

*The Chicago Province  
supports Jesuit missions in  
India, Nepal, and Peru.*



*Considered the “number one social worker of Nepal,” Fr. Thomas Gafney, SJ, was the first person in South and East Asia to use acupuncture to detoxify drug addicts.*

# “Nightingale” of Nepal

*Fr. Thomas Gafney  
Remembered in Katmandu*

**M**ORE THAN 2,000 people attended a funeral Mass for Fr. Thomas E. Gafney, SJ, on December 16, 1997, in Katmandu, Nepal. Known locally as “Father Social Work,” Fr. Gafney died late December 13 or early December 14 from deep knife wounds in his neck. He was 65 years old.

A workman found Fr. Gafney at 8 a.m., December 14, in his small, rented bungalow in Katmandu. Police investigators located a Nepali khukuri, similar to a machete, which they believe is the murder weapon. Fellow Jesuits suspect approximately 136,000 rupees (\$2,000) is missing from his home/office. A police investigation is underway.

Fr. Gafney was not unlike Mother Teresa. He worked with the less fortunate—including drug-addicted, homeless, and disabled people. Since 1970 he founded, directed,

and expanded St. Xavier’s Social Service Centers in Katmandu.

On any given day, a host of activities continue through St. Xavier’s Social Service Centers: at the residential rehabilitation center for boys addicted to drugs; at the home for blind and disabled boys; at the residence for orphaned, homeless, and disabled boys; by outreach teams on the streets of Katmandu; in colleges where scholarships are provided to those who finish high school while living at a residence; and by social workers making their rounds at hospitals.

“What impressed me about Father Gafney was his love for his children,” explains benefactor Thomas Fell, a physician who worked with him in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s. “He would bring these horribly injured or horribly maimed or horribly sick

*In Katmandu, a procession of mourners on motorcycles, bicycles, and buses followed the flatbed truck carrying Fr. Gafney’s body from the church to the place of cremation.*



**Fr. Gafney cared for disabled, homeless, orphaned, and drug-addicted children and youths by founding St. Xavier's Social Service Centers in Katmandu in 1970.**

kids to the hospital. And he would do anything for these children, no matter what had happened to them.

"I remember one paraplegic child who had to have both legs amputated. The boy eventually died from terrible bed sores and many complications. Father Gafney tenderly took care of him, making his life tolerable during his final days."

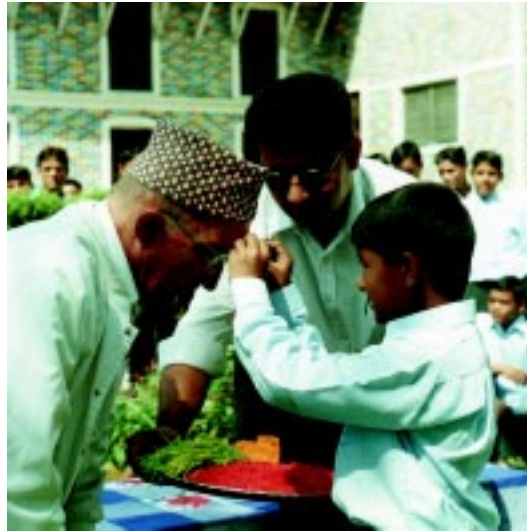
Dr. Fell has financially supported Father Gafney's work ever since his own days in Nepal. "I always knew every penny was being spent in a worthwhile and loving manner."

With the managerial linchpin missing, will all these good works continue? Fr. G. William Robins, former rector at St. Xavier's School in Katmandu has taken over directorship of Fr. Gafney's ministry. Says Fr. Robins. "We've got a very good staff to see that it continues."

Fr. Gafney, a native of Cleveland, Ohio, graduated from St. Ignatius High School there and attended John Carroll University for two years before entering the Jesuit Order in 1952. He then studied at the Jesuit Novitiate in Milford, Ohio, for four years before completing philosophy studies at West Baden College, Indiana, in 1959. Fr. Gafney studied theology at St. Mary's College in Darjeeling, West Bengal, and was or-

*"In the face of such a senseless tragedy, we can only stand still and be silent, letting the shock and pain slowly give way to a prayerful reflection about a precious life so wantonly destroyed, a selfless human being so cruelly cut down, and a dedicated apostle of healing love so inhumanly martyred."*


—Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, SJ,  
Superior General for the Society of Jesus



**As head of a "family" of orphaned, disabled, and drug-addicted youths, Fr. Gafney presided at an annual Nepali family feast. At the beginning of the celebration, the smallest boy in his care adorned Fr. Gafney's forehead with a traditional Nepalese mixture of red powder, rice and curds. Later Fr. Gafney returned the honor by extending his blessing and adorning all 200 to 300 hundred people present, one by one.**

ained a priest in 1965 in Patna, India.

From 1969 to 1976, Fr. Gafney was a teacher, rector, and treasurer at St. Xavier's School in Katmandu when he first started his social service programs. In addition, he had been the spiritual advisor for St. Mary's School Sisters since 1970.

"Tom was the finest and most Christ-like Jesuit I have ever known," wrote Fr. J. Timothy Lawless, SJ, who had worked with Fr. Gafney in the mid-1970s. "He worked with the impoverished, the abandoned, and the sick and addicted in Katmandu and neighboring areas of Nepal. He loved Nepal and its people. He gave his life *to* the Nepalese, and finally gave it *for* them as well." 



**"I always knew every penny was being spent in a worthwhile and loving manner," said benefactor Dr. Thomas Fell.**