

A Life of Service: The Inspiring Story of Rev. Fr. ShanthaSagara Hettiarachchi



Saviour Shanthalal Hettiarachchi



A Life of Service: The Inspiring Story of Reverend Father Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi

This memoir is dedicated to
Rev. Fr. ShanthaSagara Hettiarachchi,
who crossed the milestone of his 60th birthday on
June 18, 2024

Compiled by :
Shanthalal Hettiarachchi



Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Dungalpitiya

The Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Dungalpitiya holds a special place in the heart of Rev. Fr. Shanha Sagara Hettiarachchi. It is here that the seed of his vocation was planted and lovingly nurtured. This sacred place, deeply embedded in the fabric of the community, served as the fertile ground where Fr. Sagara's calling to the priesthood began to blossom. From his early days as an altar server to his profound spiritual awakenings during parish celebrations, the church stood as a beacon of faith and guidance, shaping his path towards a life dedicated to service and ministry.

Preface

The journey of a dedicated clergyman is often characterized by a blend of profound spirituality, unwavering commitment, and relentless pursuit of knowledge. This book delves into the life and work of Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi, a prominent figure within the Catholic Church, whose story is one of inspiration and devotion.

Fr. Sagara's early education was marked by academic excellence and spiritual growth, setting a strong foundation for his future endeavors. His formative years at Thalahena Junior Government School and St. Mary's College in Negombo showcased his exceptional academic abilities and deepening faith. His time at these institutions was pivotal, fostering his intellectual and spiritual development and nurturing his leadership qualities. His active involvement in religious activities and community service during these years highlighted his commitment to his faith and his desire to serve others.

His ordination was a significant milestone, marking the culmination of years of dedication and hard work. Surrounded by family, friends, and community members, Fr. Sagara was ordained a priest by His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Tonko and other distinguished clergy at St. Lucia's Cathedral, Kotahena. This deeply moving occasion signified his official entry into the priesthood and his commitment to a life of service to God and the Church.

Fr. Sagara's first Eucharistic celebration at St. Mary Magdalene's Church in Dungalpitiya was a momentous event for the local community. The grand ceremony, marked by a vibrant procession, drums, and flags, was a testament to the community's joy and pride in welcoming their newly ordained priest. The presence of senior priests, including his beloved uncle Rev. Fr. Joe Wickramasinghe and Rev. Fr. Abba Costa, who had initially encouraged him to pursue his vocation, added a layer of personal significance to the event.

His educational pursuits did not end with his ordination. Fr. Sagara's academic journey continued at prestigious institutions both in Sri Lanka and abroad. His tenure at Aquinas College of Higher Studies in Colombo, where he served as Deputy Rector under Rev. Fr. Crispin Leo, was a period of professional growth and further academic achievement. He obtained external degrees in various disciplines from the University of Peradeniya and the University of Kelaniya, enhancing his knowledge and skills.

In 2002, Fr. Sagara's quest for knowledge led him to Fordham University in New York, where he pursued a master's degree in journalism and education. During this time, he served at St. Peter and St. Paul's Church in Mount Vernon, earning the admiration of the church community for his humble approach, versatile communication skills, and engaging presentations. His contributions to the community were deeply appreciated, reflecting his commitment to both his academic pursuits and his pastoral duties.

Upon completing his studies at Fordham University, Fr. Sagara joined the Church of St. John Neumann in Las Vegas. His tenure there was marked by significant contributions to the local community and his work as a journalist for two newspapers, "Youth" and "Christian Walker." His engaging and insightful articles reflected his deep understanding of social issues and his commitment to promoting the values of the Church.

Fr. Sagara's return to Sri Lanka marked a new chapter in his service to the Church. His roles within the Archdiocese of Colombo, including his appointment as Episcopal Vicar for the Ja-Ela Region, underscored his leadership and dedication to his pastoral duties. His efforts in promoting education, social justice, and community service were widely recognized, making him a respected figure within the Church and the broader community.

This book aims to capture the essence of Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's remarkable journey. It explores his early years, his academic and spiritual development, and his contributions to the Church and the community. Through personal anecdotes, reflections, and insights, it provides a comprehensive portrait of a man whose life has been dedicated to the service of others. Fr. Sagara's story is one of faith, perseverance, and dedication, offering inspiration to all who seek to live a life of purpose and service..

His journey, marked by significant achievements and profound humility, serves as a testament to the power of faith and education in shaping a life dedicated to service.

The chapters that follow delve deeper into the various facets of his life, offering a detailed account of his experiences, challenges, and triumphs. Fr. Sagara's legacy continues to inspire, reminding us of the enduring impact of a life devoted to faith, knowledge, and community service.

In capturing his story, this book seeks to honour Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's contributions to the Church and society, celebrating his unwavering commitment to his vocation and his enduring impact on the lives of those he has touched.



Shanthalal Hettiarachchi
Dungalpitiya

18 June 2024

Chapter 1

Biography:

Rev. Fr. ShanthaSagara Hettiarachchi



Early Life

Rev. Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi was born on June 18, 1964, in Dungalpitiya, Negombo, a small town with a rich Catholic heritage. His parents, Antony Shanthasiri Hettiarachchi and Mary Fancisca Catheleen Wickramasinghe, were devout Catholics, and their unwavering faith played a significant role in his upbringing. From a very young age, Fr. Sagara was immersed in the spiritual life of his community. His family was deeply rooted in their religious beliefs, which profoundly influenced his early years.

Growing up, Fr. Sagara was an active member of his local parish, the Church of St. Mary Magdalene. This church was a central part of his life, and he participated enthusiastically in various church activities. As an altar server, he displayed a sense of responsibility and devotion that was remarkable for someone so young. He was also a member of the Junior Legion of Mary, a Catholic youth organization dedicated to prayer and service. Through these roles, he developed a strong inclination towards spiritual life, which would later define his vocation.

Fr. Sagara's love for singing and reading was evident from an early age. He found joy in the hymns and songs of the church, often leading the congregation in worship with his melodious voice.

Reading, too, became a cherished pastime, allowing him to explore the rich traditions and teachings of the Catholic faith. These interests not only nurtured his spiritual growth but also provided him with a sense of fulfillment and purpose.

He was the fourth child in a family of six, with three brothers and three sisters. This large and close-knit family environment fostered a strong sense of community and support. His father, a government servant, and his mother, a trained school teacher, instilled in their children the values of discipline, education, and faith. The Hettiarachchi household was characterized by a structured and nurturing environment, where the importance of education and spiritual development was emphasized.

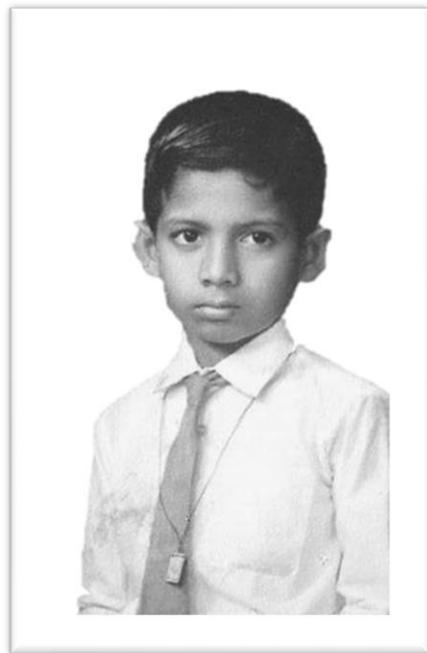
Fr. Sagara's parents played pivotal roles in shaping his character and values. His father's dedication to public service and his mother's commitment to education were exemplary. They ensured that their children grew up in a disciplined and loving environment, where respect for others and a sense of duty were paramount. These principles were deeply ingrained in Fr. Sagara, guiding him throughout his life.

In the village of Dungalpitiya, the church was more than just a place of worship; it was the heart of the community. Fr. Sagara's involvement in the church's children's activities further strengthened his bond with the local community

He participated in various events and programs organized by the church, fostering a sense of belonging and camaraderie with his peers. These experiences were instrumental in shaping his early life, providing him with a solid foundation in faith and community service.

The strong Catholic heritage of Dungalpitiya and the supportive environment of his family and parish were crucial in nurturing Fr. Sagara's spiritual journey. His early life was marked by a deep connection to his faith, a love for learning, and a commitment to serving others. These formative years laid the groundwork for his future as a dedicated and compassionate priest, guided by the principles of faith, love, and service.

*Image: Childhood photo
of Fr. Sagara*



A Legacy of Faith: The Hettiarachchi Family Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's Parents' House



Image of the Parents' House

The home of Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's parents stands as a testament to a long lineage of faith and devotion. This house, located Dungalpitiya has been a gathering place for family and community members for generations, fostering a strong sense of spirituality and community.

Family History Through Generations

The Hettiarachchi family has a rich history marked by significant milestones and moments of joy. These wedding photographs capture the essence of their enduring commitment to faith and each other.



Grandparents' Wedding Photo

Don Michel Hettiarachchi and
Maria Jayamanna



Parents' Wedding Photo

Shanthasiri Hettiarachchi
and Cathele Wickramasinghe

The Young Hettiarachchi Parents

(photo of parents in their youth)



Fr. Sagara's parents, seen here in their youth, laid the foundation for a home grounded in faith, education, and community.

Their commitment to providing a strong moral and spiritual upbringing for their children has been a guiding force in Fr. Sagara's life and vocation. Their love and dedication are evident in the close-knit bond shared by the entire Hettiarachchi family.

A Glimpse into the Hettiarachchi Family's Early Years



Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's parents were blessed with six children—three boys and three girls. His childhood was filled with the warmth and camaraderie of a large family, creating a vibrant and supportive environment. Growing up with his siblings, Fr. Sagara learned the values of love, support, and perseverance, which became foundational to his character and faith.

Each sibling, with their unique talents and personalities, contributed to a lively and nurturing home, fostering a strong sense of unity and shared purpose.

In this close-knit family setting, Fr. Sagara developed a deep sense of empathy and compassion, qualities that would later define his ministry and service to others. The dynamic interactions and mutual encouragement among his siblings not only enriched his early life but also instilled in him the importance of community and collaboration. These formative experiences played a crucial role in shaping his approach to his spiritual and social responsibilities, ultimately guiding him in his journey to become a revered and impactful figure within the Church and his community.

A Fortress of Faith

In Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's early life, the village, church, and school were deeply interconnected, creating a cohesive and supportive community. His mother, a pillar of faith and strength, significantly influenced this environment. Their old house stood as a fortress of faith, embodying the family's unwavering dedication to their beliefs. The Hettiarachchi family's commitment to their faith has been passed down through generations, with their home serving as a place of celebration and joy, reflecting their enduring legacy.

Fr. Sagara's journey is deeply rooted in this strong foundation of love, faith, and community. The vibrant interactions and shared experiences within his family and community shaped his character and guided his path. These early influences instilled in him a profound sense of empathy, compassion, and a dedication to service. As he grew, these values became central to his ministry, allowing him to touch countless lives and leave a lasting impact on the Church and broader society.

Early Education

Rev. Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's early education began at Thalahena Junior Government School, where he quickly distinguished himself through his academic excellence and leadership in religious activities. From a young age, his innate curiosity and dedication to his studies were evident. At Thalahena, he laid a strong foundation for his future educational pursuits, both academically and spiritually. This early exposure to a structured educational environment fostered his love for learning and set the stage for his future accomplishments.

Following his time at Thalahena, he continued his education at St. Mary's College in Negombo. Here, he further demonstrated his academic prowess and deepening commitment to his faith. St. Mary's College, known for its rigorous academic standards and strong Catholic values, provided an environment that nurtured his intellectual and spiritual growth. He was actively involved in the college's religious activities, often leading prayer sessions and participating in various church-related events. His leadership qualities began to shine, and he became a respected figure among his peers and teachers.

During these formative years, he became increasingly involved in church activities, deepening his understanding of religious studies. His passion for serving the church and his community grew stronger, guiding him towards a vocation in the priesthood. His involvement in the church extended beyond the school environment; he participated in local parish activities, youth groups, and community service projects. These experiences allowed him to develop a strong sense of empathy, compassion, and a desire to help others, traits that would become central to his ministry.

Determined to pursue his calling, he enrolled in the renowned St. Aloysius Seminary in Borella for his secondary-level studies. The seminary, known for its rigorous academic curriculum and spiritual formation programs, was the perfect place for him to nurture his vocation. He excelled in his studies, immersing himself in the rich traditions and teachings of the Catholic Church. His dedication to both academic excellence and spiritual growth earned him the respect and admiration of his mentors and fellow seminarians.

“During this time, reading books was a special pastime for him. His father had a library, and his mother's proficiency in the Sinhala language helped instill in him a love for literature and art, as well as the skills to write and speak eloquently.”

Admission to Seminary

In June 1976, in the small coastal town of Pamunugama, young Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi took his first significant step towards his religious vocation. This journey began with his appearance for the initial selection exam held at St. Joseph's Church.

Out of the 30 students who applied, only 8 were chosen, and Sagara was among the selected few, marking an important milestone in his spiritual journey.



"Following this achievement, he successfully passed the Seminary Entrance examination held in Borella in October 1976. This examination was crucial in assessing his readiness and commitment to pursue a life dedicated to religious service.

On the 16th of January 1977, Sagara was formally admitted to St. Aloysius Church in Borella, a renowned institution known for its rigorous academic and spiritual training. This admission marked the official beginning of his seminary education, setting the foundation for his future as a devoted priest".

In the Seminary

At St. Aloysius Seminary, under the guidance of Father Kingsley Jayamanna, who was in charge of the seminary, young Sagara continued to develop his leadership and communication skills, further deepening his commitment to serving the church and others. He participated in various outreach programs, providing spiritual guidance and support to those in need. These experiences further solidified his desire to dedicate his life to the priesthood, inspiring him to strive for excellence in all aspects of his formation. The seminary environment, with its focus on spiritual discipline, academic rigor, and communal living, provided him with a holistic education that prepared him for the challenges and responsibilities of priestly life.

