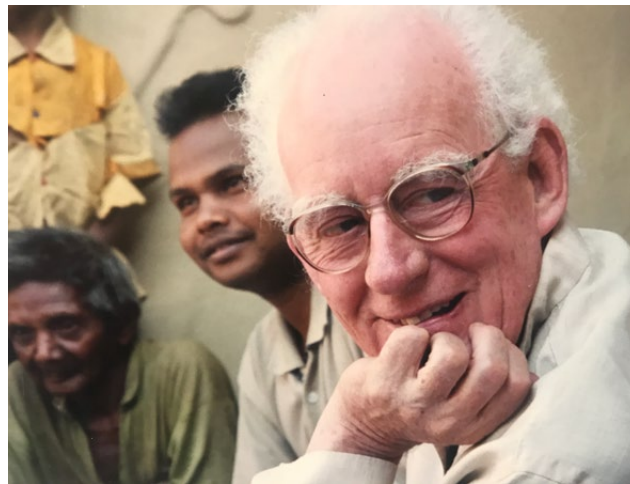
*Serving*  
at the margins



## From little things big things *grow*

If the Hazaribag Jesuit mission's 70-year lifespan were compressed into a time-lapse, we could visualise its growth from a kernel of an idea in the middle of last century to a vibrant mission busy with schools and churches and hospitals, students and parishioners and patients. We'd see those ships carrying young Jesuit missionaries across the Indian Ocean from Melbourne to Bombay. We would watch as their footprints and bicycle tyre prints bloomed across hills and valleys for seven decades until their mark on the landscape and the people had become an indelible part of Hazaribag itself.

This is how those memories unfurl for Fr Phil Crotty SJ as he pores over old photographs of the mission and reminisces about moments that



stood out for him during a lifetime of service to the Jesuit ministry. Among the early Australian and New Zealander missionaries in India, Fr Phil observed the foundation stones being laid for the Australian Province's first overseas mission; today, its legacy has reached far beyond Hazaribag's boundaries, validating the kernel that sprouted in Australia all those decades ago.

## *Uncertain beginnings*

Here's a smiling young man sitting on the rail of a ship, surrounded by family and snapped in black and white. This is Fr Phil on the day he left Melbourne in 1952, believing he'd never see home again.



*'In those days we went for life,' he says. 'There was no coming back, you know.'*

The voyage undertaken by Fr Phil and seven fellow Jesuits was perhaps a portent of things to come: sometimes stormy, at other times calm. Their arrival in Bombay on Christmas day foretold a rebirth for these men, and underscored their pledge to dedicate their lives to those living on the margins of this society.

The newcomers were following in the distinguished footsteps of the Belgian Jesuits who, since the late 19th century, had run a flourishing mission at Ranchi. No longer able to manage it alone, they'd reached out for assistance; the Australian Province, scouting for its own overseas mission, had responded. Six Jesuits duly set off for Ranchi in 1951, and others soon followed. After a period of transition, the Belgians offered the Australians the northern part of their mission, where they had been least engaged; and thus the seeds of Hazaribag Jesuit Province were sown.

## *Getting down to work*

Adventurous and ready for service, the new Jesuits soon found their groove. In an early photograph, then-scholastics Phil and John Reilly are dressed in white cassocks and sitting on bicycles. Adopting this local mode of travel, the Jesuits would cycle for days up and down the region's forested hills, calling on villagers and attending to the practicalities of running a mission. Their most important task, initially, was to learn Hindi; thus equipped, they set about evaluating the needs in the region and determining their priorities.

### **Education: a mainstay**

It was clear from the outset that education would be the lifeblood of the mission.

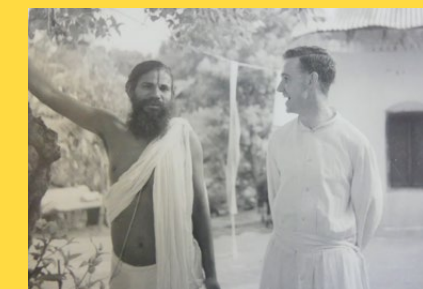


Jesuits Fr Austin Kelly SJ (left), Fr Phil Crotty SJ and Fr John Reilly SJ.

