



Altar with concelebrants: more than 50 seated at right off altar platform with laity seated Nepali-style on cushions. Nepali ceiling lamps hanging. Jacob's ladder backdrop wall painting.

JESUITS IN NEPAL

FIFTY YEARS OF SERVICE

by George Kearney

Six hundred women, men, and children from different castes, walks of life, and religions gathered on March 11, 2001, in Assumption Church in Kathmandu to begin a day-long celebration of the Jubilee anniversary of the Jesuits' apostolate in the Kingdom of Nepal.

In those fifty years the Jesuits opened the first church in Nepal, the first Catholic school, and the first Catholic college. Over time they have worked to ensure that the privilege of education be extended to women, to the physically disabled, to the lower castes, and the children of tea har-

vesters, not just the children of the wealthy landed population whom their schools originally served.

In the Jubilee Celebration program, Fr. John Locke, SJ, reminded readers of Fr. Jerome Nadal's answer to the following question, "Why are there Jesuits? Jesuits are there to do things that no one else is doing." [Nadal was one Ignatius Loyola's first companions—ed.]

The Golden Jubilee anniversary recognized much of what has been accomplished by the Jesuits in the last 50 years in the Kingdom of Nepal. In 1951, for example, 100 students finished high school. Fifty years

later, the number of graduates has increased to approximately 50,000, roughly 100 of whom, come from St. Xavier, the Jesuit high school. According to Fr. Marty P. Coyne, SJ, results of the year-end government exams for high school students arrived July 16, 2001. All 78 of the St. Xavier students who took the state exam passed, and as a group, they far exceeded national averages.

According to Ralph Waldo Emerson, "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." His quote seems most appropriate when describing the Jubilee celebration,



Deonia Jhapa East Nepal tribal dancers from the parish youth group

which presented an opportunity to remember and celebrate not just the worldly accomplishments of these pioneers, but also, as Emerson said, what lies within them: their spirit, their devotion, their character, and their love for the people they served.

It was a time to celebrate Fr. Marshall Moran's refusal to accept an honor bestowed upon him by the

Vice Chancellor of Patna University, who had called in 1949 to invite Fr. Moran to be the university's representative to an international conference on university education in gratitude for all the work he had done over the years as a member of the university's senate. Unselfishly, he refused to accept the honor. "India is now independent and you should send an Indian, not a foreigner." He

later added, "If you want to send me some place, send me to Nepal to proctor the exams there." While there, he met Mohan Shamsar Rana, the last of the Rana Prime Ministers, and with that conversation the idea of a Catholic Jesuit school in Nepal was born.

It was a time to celebrate Fr. Tom Gafney, SJ. From 1976 until his death, Fr. Gafney worked at the Social Service Center in Jawalakhel. He was known for walking the streets and inviting homeless children into the Center, where he attempted to provide some education, a clean safe home, and most of all the love they received nowhere else. Aware of the deadly effects of drug abuse in the Nepalese population, Fr. Gafney opened the Freedom Centre, a detoxification facility where the Jesuits minister to this oft-neglected segment of the population. In addition, he opened a care center for the physically disabled. He would travel often with patients to India or other remote locations, with funds he had raised himself in order to obtain treatment that was inaccessible in Nepal.

It was a time to celebrate the eter-



American Jesuit International Volunteers Karrie McCallister (middle) and Amy Johnson (right) participate in the celebration.

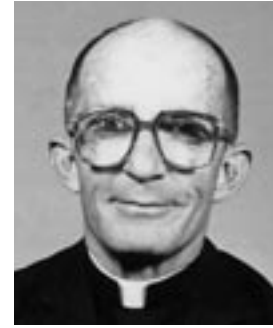




Marsh Moran, SJ, opened the doors of Nepal through education, establishing St. Xavier's School in the mountain kingdom.



Since 1955, Gene Watrin, SJ, has shared the Jesuit ministries in Nepal with friends all over the world. Mary Kay and Ed Joyce greet Gene in Chicago.



Tom Gafney, SJ, founded the Social Service Center in 1976 to aid the homeless, handicapped, and battle against drug abuse. Those efforts still continue after his murder in 1997.



Altar Mass episcopal blessing with (l to r) Fr. Lizbert D'Souza, SJ (Provincial of India), Apostolic Prefect Anthony Sharma, SJ, Bishop Victor Thakur, Archbishop Benjamin Osta, SJ, Bishop J. B. Thakur, SJ, Nepal Region Superior, Fr. Mathew Assarikudy, SJ, (in purple vestment)

nal life of Fr. Gafney who was found murdered in a small bungalow where he lived on December 14, 1997.

It was a time to celebrate the career of Fr. Eugene Watrin, SJ, who has been living and working among societal "misfits" in Nepal since 1955. In the Jubilee Celebration Program, he shared the following words: "Many boys tell me, 'Father, you have made

us misfits in society—our society of corruption, nepotism, and so on. However, we are happy, we sleep well at night, and we feel that we are people of integrity.'"

Fr. Matthew Assarikudy, SJ, Jesuit superior of the Nepal region, summed up the significance of the Jubilee celebration and the Jesuits' time in Nepal when he said, "like a

seed that is sown and later becomes a tree, the Nepal Jesuit region has grown with many branches in the past 50 years. The spirit that inspired Fr. Marshall Moran, SJ, fifty years ago continues to inspire us." The presence of that spirit is no doubt assurance that the tree will continue to grow and the world will always have its "misfits." ■