Having successfully passed the General Certificate of Ordinary Level Examination, he moved to Pepiliyana Sunethradevi Pirivena to pursue A-level studies in the arts stream as a day-scholar while residing at the seminary. This period was marked by intense academic preparation and a continued focus on his spiritual formation. At Sunethradevi Pirivena, he demonstrated his academic versatility, excelling in subjects that required critical thinking and creativity. His dedication paid off as he qualified for university education. However, true to his calling, he decided to put his university entrance on hold and continue his priestly studies.



Holiday trips during his time at junior seminary



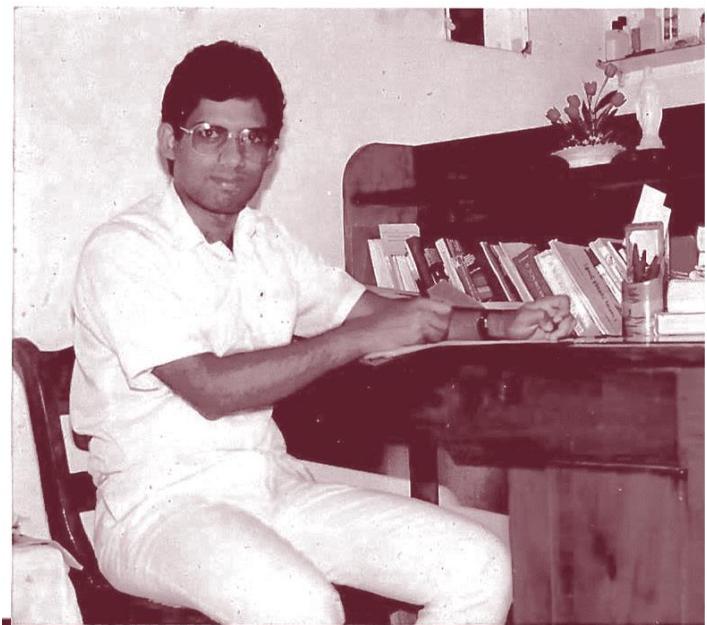
Here, his reading and writing abilities significantly improved. He began by writing hymns, songs, papers, and plays. He also contributed articles to newspapers such as Pradeepa, Muthu Menda, Davasa, and Lankadeepa.

"1983 Passed A-level and got university admission.

After high school: *In 1983, instead of attending university, he chose to go to the "Dhamma Sevana" Seminary in Kalutara, focusing on building his physical and spiritual aspects during that one-year period.*

In 1984, he entered the National Seminary for a total period of six years. At the end of these six years, he progressed to the Urban University, where he acquired two Bachelor's degrees in philosophy and theology".

*Image:
Fr. Sagara
during his
seminary
days*



He then continued his theological education at the National Seminary in Ampitiya. This seminary is renowned for its comprehensive curriculum that integrates academic study with spiritual and pastoral formation.

Here, he successfully acquired a Bachelor of Philosophy (BPh) and a Bachelor of Theology (BTh) from The Pontifical Urban University in Rome. His time at Ampitiya was marked by rigorous academic study, deep spiritual reflection, and practical pastoral experience. He engaged in various ministerial activities, gaining hands-on experience in parish work, counseling, and community outreach. This holistic approach to education ensured that he was well-prepared for the multifaceted demands of priestly ministry.

The National Seminary in Ampitiya provided him with a diverse and enriching educational experience. The curriculum was designed to provide a deep understanding of Catholic theology, scripture, and moral teachings, while also fostering personal spiritual growth. The seminary's emphasis on pastoral training ensured that he was not only knowledgeable but also compassionate and effective in ministering to the needs of his future parishioners.

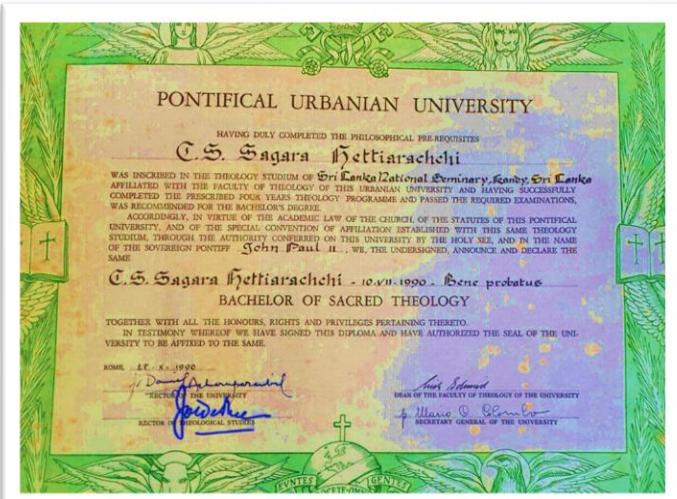
Throughout his educational journey, he was consistently recognized for his academic achievements and his unwavering commitment to his faith. His peers and mentors admired his dedication, humility, and the quiet strength with which he approached his studies and spiritual formation. His ability to balance academic excellence with a deep spiritual life was a testament to his character and his calling.



In this memorable photograph, a young seminarian, Sagara Hettiarachchi, is seen receiving accolades from the then Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. This moment captures the recognition of his dedication and promise within the clerical community. The Prime Minister's acknowledgment not only highlights Sagara's exceptional achievements but also sets the stage for his future contributions to the spiritual and social fabric of the nation. This early recognition serves as a testament to his unwavering commitment to his faith and his country.



Academic degrees in **Theology** (BTh) and **Philosophy** (BPh), conferred by The Pontifical Urbaniana University, Roma, Italy.



In addition to his formal education, he was actively involved in various extracurricular activities that enriched his seminary experience. He participated in choirs, drama clubs, and sports, which provided him with a well-rounded education and helped him develop essential life skills such as teamwork, leadership, and communication. These activities also allowed him to build strong relationships with his peers, creating a supportive network that would continue to be a source of strength and encouragement throughout his priestly ministry.

This young priest-student's educational journey was marked by a steadfast commitment to academic excellence, spiritual growth, and community service. From his early days at Thalahena Junior Government School to his ordination, his path was guided by a deep sense of faith and a desire to serve others. His education not only equipped him with the knowledge and skills necessary for his vocation but also reinforced the values and principles that would define his life as a devoted priest.

*Image:
Fr. Sagara
during his
seminary
days.*



Taking oath of fidelity



Priestly Practical Training

1.

Katuwapitiya, Negombo Church: Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's practical training began at the Katuwapiya Church in Negombo. This church, known for its active and vibrant parish community, provided an ideal environment for Fr. Sagara to apply his theological education in a pastoral setting. Here, he engaged with parishioners, led various church activities, and honed his skills in ministry and pastoral care. His time at Katuwapiya was instrumental in shaping his approach to priesthood, emphasizing the importance of community involvement and spiritual guidance.

2.

Modara St. James Church: Following his training at Katuwapiya, Fr. Sagara continued his practical training at St. James Church in Modara. St. James Church is noted for its commitment to social outreach and support for marginalized communities. At St. James, Fr. Sagara expanded his pastoral experience, working closely with diverse groups and addressing various social and spiritual needs. This phase of his training allowed him to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by urban parishes and the role of the church in providing comprehensive support to its members. His experiences at St. James enriched his perspective on ministry, reinforcing his dedication to serving all segments of the community with compassion and empathy.

Ordination

The culmination of Rev. Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's educational journey at the National seminary was his ordination, a significant milestone that marked the beginning of his formal ministry.

Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi was ordained a priest by His Eminence The Most Rev. Joseph Cardinal Tonko, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, His Grace the Most Rev. Dr. Nicholas Marcus Fernando, the Archbishop of Colombo, and His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. Oswald Gomis, the Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo. The ordination took place at St. Lucia's Cathedral in Kotahena on Saturday, 28th July, at 9:00 a.m.

The ceremony was attended by family, friends, and members of the community who had supported him throughout his journey. His ordination was a deeply moving and joyful occasion, reflecting the culmination of years of dedication, hard work, and unwavering faith. It was a moment of profound transformation, as he fully embraced his calling to serve God and the church.

This momentous occasion was a testament to Fr. Sagara's unwavering faith, dedication, and the support of his family and community.



Image:

Fr. Sagara during his ordination



Image: Fr. Sagara during his ordination



28 July 1990

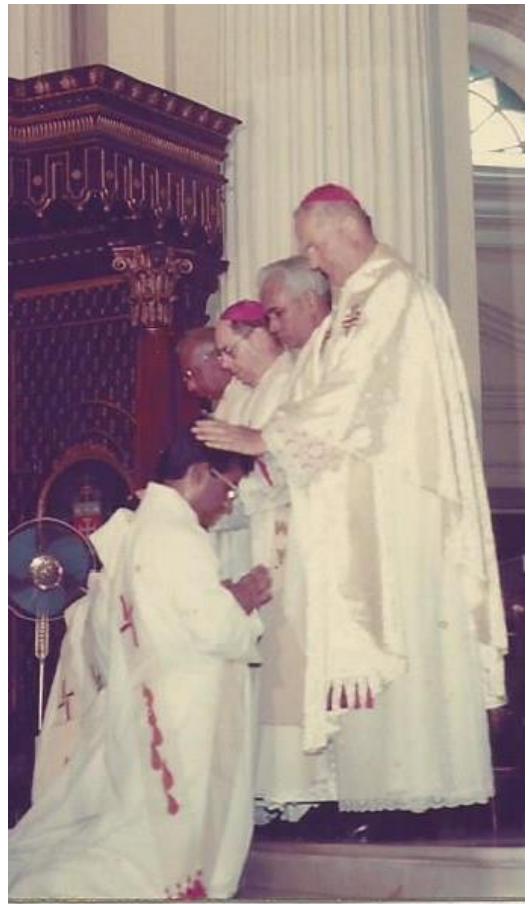


Image: Fr. Sagara during his ordination

His ordination was celebrated with great joy and reverence, signifying his official entry into the priesthood. The grandeur of the ceremony at St. Lucia's Cathedral, with its historic architecture and spiritual significance, provided a fitting backdrop for such an important event. The presence of high-ranking church officials underscored the importance of the occasion, while the participation of his loved ones highlighted the personal and communal significance of his ordination.



First Eucharistic Celebration at St. Mary Magdalene's Church, Dungalpitiya

The celebration of Fr. Sagara's first Eucharistic Celebration at St. Mary Magdalene's Church in Dungalpitiya on Sunday, 5th August 1990, at 8:30 a.m., was a grand ceremony for the village of Dungalpitiya, his hometown. The anticipation and excitement in the village were palpable as the community prepared to welcome their newly ordained priest. The streets were adorned with flags and flowers, and a sense of pride and joy filled the air.

The
Precious
Moments



Fr. Sagara was received at the border of Dungalpitiya and was accompanied by drums and flags in a vibrant procession to the church. The procession was a sight to behold, with villagers lining the streets, waving and cheering as they welcomed him. The rhythmic beats of traditional drums, the vibrant colours of the flags, and the joyful songs sung by the church choir created an atmosphere of celebration and reverence. It was a scene that embodied the deep sense of community and faith that characterized Dungalpitiya.



As the procession moved through the village, it grew larger, with more people joining in to be a part of this significant moment. Children ran ahead, excitedly leading the way, while elders followed, reflecting on the pride and joy they felt seeing one of their own return as a priest. The journey to the church was filled with moments of laughter, prayer, and heartfelt greetings, creating a tapestry of emotions that highlighted the strong bonds within the community.

Upon reaching St. Mary Magdalene's Church, Fr. Sagara was greeted by a large congregation that had gathered to witness his first Mass. The church, beautifully decorated with flowers and candles, was filled to capacity, with many people standing outside to be a part of the celebration. The altar, adorned with white lilies and roses, symbolized purity and new beginnings, perfectly capturing the essence of the occasion.



Lighting the traditional oil lamp thus Creating an ambience of energy and positivity



The Eucharistic celebration itself was a deeply spiritual and moving experience. As Fr. Sagara stood at the altar, leading the congregation in prayer, his voice resonated with a blend of humility and authority. The villagers, many of whom had known him since childhood, were moved by the sight of him in his priestly vestments, leading them in worship. The atmosphere inside the church was one of profound reverence and joy, as the community came together to celebrate this significant milestone in Fr. Sagara's life.

A Touching Moment at the Altar

The most intriguing and emotionally charged scene at the altar during Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's first mass was the presence of two senior priests, who held a special place in his heart. These priests were not just distinguished clergymen but his beloved uncle, Rev. Fr. Joe Wickramasinghe, and Rev. Fr. Abba Costa. Their presence at this significant event added a deeply personal and touching dimension to the ceremony, as they had played pivotal roles in guiding and supporting him throughout his journey towards priesthood.

Rev. Fr. Joe Wickramasinghe, his mother's brother, had always been a pillar of strength and inspiration for young Sagara. Growing up, Sagara looked up to his uncle with immense admiration and respect. Fr. Joe was a man of profound faith, wisdom, and compassion, qualities that deeply influenced Sagara's own spiritual development. It was Fr. Joe who first recognized the budding vocation in Sagara and encouraged him to consider a life dedicated to serving God and the Church. He provided not only spiritual guidance but also emotional support, nurturing Sagara's early interest in religious life.



Similarly, Rev. Fr. Abba Costa played a crucial role in Sagara's formative years. Known for his dedication to pastoral care and his deep understanding of theology, Fr. Costa was a mentor who offered Sagara invaluable insights into the life of a priest. He was a constant source of encouragement, helping Sagara navigate the challenges and uncertainties that often accompany the decision to pursue a religious vocation. Fr. Costa's unwavering support and belief in Sagara's potential were instrumental in shaping his path to the seminary.

As Sagara progressed through his education and spiritual formation, both Fr. Joe and Fr. Costa remained steadfast figures in his life. They celebrated his achievements, offered counsel during difficult times, and continuously inspired him with their own examples of devout service. Their involvement in his journey to priesthood was a testament to the profound bond they shared, not just as family and mentors, but as fellow servants of faith..



On the occasion of his first eucharist celebration, the sight of these two senior priests standing by his side at the altar was deeply moving for both Sagara and the congregation. Their presence symbolized the continuity of faith and the passing of spiritual wisdom from one generation to the next.