*'That's the best way to free people from poverty – by educating them,' says Fr Phil. 'Once people are educated in India, there are opportunities, but they need a decent education [and it's] something you have to fight for. So our main focus has [always] been on schools, colleges, teacher training institutions, technical schools, university colleges and hostels.'*

Besides teaching in existing schools, the Jesuits also built their own educational institutions, including their centrepiece, St Xavier's School Hazaribag. While Jesuit education was prized by the community, it was a challenge convincing parents their daughters' education was as valuable as their sons'.

*'When I first became parish priest, I think there were six girls in a boarding school run by the nuns at the time,' recalls Fr Phil. 'And they practically had to bribe the families to get the girls to go to school because the rule was that girls' marriages were arranged. The parents would say, "What's the point of me educating my daughter, if she's going to cook somebody else's meals in somebody else's house for the rest of her life?"'*



Fr Bob Slattery SJ with Holy Man in India circa 1957.

But persistence paid off, and another Australian Jesuit Fr Bob Slattery SJ – who has worked as an educator since arriving in Hazaribag in 1958 – has borne witness to the social and cultural shift.

*'A large percentage of the students [now] are young women,' he says. 'We have wonderful girls who have done well, who have great leadership qualities.'*

Other projects, such as research into mathematics teaching for tribal students, have helped consolidate the Jesuits as an educational authority in Hazaribag. Today the mission is involved in the education of tens of thousands students – many of them from poor communities.



Fr Bob welcomed to Sitagarha Primary Teachers' College.





# This land is my land

The breadth and beauty of the Mahuadanr Valley are visible during the harvest festival in which women dance with pots balanced upon their heads. This region is rich in minerals and forests, and its inhabitants – many of them tribal people and Dalits (or ‘Untouchables’) – are subject to exploitation by mining and logging companies. Their plight has presented Hazaribag with one of its most challenging ministries.

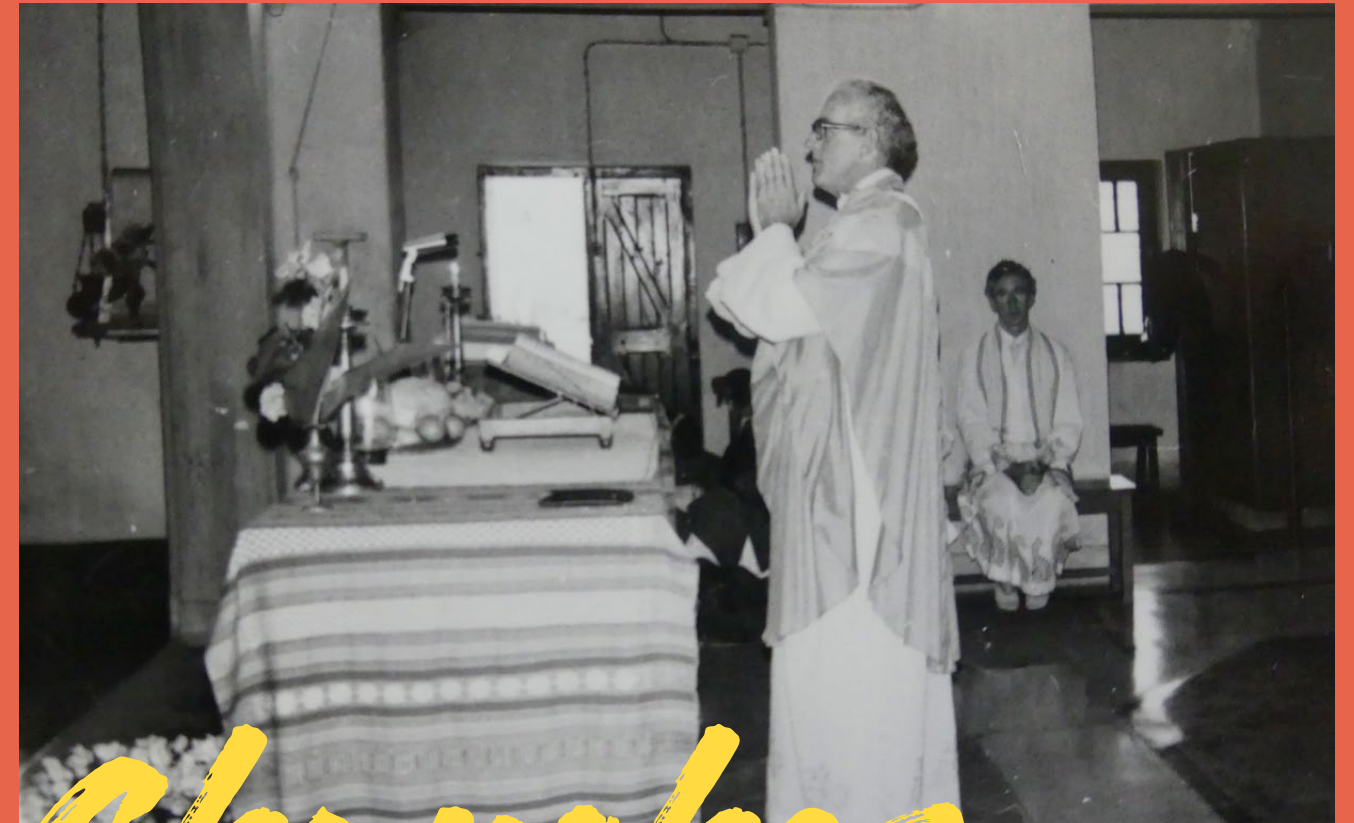
*‘The problems are all so vast, and the experience is that they are beyond our capacity as a human being to solve,’* says Fr Tony Herbert SJ, who arrived in Hazaribag in 1965 and has spent 40 years advocating for the Dalits.