This touching moment was not lost on the congregation. Many were moved to tears, recognizing the deep connections and the powerful narrative of faith and support that had brought Sagara to this pivotal moment. The presence of his beloved uncle and mentor at the altar served as a poignant reminder of the importance of community and familial bonds in nurturing one's spiritual journey.

As Sagara rose, newly ordained, he did so with the profound awareness that his journey had been a collective effort, supported by the unwavering faith and love of those who believed in him. The presence of Fr. Joe and Fr. Costa was a testament to the enduring impact of their guidance and support, and a powerful affirmation of the strength and beauty of their shared faith. This moment at the altar, enriched by the presence of these two beloved priests, was a fitting culmination of Sagara's journey to priesthood, marking the beginning of his own path as a spiritual leader.

The Luncheon Hosted by His Parents

Following the Eucharistic celebration, a grand luncheon was hosted by Fr. Sagara's parents at their native house. The house, which had been the center of many family gatherings and community events, was once again filled with laughter, joy, and a sense of togetherness. The luncheon was a reflection of the Hettiarachchi family's hospitality and their deep-rooted connection to the community.

The preparations for the luncheon had begun days in advance, with family members and neighbours coming together to cook and set up for the event. The aroma of traditional Sri Lankan dishes filled the air, tantalizing the senses and adding to the festive atmosphere. Tables were set up in the courtyard, under the shade of large mango and coconut trees, providing a picturesque setting for the gathering.

Guests were treated to a sumptuous spread of traditional dishes, each carefully prepared to celebrate the joyous occasion. There were fragrant rice dishes, spicy curries, and an array of sweets and desserts that showcased the rich culinary heritage of the region. The meal was not just a feast for the palate but also a celebration of community and shared joy.

As guests enjoyed the delicious food, there were moments of laughter, storytelling, and heartfelt conversations. Fr. Sagara moved from table to table, greeting guests, receiving blessings, and sharing in the joy of the moment. His parents, Antony Shanthasiri Hettiarachchi and Mary Francisca Catheleen Wickramasinghe, beamed with pride as they watched their son being embraced by the community. Their home, which had always been a place of love and hospitality, now overflowed with the added joy of seeing their son's achievements being celebrated by those who had supported him throughout his journey.

The luncheon was also a time for the community to express their gratitude and admiration for Fr. Sagara. Speeches were made, recounting his journey and the impact he had already made in the lives of those around him. Elders from the village spoke of his childhood, his dedication to his studies and faith, and the promise they saw in him even as a young boy. These speeches were filled with emotion, reflecting the deep sense of pride and connection that the community felt towards him.

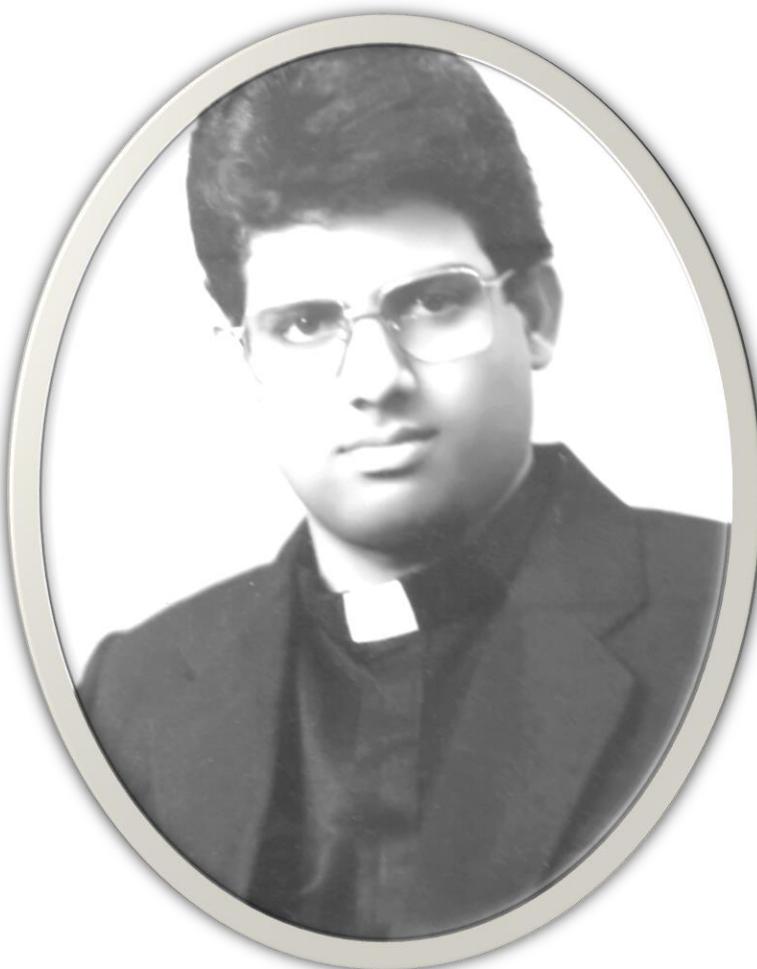
Children from the village performed traditional dances and songs, adding to the festive atmosphere. Their performances were a testament to the vibrant culture of Dungalpitiya and the community's ability to come together in celebration. Fr. Sagara watched with joy and pride, knowing that these young performers were the future of the community he was now called to serve.

As the luncheon drew to a close, there was a palpable sense of fulfillment and unity. The event had not only celebrated Fr. Sagara's ordination but had also strengthened the bonds within the community. It was a day that would be remembered for years to come, a day when the village of Dungalpitiya came together to honour one of their own and to celebrate the beginning of a new chapter in his life.



Chapter 2:

Early Ministry and Further Studies



Throughout his life, Fr. Sagara remained committed to the principles of lifelong learning and personal growth. He continued to seek opportunities for further education and training, attending workshops, conferences, and courses that allowed him to stay abreast of developments in theology, pastoral care, and social justice issues. His dedication to continuous learning ensured that he remained a dynamic and effective leader, capable of addressing the evolving needs of his parish and the broader community.

Fr. Sagara's educational journey also underscored the importance of community and collaboration. He believed that education was not a solitary endeavor but a communal one, where individuals learn from one another and grow together. This belief was reflected in his approach to ministry, where he fostered a spirit of inclusivity, dialogue, and shared responsibility. He encouraged his parishioners to take an active role in the life of the church, empowering them to contribute their talents and insights for the common good.

Following his ordination, Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi received his maiden appointment at Aquinas College of Higher Studies in Colombo 8, where he served under the guidance of Rev. Fr. Crispin Leo, the Rector of Aquinas University College, in the capacity of Deputy Rector. This role provided Fr. Sagara with an invaluable opportunity to hone his administrative and pastoral skills, working closely with students and faculty in a dynamic academic environment.

Maiden appointment
to Aquinas collage,
Colombo.



In 1996, while still serving at Aquinas College, Fr. Sagara was appointed as the Chaplain of Youth Affairs and University Chaplain of the Colombo Archdiocese. This appointment allowed him to engage directly with young people, offering spiritual guidance and support during their formative years. His role as Chaplain was crucial in fostering a sense of community and faith among the youth, helping them navigate the challenges of university life while maintaining their spiritual commitments.



Sri Lanka University Catholic Students' Movement (SLUCSM)

About

"Sri Lanka University Catholic Students' Movement (SLUCSM) affiliated with International Movement of Catholic Students Pax Romana (IMCS) has been promoting Catholic student leadership among students and undergraduates towards a meaningful and exemplary Christian life so that they become a catalyst among their fellow students since 1935."

Recognizing the importance of continued education for effective ministry, Fr. Sagara took the opportunity to pursue further studies with the blessings of Rev. Fr. Crispin Leo. His educational journey was marked by a series of academic achievements, each contributing to his growth as a scholar and a priest.

"The late Fr. Crispin Leo was a true mentor, guiding Fr. Sagara towards academic excellence. His unwavering support and wisdom were instrumental in shaping Fr. Sagara's scholarly achievements."



Receiving H.E. President R. Premadasa as the chief guest at the convocation of Aquinas College.

Views and Expressions

(Extractions from the world-wide web



CHAPLAIN DEPLORES UNIVERSITY RAGGING THAT LED TO A STUDENT'S DEATH Sri Lanka November 26 1997

Following the first reported death from ragging at a Sri Lankan university, the chaplain of the Sri Lanka Catholic Students' Movement has denounced the increasingly common practice among students.

Father Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi said that while ragging has become characteristic of a "subculture" at the universities, such inhuman ragging, which he blamed on jealousy and sadism, can never be permitted. "A majority of our university students oppose ragging outright, but unfortunately, it seems that we are unable to eliminate this evil altogether," the priest told UCA News Nov. 10. The former vice rector at Aquinas College of Higher Studies in Colombo said mild ragging, such as singing a song, might be acceptable, but he urged better understanding between "freshers" and seniors to stop more serious ragging.



CHURCH GROUP INVITES LEFTIST PARTY TO COOPERATE IN SOLVING ETHNIC CRISIS Sri Lanka January 22 2001

His sentiment was echoed by Father Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi. The Catholic students' chaplain told UCA News, "The forum was ample proof that the Church and the left could work jointly on national issues."

Mission at St. Peter and St. Paul's Church in Mount Vernon

Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's journey at St. Peter and St. Paul's Church in Mount Vernon marked a significant chapter in his ministry, intertwining his pursuit of higher education with his unwavering commitment to pastoral care. Arriving in New York in 2002, Fr. Sagara had enrolled at Fordham University to pursue a master's degree, but his dedication to serving the church remained undiminished. St. Peter and St. Paul's Church became his spiritual home and mission ground during this period.

Fr. Sagara quickly endeared himself to the church community with his humble approach and genuine concern for the well-being of his parishioners. His ability to connect with people from all walks of life, coupled with his versatile communication skills, made him a cherished presence in the parish. He was known for his engaging sermons that not only conveyed deep theological insights but also resonated with the everyday experiences of his congregation. His presentations, often enriched with cultural references and practical examples, captivated his audience and made complex religious teachings accessible to all.

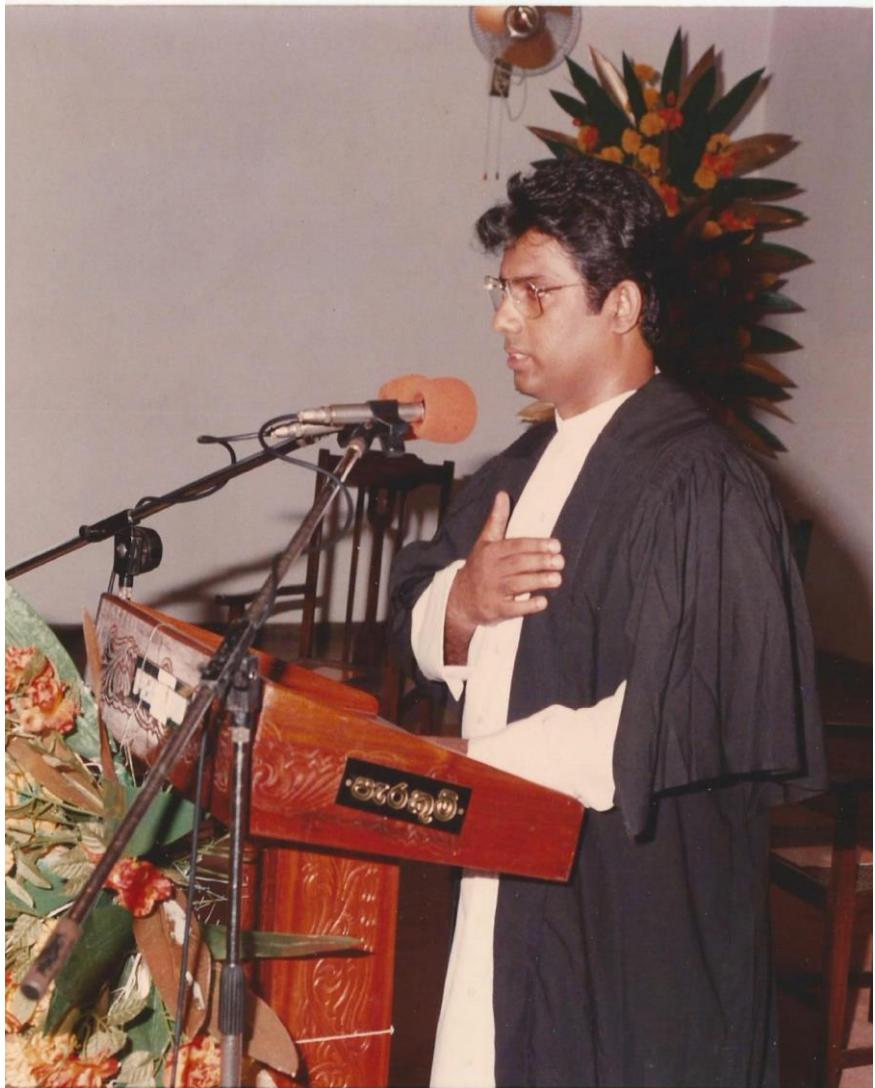
Academic Pursuits

In 1993, Fr. Sagara earned an external degree from the University of Peradeniya, specializing in Sinhala, Political Science, and Economics. This multidisciplinary education provided him with a broad understanding of societal dynamics, enriching his ability to address contemporary issues within his ministry.

The following year, he received another external degree from the University of Kelaniya, this time focusing on Sinhala, Sociology, and Christian Culture. This degree further deepened his understanding of cultural and social contexts, enhancing his ability to connect with and serve diverse communities.

*Double Degree from the
Universities of Peradeniya and
Kelaniya, Sri Lanka*



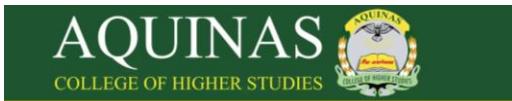


Father Sagara on the Podium at Convocation

In addition to his formal degrees, Fr. Sagara pursued courses in mass communication from the University of Colombo and Aquinas Institute of Higher Studies. These courses equipped him with essential communication skills, enabling him to effectively convey messages of faith and morality to a wider audience.

Followed:
Diploma in Communication and Media Studies

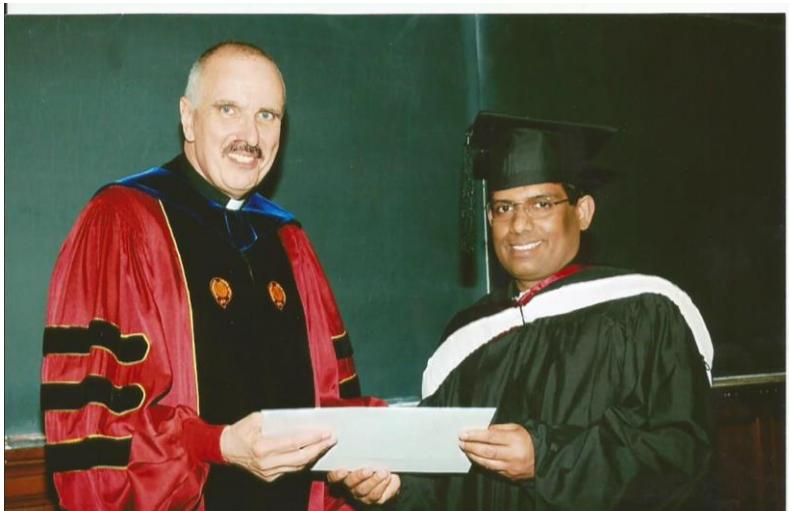
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UNIVERSITY OF COLOMBO

2.  AQUINAS
COLLEGE OF HIGHER STUDIES 

International Studies and Ministry

In 2002, Fr. Sagara embarked on an international academic journey, gaining admission to Fordham University in New York for a master's degree. During this period, he also confirmed his service at St. Peter and St. Paul's Church in Mount Vernon, where he balanced his academic pursuits with active pastoral duties.

In 2005, Fr. Sagara successfully earned a master's degree in journalism and education from Fordham University. This accomplishment not only enhanced his academic credentials but also provided him with advanced skills in journalism and education, which he would later utilize in his ministry.



Conferred a Master's Degree at Fordham University,
New York, USA

During his time at St. Peter and St. Paul's, Fr. Sagara actively participated in various church activities, providing spiritual guidance and support to individuals and families. He led prayer groups, organized community events, and was always available for personal consultations. His compassionate nature and willingness to listen made him a trusted confidant for many parishioners facing personal or spiritual challenges.

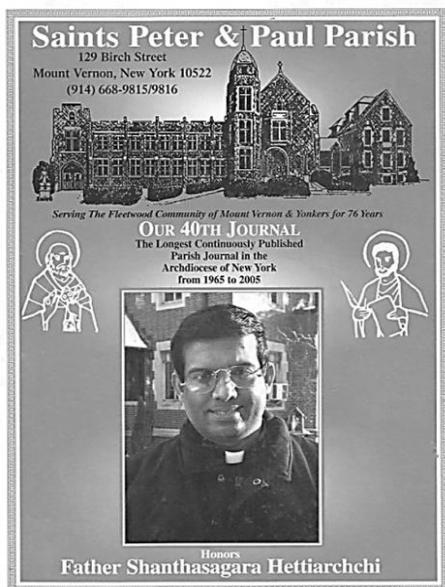
One of Fr. Sagara's notable contributions was his work with the youth of the parish. Understanding the unique challenges faced by young people, he organized youth groups and activities that fostered a sense of community and spiritual growth. He encouraged open discussions on faith, morality, and everyday issues, providing a safe space for young parishioners to express their thoughts and concerns. His efforts were deeply appreciated by the church community, as he played a crucial role in nurturing the next generation of faithful.

Sts Peter & Paul Church

129 E Birch St,
Mt Vernon,
NY 10552,
United States



Saints Peter & Paul Parish Journal Dedication



Saints Peter & Paul Parish dedicated their 40th journal to Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi in appreciation of his exceptional service to the parish community. This honor recognizes his dedication, leadership, and the positive impact he has made within the parish, reflecting his commitment to fostering a strong, compassionate, and united community.

Following his graduation, Fr. Sagara joined the Church of St. John Neumann in Las Vegas. Here, he embraced a dual role, working as a journalist for two newspapers, "Youth" and "Christian Walker." His work as a journalist allowed him to engage with a broader audience, addressing contemporary issues through the lens of faith and morality. His articles often reflected his deep commitment to social justice, education, and the spiritual well-being of the community.



St John Neumann Church
2575 W El Campo Grande Ave North
Las Vegas, NV 89031, United States

Mission at the Church of St. John Neumann in Las Vegas

In 2005, following his graduation from Fordham University with a master's degree in journalism and education, Fr. Sagara was assigned to the Church of St. John Neumann in Las Vegas. This new mission presented both challenges and opportunities, as he transitioned to serving a diverse and vibrant parish community in a bustling city known for its contrasts.

At St. John Neumann, Fr. Sagara's impact was immediately felt. His charismatic presence and ability to communicate effectively with people from different backgrounds made him an invaluable asset to the parish. He was deeply involved in the church's outreach programs, extending spiritual care and support to the broader community. His eye-catching presentations and sermons continued to draw large congregations, and his innovative approach to ministry resonated well with the parishioners.

Fr. Sagara's work in journalism also found a new platform at St. John Neumann. He became a journalist for two church-affiliated newspapers, "Youth" and "Christian Walker." Through these publications, he addressed contemporary issues from a faith-based perspective, offering insights and guidance on a wide range of topics.

His articles were well-received, reflecting his ability to engage with readers and address their concerns in a thoughtful and meaningful way.

The community at St. John Neumann deeply appreciated Fr. Sagara's efforts to integrate traditional religious teachings with modern communication methods. He organized workshops and seminars on various subjects, from spirituality and ethics to media literacy and social justice. His ability to blend his academic background with his pastoral duties enriched the parish's educational programs, fostering a well-rounded understanding of faith and its application in the contemporary world.

Fr. Sagara's tenure at St. John Neumann was marked by his dedication to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment. He worked tirelessly to ensure that everyone felt valued and heard, regardless of their background or life circumstances. His humble demeanor and genuine concern for the welfare of his parishioners earned him immense respect and admiration from the community.

Appreciations and Legacy

In both St. Peter and St. Paul's Church in Mount Vernon and the Church of St. John Neumann in Las Vegas, Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi was celebrated for his humble approach, versatile communication, and captivating presentations. His ability to connect with people on a personal level, coupled with his commitment to addressing contemporary issues through a faith-based lens, made him a beloved figure in these parishes.

The communities he served appreciated his efforts to make religious teachings relevant and accessible. His work with the youth, his involvement in community outreach, and his contributions to religious journalism left a lasting impact on the lives of many. Fr. Sagara's ministry in these parishes exemplified the essence of pastoral care, rooted in compassion, understanding, and a deep commitment to serving others.

As Fr. Sagara continues his journey in ministry, the experiences and lessons from his time at St. Peter and St. Paul's Church and St. John Neumann Church remain integral to his approach. His legacy in these parishes is a testament to the transformative power of faith, education, and community, and serves as an inspiration for future generations of clergy and faithful alike.

Returning Home

Upon completing his studies and gaining valuable international experience, Fr. Sagara returned to Sri Lanka 2007, bringing with him a wealth of knowledge and a renewed sense of purpose. His experiences abroad had broadened his perspective, enabling him to approach his ministry with fresh insights and innovative ideas.

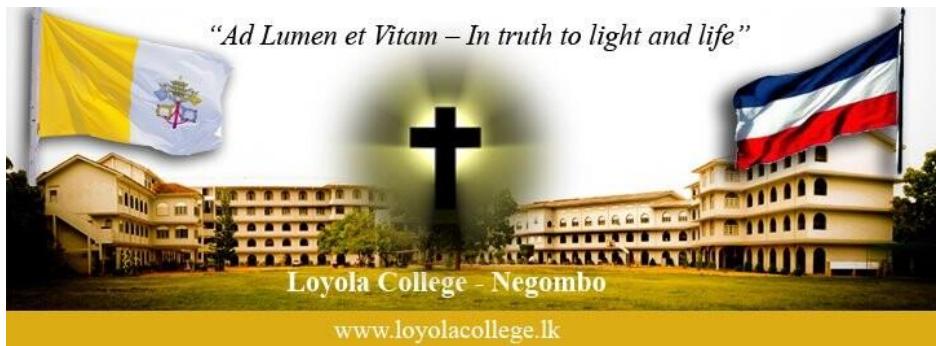


Return to Sri Lanka and Appointment as Deputy Principal of Loyola College, Negombo

In 2007, after completing his theological and academic training abroad, Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi felt a strong calling to return to his homeland, Sri Lanka. The years spent overseas had not only enriched his knowledge and experience but also deepened his commitment to contribute meaningfully to the education and spiritual growth of the youth in his country. With a heart full of hope and a mind brimming with ideas, he embarked on his journey back to Sri Lanka, ready to embrace the new challenges and opportunities that awaited him.

Upon his return, Fr. Hettiarachchi was warmly welcomed by the local community and the clergy. His reputation as a dedicated scholar and a compassionate priest had preceded him, and it was no surprise that he was soon appointed as the Deputy Principal of Loyola College, Negombo. This prestigious institution, known for its academic excellence and strong moral foundation, provided the perfect platform for Fr. Hettiarachchi to apply his skills and vision.

As Deputy Principal, Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi took on a multitude of responsibilities. His role was not just administrative; it was deeply intertwined with the academic and spiritual well-being of the students and staff



He worked closely with the Principal, staff members, and the broader school community to ensure that the school's standards of education and discipline were upheld.

Spiritual Guidance: Being a priest, his influence extended beyond the classroom. He was deeply involved in the spiritual formation of the students. Through regular Mass, retreats, and counseling sessions, he nurtured the faith and moral values of the young minds entrusted to his care.

Community Engagement: Understanding the importance of a supportive community, he fostered strong relationships with parents, alumni, and local organizations. He initiated various outreach programs that not only benefited the students but also uplifted the surrounding community.

His tenure as Deputy Principal; though very short, was marked by significant advancements in the school's academic and spiritual landscape. However, he was never one to rest on his laurels. His vision for Loyola College was one of continuous growth and improvement. He encouraged an ethos of lifelong learning and adaptability, preparing the students to face the ever-changing world with confidence and competence.

Chapter 3

Back to parish service



On February 1, 2008, Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi was appointed as the Parish Priest of Our Lady of Sorrows in Ja-Ela by His Grace, the Most Rev. Dr. Oswald Gomis, the Archbishop of Colombo. This appointment marked a significant chapter in both Fr. Sagara's pastoral journey and the history of Our Lady of Sorrows parish, bringing with it a wave of spiritual rejuvenation and community development.



"Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's impact as the Parish Priest of Our Lady of Sorrows, Ja-Ela, is a testament to his dedication, vision, and faith. His ability to blend traditional pastoral care with innovative community initiatives created a vibrant, dynamic parish that thrived under his leadership. As the parish continues to build on the foundations he laid, Fr. Sagara's tenure is remembered as a period of significant spiritual and social growth for the community."

The Early Days of Appointment

Upon his appointment, Fr. Sagara was met with the task of shepherding a diverse congregation in a rapidly urbanizing area. His approach was both traditional and innovative, balancing the rich liturgical practices of the Catholic Church with contemporary pastoral methods. Fr. Sagara's emphasis on the Eucharist as the source and summit of Christian life became a cornerstone of his ministry. He encouraged frequent participation in the sacraments, fostering a deeper spiritual life among the parishioners.



Community and Spiritual Development

One of Fr. Sagara's significant contributions was his focus on community building. Recognizing the importance of a strong, cohesive community, he initiated several programs aimed at fostering unity and mutual support among the parishioners. These programs included youth groups, family ministries, and outreach activities that catered to the various needs of the community.



Fr. Sagara also placed a strong emphasis on education and catechesis. Under his guidance, the parish's Sunday school program flourished, providing comprehensive religious education to the children and youth of the parish. He often remarked that educating the young in the faith was crucial for the future of the Church.

His efforts saw a notable increase in youth participation in church activities, from altar serving to choir singing, and even in organizing parish events.

Landmark Milestone

150th Anniversary of the Passion Play

A landmark event during Fr. Sagara's tenure was the 150th anniversary of the Passion Play at Our Lady of Sorrows parish. This historic play, which dramatizes the final days of Jesus Christ's life, is a deeply rooted tradition in the parish, drawing participants and audiences from far and wide. The anniversary celebration in 2008 was a monumental occasion, marked by elaborate preparations and widespread community involvement.



Mount Calvary – Ja Ela,

Fr. Sagara played a pivotal role in organizing and enhancing the Passion Play for its sesquicentennial celebration. His leadership ensured that the play not only honoured its historical significance but also resonated with contemporary audiences. The event included special performances, community activities, and spiritual reflections that highlighted the profound impact of Christ's passion and resurrection. The 150th anniversary not only celebrated a long-standing tradition but also strengthened the parish's cultural and spiritual identity.



150 years Jubilee celebration of the Passion Play at Mount Calvary – Ja Ela,

Views and Expressions *(Extractions from the world-wide web)*



Daily News

Sri Lanka's National Newspaper Since 1918

Thursday, 26 March 2009

Passion play of Ja-ela celebrates 150 years

..... When Rev. Fr. Santha Sagara heard about the 150th Jubilee of the Passion Play, his first task was to declare 2008/2009 as the Jubilee year. He then silently, but firmly engaged in the other activities that suit to its success.



Ja-Ela Kapaala Kanda (Mount Calvary) celebrates 150 year anniversary

Tue, 2009-03-24 01:48 — admin

By Quintus Perera – Asian Tribune Colombo, 24 March, (Asiantribune.com):

Rev Fr Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi, Parish Priest, Ja-Ela Our Lady of Sorrows Church directing the 150th Anniversary of the Ja-Ela Passion of Christ enactment.

Sunday April 05, 2009

With Good Friday approaching, a group of people in Ja-ela prepare to enact the Passion Play, for the 150th year, a practice that has been handed down from one generation to another

By Kumudini Hettiarachchi



Fr. Hettiarachchi

.....And this year is special because it is the 150th year that the people of Ja-ela bring to life not only the agony and passion of Christ but also His resurrection which are the most significant events in the Christian calendar.