Nonetheless, progress has been made in empowering these people through health and educational programs, women’s savings groups (directed by religious sisters with whom the Jesuits work), land repossession and the almost intractable task of unpicking an internalised sense of subordination forged by generations of oppression.

*‘Once people realise they have the same capacity as everyone else, and once they see what they can achieve with an education, it takes on a momentum of its own,’* says Fr Tony. *‘Breaking the literacy barrier is really the hardest part. Once you break through that barrier they’ll start climbing up.’*



**Above:** Rural students studying under a tree.  
**Top:** Fr Tony Herbert SJ walking with village children.



# Churches made of mud

The colours and patterns of the tribal altar cloth are conjured from sepia by Fr Phil, bright fabric embroidered by the tribal women and worn as saris, loin cloths and shawls.

*‘This is a photograph (Above) taken while I was touring from mission station to mission station,’* he says. *‘I was the Major Superior [today known as Provincial] of the mission at the time, so my job was to go visiting and see how things were.’*

In the picture, he celebrates Mass with the local parish priest. The altar cloth signifies the enfolding of tribal tradition into the Catholic worship brought here by the Jesuits; such enculturation has helped bridge the cultural gap and forge a shared spiritual sensibility.



*‘The main cultural and musical instrument is the drum, so we integrated that music, those drums, those dances into the*

*liturgy as far as we possibly could, [and it] became very popular among the people,’* recalls Fr Phil.

The Belgians built St Joseph’s Catholic Church in 1904, and it still stands in Mahuadanr, a Gothic structure carried piece by piece – stained glass windows, bells – from the railway station 60km away.

*‘It’s small given the size of the population in Mahuadanr, but it’s a treasure,’* says Fr Phil.

And while it is the site for many a Jesuit Mass, God’s word is, in the spirit of accompaniment, carried to those living in even the remotest communities.

*‘Normally Mass is held outside because there isn’t enough room, but every village tries to make their own church,’* says Fr Phil. *‘The houses are adobe – they’re made of mud – and the church is made of mud too.’*



# Passing the baton



Fr Bob Slattery SJ and Fr Santosh Minj SJ,  
Provincial Superior of the Hazaribag Jesuits.

New faces appear gradually among those of Australian and New Zealander Jesuits in the old photographs, including Indian Jesuits, the first of whom joined the order in 1954. The seeds of the Hazaribag Province flourished, having had Indian Major Superiors, Provincials since 1986. Today the Indian Jesuits outnumber their counterparts in Australia.

## Co-missionaries, the quiet heroes

The Jesuits who left Australia took with them the goodwill of the Australian Province and its immense network of supporters. Jesuit Mission was established in 1951 to better organise this patronage. Schools and benefactors rallied, with the inaugural Maytime Fair held in Melbourne and the Indian Bazaar in Sydney. Today, these annual events are pivotal fundraisers for Jesuit Mission. In a poignant homecoming, Fr Phil returned to Australia after half a century in India and became Jesuit Mission's director in 2008. For Australian Jesuits who've remained in India, like Fr Tony, the organisation is a lifeline.