"The Passion Play at Ja-ela is a mix of statues (rookada) and people," explains Parish Priest Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi.

However, no one has aspired to play the roles of Jesus Christ and Mother Mary in this historic play, begun way back in 1859 by L. Lewis Fernando, says Fr. Hettiarachchi, going down the corridors of time.

"The foundation stone for the old church building had been laid in 1801 and the hillock close to the church consecrated as Kapala Kanda in 1848," he says. Most probably it is the first in Sri Lanka to be declared as Mount Calvary; it is believed.

The Island
Online

SATURDAY MAGAZINE

The Passion play of Ja-Ela 150 years old

by L. S. Nelson Fernando

Ja-Ela was then a remote village, now turned into a town. In 1801 the foundation stone was laid to build a church. It was a small church then, now replaced by a beautiful, large church. This church was originally under the administration of the Nagoda Parish. Later it became a separate and an independent parish, in the Archdiocese. This church is dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows.....

.....Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi is the present parish priest of the Ja-Ela mission. He too takes great pain to improve this hillock and the Passion Plays to fulfill the aspirations of the parishioners, like his predecessors. On this historic occasion we extend our sincere thanks to all of them.

When Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara heard about the 150th anniversary of the Passion Play, his first task was to declare 2008/2009 the Jubilee Year. He then silently, but firmly engaged in the other activities that mark its success. He decided to issue a souvenir and to give a better look to the Calvary as well. With the Blessing of God Almighty may all his endeavours come true. At his request Ranaweera Fernando, with the consent of the chairman and members of the Urban Council, Ja-Ela, will change the system of electricity to the Calvary to fulfill the aspirations of the pilgrims.

150 Years Jubilee Celebration of the Passion Play at Mount Calvary – Ja Ela

The 150th Jubilee celebration of the Passion Play at Mount Calvary in Ja-Ela was a momentous occasion, deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual heritage of the region. The event was celebrated under the guidance and administration of Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi, the Parish Priest at the time, who played a pivotal role in organizing and enhancing this historic milestone.

Historical Background of the Passion Play

The Passion Play at Mount Calvary has been an integral part of the Ja-Ela community for a century and a half. It dramatizes the final days of Jesus Christ, culminating in His crucifixion and resurrection. This play has not only been a significant religious event but also a cultural one, drawing participants and spectators from various parts of Sri Lanka. Over the years, it has evolved, reflecting the changing times while preserving its core message of sacrifice and redemption.

Preparations and Enhancements

In the lead-up to the 150th Jubilee, Fr. Sagara undertook extensive preparations to ensure the event was both memorable and impactful. His leadership brought together various segments of the community, including the youth, families, and elders, to participate in the play and its associated activities. The preparations involved months of rehearsals, set design, and costume making, all aimed at creating an immersive and spiritually enriching experience for the audience.

One of Fr. Sagara's significant contributions was the introduction of modern theatrical techniques to enhance the play's production value. He incorporated elements such as advanced lighting, sound effects, and multimedia presentations, which brought a new dimension to the traditional performance. These enhancements not only made the play more engaging but also helped convey its profound messages more effectively.

The Jubilee Celebration

The 150th Jubilee celebration was marked by a series of events leading up to the grand performance of the Passion Play. These included spiritual retreats, special masses, and community gatherings that fostered a sense of unity and anticipation among the parishioners. The Jubilee festivities also featured cultural programs showcasing the rich heritage of J-
Ela, reflecting the deep connection between the community and the Passion Play.

On the day of the performance, Mount Calvary was transformed into a vibrant tableau of faith and devotion. The play was performed with great reverence and artistry, bringing to life the Passion of Christ in a way that resonated deeply with the audience. Fr. Sagara's direction ensured that the spiritual essence of the play was preserved, while the technical enhancements added a new layer of emotional depth.

Community Impact and Legacy

The 150th Jubilee celebration of the Passion Play had a profound impact on the Ja-Ela community. It reinforced the importance of faith, tradition, and collective effort in sustaining the cultural and spiritual fabric of the parish. The event also provided an opportunity for younger generations to connect with their heritage and appreciate the enduring significance of the Passion Play.

Fr. Sagara's leadership during this milestone event left a lasting legacy. His vision and dedication not only elevated the standard of the Passion Play but also strengthened the community's faith and unity. The successful celebration of the Jubilee is a testament to his ability to blend tradition with innovation, creating a spiritually enriching experience for all involved.

Social Outreach and Charity

Understanding the social dimension of the Gospel, Fr. Sagara spearheaded numerous charitable initiatives. He mobilized the parishioners to engage in outreach programs that supported the poor and marginalized within and beyond the parish boundaries. These initiatives included food drives, medical camps, and educational support for underprivileged children. His charismatic leadership inspired many to volunteer and contribute, fostering a culture of service and compassion.

Fr. Sagara's commitment to social justice was evident in his active involvement in addressing local issues. He worked closely with community leaders and local authorities to tackle problems such as substance abuse, domestic violence, and unemployment. By addressing these issues, he not only helped improve the lives of individuals but also strengthened the social fabric of the community.

Liturgical Enhancements

Fr. Sagara's liturgical leadership brought a renewed vibrancy to the parish's worship life. He introduced practices that enhanced the liturgical experience, such as incorporating local cultural elements into the Mass, which made the liturgy more relatable to the parishioners. He also paid special attention to the quality of liturgical music, ensuring that it was both spiritually uplifting and participatory.

His passion for the liturgy was particularly evident during major feasts and celebrations. Fr. Sagara's meticulous planning and execution of these events not only highlighted the richness of the Church's liturgical calendar but also drew the community together in celebration and worship.

Challenges and Resilience

Fr. Sagara's tenure was not without challenges. The dynamic socio-economic landscape of Ja-Ela presented several obstacles, including economic disparities and cultural tensions. However, Fr. Sagara's resilient spirit and unwavering faith enabled him to navigate these challenges effectively. His ability to listen, empathize, and provide practical solutions earned him the respect and trust of the parishioners.

Legacy and Impact

Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's appointment as the Parish Priest of Our Lady of Sorrows left an indelible mark on the parish community. His holistic approach to pastoral care—combining spiritual nourishment with social outreach—set a benchmark for future parish leadership. Under his guidance, the parish not only grew in numbers but also in faith and unity.

His legacy continues to inspire both the clergy and the laity to live out their faith in action. The programs and structures he established have endured, continuing to benefit the parish and the wider community.

Chapter 4

Leading with Words: Editor-in-Chief of the Catholic Newspaper



"Father Sagara's tenure as chief editor of "Pradeepaya" left a lasting impact on the newspaper and the Catholic community in Sri Lanka. His leadership was characterized by a deep commitment to the principles of Catholic social teaching, a passion for justice, and a dedication to excellence in journalism. Under his guidance, "Pradeepaya" not only survived but thrived, continuing to be a beacon of wisdom and a trusted source of information for generations of Sri Lankan Catholics."



Daily News

Sri Lanka's National Newspaper Since 1918

Saturday, 12 June 2010



Gnanartha Pradeepaya new Editor



GNANARTHA PRADEEPAYA NEW EDITOR

Daily News (New York, NY)

June 12, 2010

Sri Lanka, June 12 -- Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi, Parish Priest, Ja-ela has been appointed as the Editor, Gnanartha Pradeepaya, the Sinhala Catholic weekly considered to be the oldest newspaper in Sri Lanka.

Fr. Shantha Sagara holds a Mass Media degree and is the son of Shanthasiri Hettiarachchi of Dungalpitiya, a prominent Catholic writer and author.

Resumed duty as chief editor at "Pradeepaya" the Catholic Newspapers on 01 June 2010.

On June 1, 2010, Father Sagara Hettiarachchi resumed his role as the chief editor of "Pradeepaya," the Catholic weekly newspaper known as "The Lamp of Wisdom." This marked a significant milestone in his career and for the publication itself, which has been a vital part of the Catholic community in Sri Lanka for over 150 years. "Pradeepaya" is not just a newspaper; it is a cultural and religious touchstone for Catholics in Sri Lanka, providing news, analysis, and a Catholic perspective on current events.

Historical Significance of "Pradeepaya"

"Pradeepaya" was founded in the 1860s and has since evolved from a modest four-page broadsheet to a comprehensive 24-page weekly publication. Its mission has always been to inform and educate the Catholic community while addressing broader social, political, and economic issues. The newspaper has historically played a crucial role in defending the rights and interests of Catholics, who are a minority in a predominantly Buddhist country. Over the decades, "Pradeepaya" has faced various challenges, including censorship and political pressure, but it has consistently maintained its editorial independence and commitment to truth.

Father Sagara's Vision and Leadership

Father Sagara's return as chief editor brought renewed energy and direction to "Pradeepaya." His vision for the newspaper was rooted in a deep understanding of its historical role and an awareness of the changing media landscape. He emphasized the importance of adapting to new media trends, including the expansion of the newspaper's online presence. This move was crucial for reaching the Sri Lankan Catholic diaspora and younger readers who increasingly consume news digitally.

Editorial Independence and Integrity

Under Father Sagara's leadership, "Pradeepaya" continued to uphold its tradition of editorial independence. This was particularly important in a time when media outlets were often subjected to political and economic pressures. Father Sagara believed that the newspaper's role was not just to report news but to provide a platform for critical discussion and reflection. He encouraged his team to tackle controversial issues head-on, always with a view to promoting justice and the common good.

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Addressing Contemporary Issues

One of the key areas of focus for "Pradeepaya" under Father Sagara was its coverage of contemporary social issues. This included topics such as poverty, education, human rights, and environmental sustainability. The newspaper also provided in-depth analysis of political developments, always from a Catholic perspective that emphasized moral and ethical considerations. Father Sagara believed that the Catholic Church had a responsibility to engage with the world and address the challenges facing society.

Community Engagement and Outreach

Father Sagara also placed a strong emphasis on community engagement. He saw "Pradeepaya" not just as a newspaper but as a community resource. The publication featured regular columns and articles written by members of the Catholic community, including priests, laypeople, and experts in various fields. This helped to foster a sense of ownership and involvement among readers. Additionally, "Pradeepaya" organized events and forums to facilitate dialogue and discussion on important issues, further strengthening its role as a community hub.

Challenges and Opportunities

Leading "Pradeepaya" was not without its challenges. The newspaper had to navigate the complexities of operating in a media environment that was increasingly competitive and financially strained. Advertising revenue, which was traditionally a significant source of income for newspapers, was declining, and there was a need to explore new revenue models. Father Sagara and his team worked tirelessly to ensure that "Pradeepaya" remained financially viable while maintaining its editorial standards and independence.

The Role of Faith in Journalism

For Father Sagara, journalism was not just a profession but a vocation. He believed that faith should inform and inspire every aspect of a journalist's work. This meant striving for excellence, integrity, and a commitment to the truth. It also meant being a voice for the voiceless and standing up for justice, even when it was difficult or unpopular. Under his leadership, "Pradeepaya" exemplified these principles, earning the respect and trust of its readers.

Future Directions

Looking ahead, Father Sagara had ambitious plans for "Pradeepaya." He envisioned a future where the newspaper would continue to grow and evolve, embracing new technologies and reaching an even broader audience. He saw potential in expanding the newspaper's digital offerings, including interactive features, multimedia content, and social media engagement. He also wanted to strengthen partnerships with other Catholic media outlets around the world, creating a global network of Catholic journalism.

Father Sagara Hettiarachchi's Contributions to "Gnanartha Pradeepaya" and Its 150th Anniversary Celebration

Father Sagara Hettiarachchi's role as chief editor of "Gnanartha Pradeepaya," one of the oldest and most respected Catholic newspapers in Sri Lanka, has had a profound impact on his ministry and public engagements. His tenure has been marked by a dedication to upholding the values of the Catholic Church while addressing contemporary social issues with a focus on hope, collective action, and community engagement. This comprehensive article explores his contributions to the newspaper and highlights the celebration of its 150th anniversary under his editorship.

(Historical Context of "Gnanartha Pradeepaya":

Founded in 1864, "Gnanartha Pradeepaya" has been a cornerstone of Catholic journalism in Sri Lanka. The newspaper was established to serve the Catholic community by providing news, religious instruction, and commentary on social and political issues from a Catholic perspective. Over the years, it has grown from a modest publication into a significant voice for Catholics in Sri Lanka, navigating the complexities of a multi-religious society and a dynamic political landscape.)

The 150th Anniversary of "Gnanartha Pradeepaya"

Under Father Sagara's editorship, "Gnanartha Pradeepaya" celebrated its 150th anniversary, a milestone that underscored the newspaper's enduring relevance and importance. The anniversary was marked by a series of special editions, events, and initiatives that celebrated the newspaper's rich history and looked forward to its future.

Commemorative Editions and Special Features

To commemorate the 150th anniversary, Father Sagara oversaw the publication of a series of special editions that highlighted the newspaper's history and achievements. These editions included archival material, historical articles, and contributions from prominent figures in the Catholic community. They provided readers with a deeper understanding of the newspaper's legacy and its role in shaping Catholic thought and action in Sri Lanka.

One of the highlights of the commemorative editions was a retrospective of significant events covered by "Gnanartha Pradeepaya" over the past century and a half. This feature showcased the newspaper's role in documenting key moments in Sri Lanka's history, from colonial times to the present day. It also highlighted the newspaper's commitment to reporting on social justice issues and advocating for the rights of the marginalized.

Anniversary Events and Community Engagement

The 150th anniversary celebrations included a series of events that brought together members of the Catholic community, journalists, and other stakeholders. These events featured panel discussions, lectures, and cultural performances that explored the newspaper's impact and future direction. Father Sagara played a central role in organizing and moderating these events, using them as opportunities to engage with the community and gather feedback on the newspaper's content and mission.

One of the key themes of the anniversary events was the role of Catholic journalism in a changing world. Father Sagara invited prominent journalists and media experts to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing Catholic media today. These discussions highlighted the need for Catholic newspapers to remain relevant and adapt to new technologies while staying true to their core values.





GNANARTHA PRADEEPAYA celebrates 150th anniversary

- Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)
- 16 Jan 2016

The 150th Jubilee of the Gnanartha Pradeepaya, the oldest existing Sinhala Newspaper in Sri Lanka was celebrated on January 11. President Maithripala Sirisena and Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith are seen at the ceremony held at the Archbishop's House Auditorium. Flanking them are the Gnanartha Pradeepaya Editor Rev. Fr. Shanthasagara Hettiarachchi and the Catholic Messenger Editor Rev. Fr. Mahendra Goonetileka, who is also the Administrator of the Colombo Catholic Press.



Emphasis on Hope and Collective Action

One of the hallmarks of Father Sagara's writings is his emphasis on hope and collective action. He consistently highlighted the importance of hope as a driving force for individuals and communities facing challenges. In his editorials, Father Sagara often drew on the teachings of the Catholic Church to inspire readers to take positive action in their lives and communities. He believed that hope was not just a passive feeling but an active commitment to working towards a better future.

His articles frequently called for collective action to address social issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. He encouraged the Catholic community to come together to tackle these challenges, emphasizing the role of the Church in fostering a spirit of solidarity and mutual support. This focus on collective action resonated with readers and reinforced the idea that the Church is a vital agent of social change.

Addressing Contemporary Social Issues

Father Sagara's contributions to "Gnanartha Pradeepaya" extended beyond the realm of spiritual and religious discourse. He was deeply engaged with contemporary social issues and used the newspaper as a platform to address them. His editorials and articles covered a wide range of topics, including human rights, education, healthcare, and political developments.

One significant area of focus was the plight of marginalized and vulnerable groups. Father Sagara was a strong advocate for the rights of women, children, and ethnic minorities. He used his platform to raise awareness about their struggles and to call for justice and equality. His writings often included powerful personal stories and testimonies that highlighted the human impact of social issues, making them more relatable and compelling for readers



Advocacy and Social Justice

Father Sagara's advocacy for social justice has had a significant impact on the newspaper's readership and the broader community. His writings have raised awareness about critical issues and encouraged readers to take action. By highlighting the struggles of marginalized groups and calling for systemic change, he has helped to foster a more just and equitable society.

His commitment to social justice has also influenced the newspaper's reporting and editorial policies. "Gnanartha Pradeepaya" has continued to prioritize coverage of social issues and to provide a platform for voices that are often marginalized in mainstream media. This focus has reinforced the newspaper's role as a champion of justice and a voice for the voiceless.

Engaging the Catholic Community

Father Sagara's efforts to engage the Catholic community have strengthened the newspaper's connection with its readers. His inclusive approach, which encouraged contributions from a diverse range of voices within the community, has made "Gnanartha Pradeepaya" a more representative and dynamic publication. This engagement has fostered a sense of ownership and involvement among readers, who see the newspaper as a reflection of their experiences and concerns.

By organizing events and initiatives that brought the community together, Father Sagara has also reinforced the newspaper's role as a hub for dialogue and collaboration. These efforts have helped to build a stronger, more connected Catholic community that is better equipped to address the challenges of the modern world.

Adapting to a Changing Media Landscape

Father Sagara's recognition of the need to adapt to a changing media landscape has positioned "Gnanartha Pradeepaya" for continued success. His initiatives to expand the newspaper's digital presence and embrace new technologies have ensured that it remains relevant and accessible to a diverse audience. This forward-thinking approach has also opened up new opportunities for engagement and growth, allowing the newspaper to reach a wider and more diverse readership.

Father Sagara's Vision and Editorial Leadership

When Father Sagara Hettiarachchi took over as chief editor, he brought a fresh vision and a deep commitment to the newspaper's mission. His editorial leadership was characterized by a balance between tradition and innovation. He recognized the importance of maintaining the newspaper's historical legacy while adapting to the changing needs of its readership in the digital age.



photograph courtesy
Daily News
Wednesday, January 13, 2016 - 01:00



Father Sagara Hettiarachchi's contributions to "Gnanartha Pradeepaya" have been instrumental in shaping the newspaper's editorial direction, strengthening its connection with the Catholic community, and ensuring its continued relevance in a changing media landscape. His emphasis on hope, collective action, and social justice has resonated with readers and reinforced the newspaper's mission as a voice for the Catholic community in Sri Lanka.

Chapter 4

"back to parish service"

(returning to duties within a parish, i.e. pastoral care, liturgical duties, and community activities)



KADAWATHA Parish

Rev. Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi was appointed as the parish priest of St. Andrew Avellino's Church in Kadawatha in 2018



**St. Andrew Avellino's Church,
Kadawatha**

The historic parish of St. Andrew Avellino's in Kadawatha known for its vibrant community and rich traditions, has been a beacon of faith in the region. Since his appointment, Fr. Sagara has dedicated himself to nurturing the spiritual growth of the parishioners, fostering unity, and enhancing the church's outreach programs. His leadership has brought renewed vigour to the parish, encouraging greater participation in religious activities and community service. Under his guidance, St. Andrew Avellino's Church continues to thrive as a cornerstone of faith and community support in Kadawatha.

Rev. Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi

Appointed as the parish priest of St. Joseph's Church,
Pamunugama in 2019



Pamunugama Parish



"One of the prominent churches in the region, St. Joseph's Church has a rich history and cultural heritage, contributing to the spiritual and social fabric of the community."

Spiritual Leadership and Pastoral Care

Reverend Father Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi of St. Joseph's Church in Pamunugama exemplifies spiritual leadership through his profound and impactful sermons. His messages often center on themes of love, forgiveness, and unity, resonating deeply with parishioners and fostering a strong sense of community. Father Sagara's pastoral care goes beyond his sermons; he provides comfort during times of grief, celebrates significant life milestones, and guides individuals on their faith journeys. His genuine concern for each parishioner creates a welcoming and supportive environment within the church.

Community Outreach Programs

Under Father Sagara's guidance, St. Joseph's Church has become a beacon of compassion in the Pamunugama community. The church is actively involved in various outreach programs, including food drives, clothing distribution, and medical camps aimed at assisting the less fortunate. Father Sagara's vision extends beyond immediate material aid; he is deeply committed to empowering individuals through education and skill development initiatives. This holistic approach not only addresses the physical needs of the community but also aims to uplift and empower its members.

Youth Empowerment and Mentorship

Recognizing the importance of nurturing the younger generation, Father Sagara invests significantly in the youth of his parish. He organizes Bible study groups, vocational training sessions, and leadership workshops to help young parishioners develop their talents and skills. By encouraging them to explore their abilities and take on responsibilities, Father Sagara ensures the continuity of faith and service within the church. His mentorship fosters a sense of purpose among the youth, preparing them to become future leaders of the community.

Cultural Celebrations and Heritage Preservation

Father Sagara places great importance on celebrating and preserving the cultural heritage of Pamunugama. He organizes various cultural events, such as music festivals, art exhibitions, and traditional performances, within the church premises. These events not only showcase local talent but also strengthen the cultural identity of the parishioners. By promoting and preserving cultural practices, Father Sagara instills a sense of pride and belonging among the members of his community.

Interfaith Harmony in Practice

Father Sagara is a strong advocate for interfaith dialogue and harmony. He believes that understanding and respecting other religious traditions is crucial for creating a harmonious society. To this end, he organizes seminars, workshops, and collaborative events that bring together people of different faiths. These initiatives foster respectful conversations, dispel misconceptions, and build bridges of understanding between diverse religious communities.

Impact on Lives

The compassionate approach of Father Sagara has touched countless lives within and beyond the boundaries of St. Joseph's Church. Many families have found hope during difficult times, children have been provided with educational opportunities, and the elderly have felt cared for and valued. Father Sagara's legacy is reflected in the positive changes he has brought to the lives of those he has served, leaving an indelible mark on the community.

Architectural Significance

St. Joseph's Church in Pamunugama is not only a center of spiritual life but also a monument of architectural beauty. The church, believed to have been constructed during the Portuguese regime, features a stunning Gothic-style façade, intricate stained glass windows, and elaborately carved wooden altars. Father Sagara's dedication to maintaining the church's structural integrity ensures that future generations can continue to appreciate its historical and architectural significance.

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St. Sebastian's Church - Elen Egoda, Pamunugama



Currently, St. Sebastian Church, Alen Egoda, which is part of the Pamunugama mother parish, is under the spiritual guidance of Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi. Fr. Sagara, as he is affectionately known, brings a wealth of experience and a deep sense of dedication to his role as parish priest. His tenure at St. Sebastian Church is marked by a renewed focus on community engagement, spiritual growth, and social outreach.

Fr. Sagara is known for his compassionate and approachable nature, making him a beloved figure among the parishioners. He actively leads Masses, confessions, and various liturgical celebrations, ensuring that the spiritual needs of the community are met. His homilies are deeply inspiring, often drawing from his own experiences and his profound understanding of the scriptures.

Under Fr. Sagara's leadership, St. Sebastian Church has seen an increase in community-focused initiatives. He has been instrumental in organizing charity drives, educational programs, and health camps that benefit the local population. His efforts have strengthened the bond between the church and the community, making the church a central figure in addressing social issues and supporting the underprivileged.

Fr. Sagara places a strong emphasis on religious education for all age groups. He has introduced several programs aimed at deepening the understanding of the Catholic faith among children, youth, and adults. Catechism classes, Bible study groups, and retreats are regularly held, fostering a robust religious education environment within the parish.

Collaboration and Partnerships

In line with his broader vision, Fr. Sagara has fostered collaborations with other religious figures, local organizations, and community leaders. These partnerships aim to promote interfaith dialogue, communal harmony, and collective action on social issues. His ability to work across different groups for a common cause has significantly enhanced the church's role in the broader community.





Laying the
foundation stone
for the newly
constructed
"Lourdes" cave at
the St. Sebastian
Church premises in
Alen Egoda,
Pamunugama.



All Saints Church , Seda Uyana , Pamunugama



All Saints Church , Pamunugama Seda Uyana.

All Saints Church, located at Seda Uyana in Pamunugama, stands out as a serene and picturesque place of worship. The aerial view of the church, nestled on a verdant island surrounded by water, highlights its unique setting and the natural beauty that envelops it. This tranquil environment provides a peaceful retreat for visitors and parishioners alike, fostering a deep sense of spirituality and connection with nature. The statues and monuments adorning the church grounds further enhance its sanctity, offering spaces for contemplation and prayer against the backdrop of lush greenery and calm waters.



All Saints Church, located in Pamunugama's Seda Uyana, stands as a vibrant hub of faith and community life.

The church is dedicated to All Saints, celebrating the lives of all holy men and women, known and unknown, who have achieved sainthood.

All Saints Church is not only a place of worship but also a center for various community activities and outreach programs. The church organizes regular Masses, prayer meetings, and religious festivals, fostering a deep sense of spirituality and community among its members. Additionally, it hosts educational programs, charity drives, and social gatherings, making it a cornerstone of support and fellowship in Seda Uyana. The church's active social media presence, indicated by its substantial number of likes, highlights its commitment to staying connected with its parishioners and engaging with the wider community in meaningful ways.



Reverend Father Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi has played a pivotal role as the administrative priest of All Saints Church. Known for his dedication and compassionate leadership, Fr. Sagara has significantly contributed to the church's growth and the spiritual well-being of its community. His efforts in organizing religious events and pastoral activities have strengthened the church's presence and outreach. Under his guidance, the church has not only maintained its serene ambiance but also become a beacon of faith and unity for the people of Pamunugama and beyond.



Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi appointed as the Episcopal Vicar in the Ja-Ela region

Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi, while serving as the parish priest of the large Pamunugama parish, was re-titled as the Episcopal Vicar for the Ja-Ela Region by His Eminence Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith. This dual role brought additional duties and responsibilities.

Acting with the bishop's authority, Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi managed the Ja-Ela Region, ensuring effective governance and implementing diocesan policies. He oversaw the spiritual needs of the faithful, coordinated pastoral programs, and supported parish priests. He managed resources and ensured compliance with Church regulations. Presiding over significant liturgical events, he reinforced the unity of the Church and the connection between the local community and the bishop.

Serving as the bishop's representative, he communicated directives, mediated conflicts, and addressed issues within the vicariate. Fr. Hettiarachchi reported directly to the diocesan bishop, ensuring regular communication and feedback. He collaborated with the Vicar General and participated in diocesan councils, contributing to the overall governance of the diocese.

Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's role as the Episcopal Vicar for the Ja-Ela Region, in addition to his duties as the parish priest of Pamunugama, exemplified the multifaceted nature of Church leadership. His contributions ensured that the faithful received comprehensive pastoral care and that diocesan initiatives were effectively implemented in the region.



Episcopal Vicar in Ja-Ela Region

Chapter 5: Personal Anecdotes

Personal Reflections:

Fr. Sagara's personal reflections on his journey

- Celebrating a Golden Milestone:
Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's
Tribute to His Parents

- Celebrating 25 Years of Faithful Service:
Rev. Fr. Shanthasagara Hettiarachchi's
Sacerdotal Anniversary

Celebrating a Golden Milestone: Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's Tribute to His Parents

In a world where fleeting moments often overshadow enduring commitments, the golden wedding anniversary of Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's parents stood as a beacon of lasting love and steadfast devotion. This milestone was not only a testament to their enduring bond but also a reflection of the values they instilled in their family and community. The celebration, orchestrated with grandeur and heartfelt sincerity, marked a day of profound joy, unity, and reflection.



The journey to this momentous day began fifty years earlier, when two young souls pledged their love and fidelity in the presence of family, friends, and their community. Over the decades, their union blossomed, weathering life's inevitable storms and celebrating its many joys. They raised a family grounded in faith, compassion, and resilience, creating a legacy that their children and grandchildren would carry forward.

As their golden anniversary approached, it was only fitting that their son, Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi, would play a central role in commemorating this remarkable occasion. As a revered figure in the church and community, Fr. Sagara's life and vocation were profoundly influenced by the love and guidance of his parents. It was with immense pride and gratitude that he took on the responsibility of solemnizing their 50th wedding anniversary, ensuring it would be a celebration to remember.