*'The mission office structure has been extraordinary, and it has provided us with an economic security from which we can build on,' he says. 'It's not just the dollar note... it's knowing there's a whole community who are very much concerned, involved and interested.'*

Religious sisters, too, make an appearance in those early images. Indeed, the Jesuits' collaboration with many orders has underpinned the success of their mission. The sisters work in community clinics and hospitals – providing, most recently, critical care for COVID patients – and hold numerous teaching and administrative posts.

*'One of the great things about the Hazaribag mission is we are working very closely with various orders of sisters in medical work, education, social work,' says Fr Bob. 'They are a great support, [it's] great to be working with women – women do better work than men!'*

Fr James Thwaites SJ and Sr Coomas dispensing medicine at a leprosy clinic in 1978.



Many Jesuit Mission supporters, also known as co-missionaries, have visited Hazaribag over the years, sometimes sharing invaluable skills. The late ophthalmologist Peter Anderson, a Riverview Old Boy and President of the Indian Bazaar Committee for 25 years, along with fellow patron Dr Frank Cheok, trained young doctors in the sight-restoring procedure of corneal grafting. Dr Anderson's wife Joy, who accompanied him on his visits, recalls the deep satisfaction he drew from his contribution to Hazaribag.

*'He said, "Oh, you feel you're a real doctor, doing this kind of work"', she says.*

*'We saw different things on different visits, so we saw where the money was going. That's where you see that education is the answer to everything.'*



## Sowing the legacy beyond India's borders

As residency visas have become more difficult to obtain and as Indian Jesuits forge a future for Hazaribag, the Australian Jesuits have gradually reduced their grassroots involvement. But the spirit of their ministry has found life in projects beyond India's borders, in countries like Timor-Leste, Nepal, Myanmar, the Philippines, Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand.

Some of the recipients of this shared legacy were refugees in Nepal, repatriated from neighbouring Bhutan where they'd settled many years earlier. Fr Paul Horan SJ, who'd taught for four decades in India after arriving there in 1965, was seconded to the camps where the refugees were living; here, he drew from his deep well of experience in Hazaribag while co-ordinating English classes and trying to buoy the spirits of a thoroughly dispirited people.

*'When you go into the camps it's pretty depressing. You see people either going down to the food storehouse to collect their rations, or sitting around all day,' he recalls. But in the classroom, 'There's a certain liveliness, and I felt I was doing something that was helping somebody.'*

Jesuit Mission has supported scores of other projects across Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Most recently, it contributed to the establishment of Xavier Jesuit School in Cambodia, a development overseen by Fr Quyen Vu SJ, the new Australian Provincial. Launched with just 34 students in 2015, it has grown to accommodate 800 students, with many more clamouring to get in. The school is also a crucible of learning for teachers whose education was eroded during the Khmer Rouge's regime.



**Above:** Fr Quyen Vu SJ and students from Xavier Jesuit School in Cambodia.  
**Top:** Refugee children from Myanmar studying in Mae Hong Son, Thailand.





# Joining hands

## and moving forward

Back in Sydney, those grainy photographs pile up before the now-89-year-old Fr Phil. They couldn't have prophesied the umbilical connection that would one day bind Hazaribag to the ministries it inspired elsewhere in the world. Seventy years on, the desire to 'be present with those on the margins', as Fr Tony so eloquently articulated the Jesuit mission, is as strong as it was in 1951. And as Fr Quyen ushers in a new era as Australian Provincial, he is mindful of the responsibility entrusted to his generation by those Jesuits who've gone before.

*'We are invited, or we are sent to, the peripheries, to the places and people who are really in need,' he says. 'And I think that's what Jesuit Mission is all about: to reach those on the peripheries and provide what is needed at that time. That ripple effect, the mission of Jesuit Mission, is continuing*

*to support, continuing to reach out. We join hands, and when we join hands we move forward.'*



**Above:** Girls from St Mary's Chiropath, India.  
**Top:** Students at an English class in a monastic centre in Myanmar.