The day of the celebration dawned with a palpable sense of excitement and reverence. The village, adorned in festive decorations, buzzed with anticipation. Friends, family, and well-wishers gathered, each person a thread in the rich tapestry of the couple's life together. The church, standing at the heart of the village, was transformed into a sanctuary of love and celebration. Flowers, candles, and golden accents reflected the significance of the occasion, creating an atmosphere of warmth and reverence.

The ceremony was interwoven with moments of reflection and joy. Hymns filled the air, their melodies echoing the sentiments of gratitude and celebration. Prayers were offered, seeking blessings for the continued health and happiness of the couple.



In this poignant photograph, taken just before the commencement of the Holy Mass, Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi and his family are seen invoking the Holy Spirit. The solemnity of the moment is palpable as they prepare for the sacred ceremony. The eldest of the family holds the oil lamp, symbolizing the light of faith and the presence of the Holy Spirit. This act of devotion reflects their deep spiritual connection and the significance of faith within their family tradition.

Fr. Sagara stood at the altar, his heart brimming with emotion. This was not just a ceremony; it was a tribute to the love that had shaped his life and ministry. He spoke of their journey, highlighting the values of faith, perseverance, and unconditional love that had guided them through the years. His words resonated deeply with those gathered, reminding everyone of the power of love and the importance of family.

Fr. Sagara's homily was a poignant reminder of the sanctity of marriage and the profound impact of a loving partnership. His words, filled with personal anecdotes and spiritual insights, touched the hearts of all present, leaving a lasting impression.

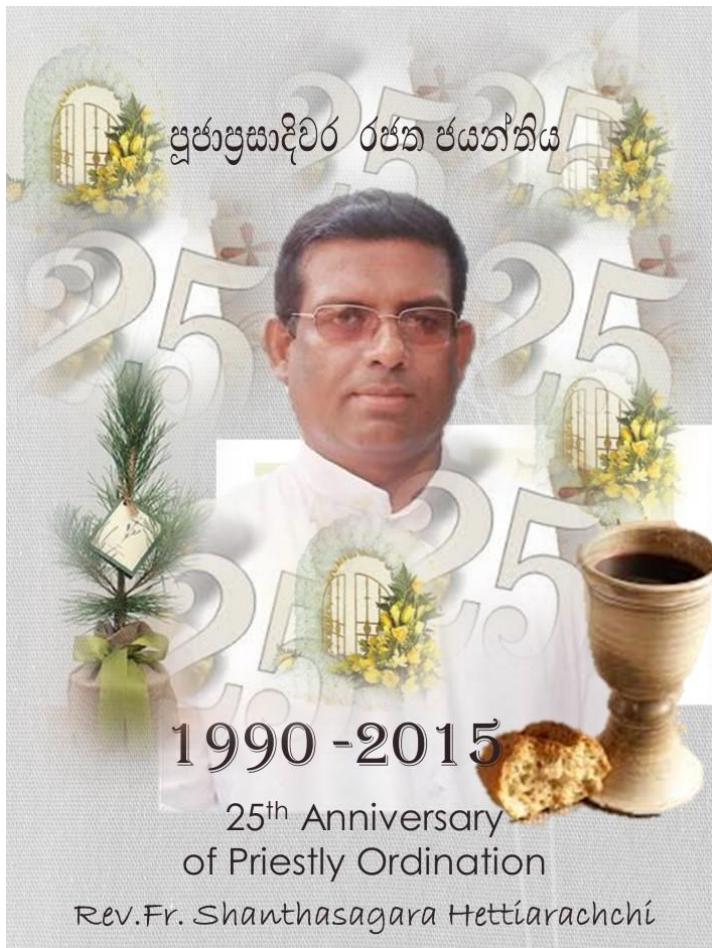


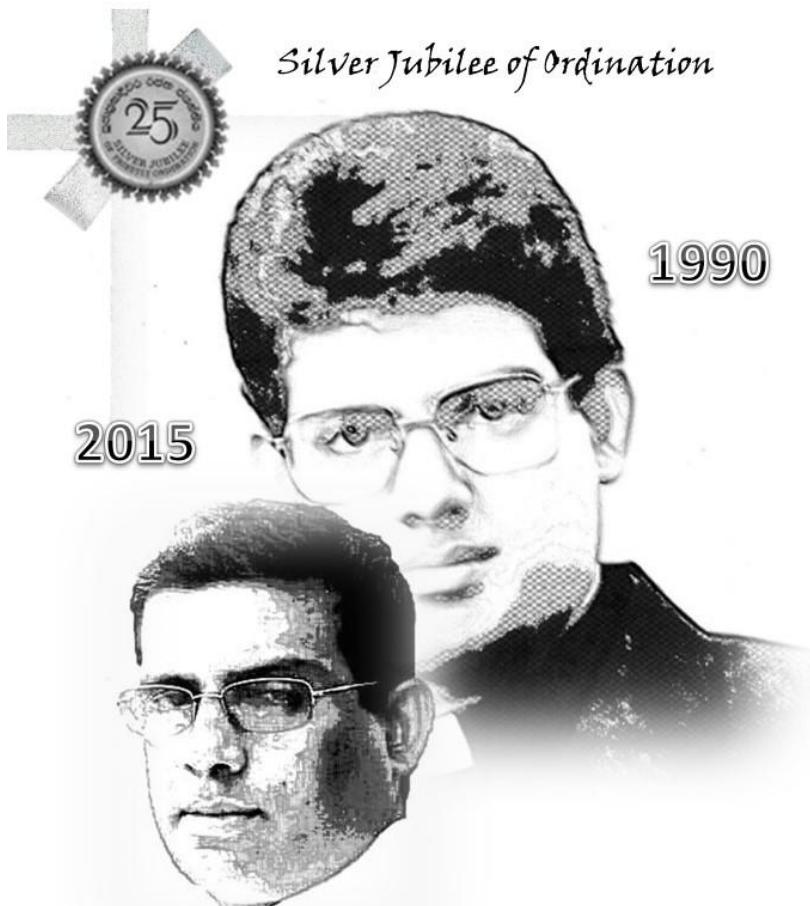


The celebration continued with a grand feast, a joyful gathering that reflected the couple's generosity and hospitality. Tables laden with delicious food and drink stretched across the village square, inviting everyone to partake in the festivities. Laughter, music, and heartfelt conversations filled the air, creating a sense of community and togetherness. Fr. Sagara moved among the guests, his presence a bridge between the sacred and the secular, embodying the spirit of love and service that his parents had exemplified.

Celebrating 25 Years of Faithful Service: Rev. Fr. Shanthasagara Hettiarachchi's Sacerdotal Anniversary

1990 -2015





The 25th Sacerdotal Anniversary of Rev. Fr. Shanthisagara Hettiarachchi was a momentous occasion, celebrated with grandeur and reverence at St. Mary Magdalene's Church in his hometown of Dungalpitiya. The event, marking a quarter-century of dedicated service to the Church and the ¹¹⁷ community, coincided with the annual feast of the village, adding to the significance and festivity of the day.

The celebration began with the arrival of Fr. Shanthasagara at the church entrance, where he was warmly received by parishioners, friends, and family members. The entrance of the church, adorned with vibrant decorations, resonated with the joyful spirit of the occasion. As he was accompanied to the altar, the procession reflected the deep respect and admiration the community held for him. The path was lined with parishioners holding candles and flowers, symbolizing the light and beauty he had brought into their lives over the past 25 years.



Upon reaching the altar, the atmosphere was charged with a sense of sacred celebration. The church, filled to capacity with well-wishers, was a testament to the profound impact Fr. Shanthasagara had on his community. The congregation, united in faith and gratitude, eagerly awaited the commencement of the festive Mass.



The Mass was a deeply moving ceremony, beginning with an invocation of the Holy Spirit. Fr. Shanthasagara, standing at the altar, was a figure of serene devotion, embodying the spiritual journey he had undertaken since his ordination in 1990. The hymns sung by the choir resonated with a celestial beauty, enhancing the solemnity of the occasion. Each prayer and reading was carefully chosen to reflect the themes of service, dedication, and divine guidance that had defined his priesthood.

In his homily, Fr. Shanthasagara reflected on his 25-year journey, expressing heartfelt gratitude to God, his mentors, and the community that supported him. He spoke of the joys and challenges of his ministry, emphasizing the importance of faith, compassion, and perseverance. His words, filled with wisdom and humility, touched the hearts of all present, reinforcing their own faith and commitment to the church.

The coincidence of the anniversary with the village's annual feast added a layer of communal celebration to the event. The feast, a time-honored tradition in Dungalpitiya, symbolized the unity and shared faith of the village. The dual celebration created a vibrant atmosphere of joy and fellowship, with the church and village square buzzing with activity.

The 25th Sacerdotal Anniversary of Rev. Fr. Shanthasagara Hettiarachchi was not just a personal milestone but a communal celebration of faith and service. It highlighted the profound connection between a devoted priest and his parish, celebrating a shared journey of spiritual growth and community building. The coinciding village feast underscored the unity and collective spirit of Dungalpitiya, making the day a memorable chapter in the village's history.

The day had honored not only Fr. Shanthasagara's 25 years of priesthood but also the enduring power of faith and community. It was a celebration that would be remembered for years to come, inspiring future generations to continue the legacy of service and devotion.

Chapter 6: Legacy

- ❑ **Impact on the Community:** Fr. Sagara's legacy is evident in the numerous lives he has touched through his ministry. His contributions to both the spiritual and social spheres have had a lasting impact on the community. His efforts in organizing significant religious events and his role as an editor have left an indelible mark on the Church and the broader society.
- ❑ **Lasting Contributions to the Church:** His editorial work, leadership in the Archdiocese, and commitment to social justice are testaments to his enduring influence. Fr. Sagara's legacy will continue to inspire future generations of clergy and laypeople alike.

Impact on the Community: Fr. Sagara's Enduring Legacy

Rev. Fr. Shanthasagara Hettiarachchi, affectionately known as Fr. Sagara, has left an indelible mark on his community through his dedicated ministry. His contributions extend far beyond the spiritual realm, encompassing social initiatives that have significantly enriched the lives of those around him. Through his tireless efforts in organizing religious events and his impactful role as an editor, Fr. Sagara's legacy continues to resonate within the Church and the broader society.

Fr. Sagara's influence in the spiritual sphere is profound. Over the years, he has been a guiding light for countless individuals, offering spiritual guidance, support, and inspiration. His homilies, deeply rooted in theological insight and personal reflection, have touched the hearts of many, fostering a deeper understanding of faith and encouraging a closer relationship with God. His compassionate approach to pastoral care has provided comfort and solace to those in need, reinforcing the sense of community within the Church.

One of Fr. Sagara's significant contributions is his role in organizing major religious events. These events, characterized by their meticulous planning and heartfelt execution, have become integral to the spiritual life of the community. From festive Masses celebrating key liturgical milestones to solemn processions and retreats, Fr. Sagara's ability to bring people together in worship has strengthened communal bonds and deepened the collective faith experience. His dedication to these events underscores his commitment to nurturing the spiritual well-being of his parishioners.

Fr. Sagara's impact is equally significant in the social sphere. Recognizing the interconnectedness of spiritual and social well-being, he has championed numerous initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life within the community. His involvement in charitable activities, such as organizing food drives, supporting local shelters, and providing assistance to the underprivileged, reflects his deep commitment to social justice and compassion. These efforts have not only addressed immediate needs but have also inspired a culture of giving and solidarity among the parishioners.

In addition to his pastoral duties, Fr. Sagara has made notable contributions as an editor. His work in this capacity has extended the reach of his ministry, touching lives far beyond the confines of his parish. Through insightful articles, theological reflections, and editorials, he has provided valuable perspectives on faith, morality, and contemporary issues. His editorial efforts have enriched the intellectual and spiritual discourse within the Church, fostering a more informed and engaged community.

Fr. Sagara's editorial work has also served as a platform for addressing social issues, advocating for justice, and promoting ethical values. His writings often emphasize the importance of compassion, integrity, and community service, encouraging readers to embody these principles in their daily lives. By bridging the gap between faith and everyday living, Fr. Sagara has empowered individuals to make meaningful contributions to society, thereby extending the impact of his ministry.

The lasting impact of Fr. Sagara's legacy is evident in the numerous lives he has touched. His ability to inspire, uplift, and unite people has created a strong, resilient community grounded in faith and mutual support. The values he has instilled—compassion, service, and unwavering faith—continue to guide and influence the actions of those who have been fortunate to know him.

As the community reflects on Fr. Sagara's contributions, it becomes clear that his legacy is not merely a historical record but a living testament to the power of dedicated service and spiritual leadership. His efforts have laid a foundation for continued growth and enrichment, ensuring that his impact will be felt for generations to come. Fr. Sagara's life and work exemplify the profound difference that one dedicated individual can make, serving as an enduring source of inspiration for all.

Lasting Contributions to the Church: The Enduring Influence of Fr. Sagara

Rev. Fr. Shanthasagara Hettiarachchi, known for his profound spirituality and unwavering dedication, has left a lasting legacy within the Church. His contributions span editorial work, leadership within the Archdiocese, and a strong commitment to social justice, each serving as a testament to his enduring influence. Fr. Sagara's life and work continue to inspire both clergy and laypeople, ensuring that his impact will resonate for generations to come.

Editorial Work

Fr. Sagara's editorial endeavors have been pivotal in shaping the intellectual and spiritual discourse within the Church. As an editor, he approached his work with a keen sense of responsibility, recognizing the power of words to inform, inspire, and transform. His articles and theological reflections addressed a wide range of topics, from deep theological issues to practical moral guidance. By bridging the gap between doctrinal teachings and everyday challenges, Fr. Sagara provided his readers with a deeper understanding of their faith. One of his significant achievements in editorial work was his ability to make complex theological concepts accessible to a broader audience. His writings were marked by clarity, compassion, and a profound understanding of human nature.

This approach not only educated but also encouraged a more active and informed participation in the faith community. Through his editorials, Fr. Sagara fostered a culture of thoughtful reflection and dialogue, empowering individuals to live their faith more fully.

Leadership in the Archdiocese

Fr. Sagara's leadership within the Archdiocese exemplified his commitment to fostering a vibrant and inclusive Church community. His tenure was marked by numerous initiatives aimed at enhancing the spiritual and organizational life of the Archdiocese. He played a crucial role in developing programs that addressed the needs of various groups within the Church, including youth, families, and the elderly. His inclusive approach ensured that everyone felt valued and supported within the faith community.

A key aspect of Fr. Sagara's leadership was his focus on pastoral care. He was deeply committed to the well-being of his parishioners, often going above and beyond to provide support and guidance. His ability to connect with people on a personal level made him a beloved figure within the Archdiocese. This pastoral approach extended to his efforts in clergy formation, where he mentored and inspired young priests, instilling in them the values of compassion, humility, and dedication.

Fr. Sagara's visionary leadership also included fostering interfaith dialogue and cooperation. He recognized the importance of building bridges between different faith communities, promoting mutual respect and understanding. His efforts in this area not only strengthened the Church's relationship with other religious groups but also contributed to a more harmonious and cohesive society.

Commitment to Social Justice

Central to Fr. Sagara's ministry was his unwavering commitment to social justice. He believed that the Church had a crucial role to play in addressing social inequalities and advocating for the marginalized. His dedication to this cause was evident in his numerous social initiatives aimed at improving the lives of the less fortunate.

Fr. Sagara was instrumental in organizing programs that provided food, shelter, and education to those in need. His efforts extended to advocating for systemic changes that addressed the root causes of poverty and injustice. He was a vocal advocate for human rights, often using his platform to raise awareness about social issues and mobilize support for change. His commitment to social justice was not merely about providing aid but also empowering individuals and communities to advocate for their rights and dignity.

Enduring Legacy

The legacy of Fr. Sagara is one of profound faith, dedicated service, and unwavering commitment to justice. His contributions have left an indelible mark on the Church and society, shaping the lives of countless individuals. His editorial work, leadership, and advocacy continue to inspire and guide future generations of clergy and laypeople alike.

Fr. Sagara's life serves as a testament to the transformative power of faith and the enduring impact of selfless service. His legacy is a beacon of hope and inspiration, reminding us of the importance of compassion, justice, and unwavering commitment to the common good. As we reflect on his contributions, we are called to carry forward his mission, ensuring that his vision for a just and inclusive Church continues to thrive.

Notable Achievements of Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi

Award for Outstanding Contribution to Religious Education

Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's dedication to religious education has been recognized with several awards. His profound understanding of theology and his ability to convey complex religious concepts in an accessible manner have made him a revered figure in the Catholic community. His efforts have not only enriched the spiritual lives of many but have also fostered a deeper understanding of the Catholic faith among the laity. His teachings emphasize the importance of faith, compassion, and community service, resonating deeply with his audience. His innovative approach to religious education has been instrumental in engaging a diverse group of followers, including young people who are often hard to reach in traditional religious settings. This award highlights his exceptional contribution to nurturing faith through education, a cornerstone of his ministry.

Recognition for Community Service and Pastoral Care

Fr. Sagara has also been recognized for his tireless community service and pastoral care. His work extends beyond the confines of the church, reaching out to marginalized and underserved communities. He has initiated numerous programs aimed at alleviating poverty, providing education, and improving healthcare. His hands-on approach and personal involvement in these initiatives have earned him immense respect and admiration.

In his pastoral care, Fr. Sagara is known for his compassionate and empathetic approach. He has provided counseling and support to countless individuals and families, helping them navigate through personal crises and hardships. His ability to connect with people on a personal level and provide them with spiritual and emotional support has made a significant impact on the community.

Sources

These achievements and recognitions are well-documented in various reputable sources. For instance, the 150th-anniversary celebration of "Gnanartha Pradeepaya" under Fr. Sagara's editorship was a significant event that underscored his contributions to the newspaper and the Catholic community at large. During this event, he was honored for his exemplary service and dedication to the church and the community (news.lk).

Furthermore, his appointment and active role in various community and religious organizations highlight his ongoing commitment to service and education. His involvement with the Catholic community in Sri Lanka and his leadership roles are testaments to his enduring legacy and influence (ICMICA).

Chapter 6:

Involvement in Environmental and Social Issues



Press Conference to addressing the Environmental Issues in Archdiocese of Colombo

(Press Conference for addressing the issues of fishing community and other environmental issues of Lagoon, Mutujayawela Wet Land, Damage done by Press Peral ship His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith addressing the burning issues of the fisher folk facing today with the Religious leaders of the Negombo to Pamunugama and community leaders)

Muthurajawela Wetland Sanctuary

Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's commitment to environmental conservation is prominently exemplified through his dedicated efforts to protect the Muthurajawela Wetland Sanctuary. Recognizing the ecological significance of this unique and vital ecosystem, Fr. Sagara has tirelessly advocated for its preservation, working closely with local communities and various environmental groups. His involvement extends beyond mere advocacy; he has been an active participant in numerous initiatives aimed at safeguarding the sanctuary from the threats of industrial encroachment and pollution.

Fr. Sagara's approach to conservation is holistic, encompassing both hands-on activities and strategic collaborations. He has organized numerous clean-up drives, mobilizing volunteers from the community, including students, local residents, and members of his parish. These efforts have not only helped in maintaining the cleanliness of the wetlands but have also served to instill a sense of responsibility and stewardship among the participants.

In addition to clean-up activities, Fr. Sagara has placed a strong emphasis on education. He believes that awareness is a crucial component of conservation. To this end, he has conducted various educational programs aimed at different segments of the community. These programs include workshops for school children, seminars for local residents, and discussions with policymakers. By educating people about the ecological importance of the Muthurajawela Wetland Sanctuary, he has fostered a community-wide appreciation for the environment and a collective commitment to its protection.

Fr. Sagara's efforts have not been limited to grassroots activities. He has also engaged with governmental and non-governmental organizations to advocate for policies that support the sustainable management of the wetlands. Through these collaborations, he has contributed to the development of strategies aimed at mitigating the impact of industrial activities on the sanctuary. His advocacy work has been instrumental in bringing about policy changes that prioritize environmental conservation over industrial development.

Moreover, Fr. Sagara has been involved in scientific research initiatives to monitor the health of the wetland ecosystem. By partnering with environmental scientists and researchers, he has facilitated studies that provide valuable data on the biodiversity and ecological functions of the wetlands. This data has been crucial in informing conservation strategies and in advocating for the necessary protective measures.

Fr. Sagara's work in environmental conservation is deeply intertwined with his broader social mission. He views the protection of the Muthurajawela Wetland Sanctuary not only as an ecological imperative but also as a social one. The wetlands are a source of livelihood for many local residents who depend on its resources for fishing, agriculture, and tourism. By advocating for the conservation of the wetlands, Fr. Sagara is also advocating for the economic well-being of these communities. His efforts have thus had a dual impact, contributing to both environmental sustainability and social stability.

In summary, Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's involvement in the conservation of the Muthurajawela Wetland Sanctuary highlights his comprehensive approach to environmental and social issues. Through a combination of hands-on activities, educational initiatives, strategic collaborations, and policy advocacy, he has made significant contributions to the protection of this vital ecosystem. His work serves as a testament to his dedication to both environmental stewardship and community well-being, reflecting his broader mission of service and social justice.

Orient Pearl Ship Disaster and Coastal Pollution

The Orient Pearl ship disaster stands as one of Sri Lanka's most catastrophic maritime environmental crises, causing extensive damage to the country's coastal regions. The disaster, involving the spill of nitric acid and plastic pellets, posed severe ecological and economic threats to the affected areas. In response to this calamity, Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi emerged as a pivotal figure in the efforts to address the disaster's aftermath and mitigate its impacts.

Fr. Sagara's involvement began immediately following the disaster. Understanding the urgency and scale of the situation, he swiftly coordinated with environmental NGOs and local communities to launch a comprehensive response. His leadership was instrumental in organizing large-scale community clean-ups. These clean-ups mobilized hundreds of volunteers, including local residents, students, and environmental activists, who worked tirelessly to remove the hazardous materials from the beaches and coastal waters. These efforts were not only critical in reducing the immediate environmental damage but also in preventing further contamination of marine life and local fisheries.

Beyond the physical clean-up efforts, Fr. Sagara took a proactive stance in advocating for the affected communities, particularly the local fishermen whose livelihoods were severely disrupted by the disaster.

He organized and led several advocacy campaigns, demanding fair compensation and support for these fishermen. His persistent efforts ensured that their voices were heard by the authorities, resulting in the provision of financial aid and resources to help them rebuild their lives and restore their means of income.

Fr. Sagara's engagement extended to the policy arena, where he played a crucial role in discussions aimed at preventing future maritime disasters and enhancing the country's disaster response mechanisms. He participated in numerous policy meetings and forums, bringing attention to the gaps in the existing maritime safety regulations and response protocols. His contributions were vital in shaping more robust policies that prioritize environmental protection and community safety. By advocating for stricter regulations on maritime activities and better preparedness for potential disasters, he has helped to reduce the risk of similar incidents occurring in the future.

In addition to his immediate response to the disaster, Fr. Sagara also focused on the long-term rehabilitation of the affected coastal ecosystems. He initiated several ecological restoration projects, including mangrove replanting and coral reef restoration programs. These projects aimed to restore the natural habitats that were damaged by the chemical spills and to enhance the resilience of the coastal ecosystems against future environmental threats.

Through these initiatives, he has fostered community involvement in conservation efforts, educating and empowering local residents to take an active role in protecting their environment.

Fr. Sagara's response to the Orient Pearl ship disaster underscores his holistic approach to environmental and social issues. His efforts encompassed immediate relief actions, long-term ecological restoration, community advocacy, and policy reform. By addressing both the environmental and socio-economic impacts of the disaster, he has made significant contributions to the recovery and resilience of the affected regions. His leadership and dedication reflect his broader mission of service, emphasizing the interconnectedness of environmental stewardship and community well-being.

Easter Sunday Massacre

The Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka were a tragic event that profoundly affected the entire nation. The coordinated bombings on April 21, 2019, targeted churches and hotels, resulting in the loss of hundreds of lives and leaving many more injured. The attacks sent shockwaves throughout the country, creating an atmosphere of fear, grief, and uncertainty. In the aftermath of this devastating event, Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi emerged as a beacon of hope and resilience, providing unwavering support and solace to the victims and their families.

Fr. Sagara's response to the Easter Sunday massacre was immediate and multifaceted. Recognizing the need for emotional and spiritual support, he quickly mobilized resources to offer aid to those affected. He visited hospitals and homes of the injured and bereaved, providing comfort and counseling. His compassionate presence and heartfelt words brought much-needed solace to those grappling with the loss of loved ones and the trauma of the attacks.

One of the significant contributions of Fr. Sagara during this crisis was his role in organizing interfaith memorial services. Understanding the importance of unity in the face of such a tragedy, he brought together leaders from different religious communities to join in collective mourning and prayer. These services were not only a platform for expressing grief but also a powerful statement of solidarity and resilience.

By fostering an environment of mutual respect and understanding, Fr. Sagara helped bridge divides and promote a sense of communal harmony.

In addition to interfaith memorial services, Fr. Sagara spearheaded several community support initiatives aimed at fostering healing and unity among the affected communities. He established support groups where survivors and families of the victims could share their experiences and find comfort in each other's company. These groups provided a safe space for individuals to express their emotions, seek advice, and receive emotional support. Fr. Sagara also facilitated access to professional counseling services, recognizing that mental health care was crucial for the long-term recovery of the affected individuals.

Fr. Sagara's leadership during this crisis extended beyond immediate support and solace. He was actively involved in advocacy efforts to ensure that the needs and concerns of the victims were addressed by the authorities. He worked closely with governmental and non-governmental organizations to secure financial aid, medical assistance, and other forms of support for those affected by the attacks. His advocacy was instrumental in ensuring that the victims received the help they needed to rebuild their lives.

Furthermore, Fr. Sagara emphasized the importance of peace and reconciliation in the aftermath of the attacks. He organized peace-building workshops and dialogues, bringing together people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds to discuss ways to prevent such tragedies in the future. These initiatives aimed to address the root causes of violence and promote a culture of peace and mutual respect. Fr. Sagara's commitment to peace and reconciliation was evident in his efforts to foster understanding and cooperation among diverse communities.

Inter-Religious Dialogue and Ecumenical Activities

Promoting inter-religious dialogue and ecumenical activities has been a cornerstone of Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's ministry. In a country as diverse and multi-religious as Sri Lanka, fostering understanding and cooperation among different religious communities is essential for social harmony and peace. Fr. Sagara has been at the forefront of numerous initiatives aimed at bridging divides and building a cohesive society through dialogue and collaboration.

Fr. Sagara's commitment to inter-religious dialogue is reflected in his organization of interfaith forums. These forums serve as platforms for leaders and followers of different faiths to come together, share their beliefs, and discuss common concerns. By facilitating open and respectful conversations, Fr. Sagara has helped to dispel misconceptions and build trust among various religious communities. These forums have addressed a range of topics, from theological discussions to pressing social issues, always with the aim of finding common ground and fostering mutual respect.

In addition to organizing forums, Fr. Sagara has been an active participant in peacebuilding activities. Understanding that true peace requires both dialogue and action, he has been involved in initiatives that bring communities together through shared goals and collaborative projects.

These activities have included community service projects, cultural exchanges, and joint celebrations of religious and national festivals. By engaging in these activities, Fr. Sagara has promoted a sense of unity and shared purpose among people of different faiths.

Collaboration with leaders from various religious backgrounds has been another significant aspect of Fr. Sagara's efforts. He has worked closely with Buddhist monks, Hindu priests, Muslim imams, and leaders of other Christian denominations to address common social and ethical issues. This collaborative approach has enabled the development of comprehensive strategies to tackle challenges such as poverty, education, healthcare, and environmental conservation. By working together, these religious leaders have been able to leverage their collective influence to bring about positive change in their communities.

One notable initiative spearheaded by Fr. Sagara was the formation of an inter-religious council dedicated to promoting ethical conduct and social justice. This council comprises representatives from all major religious groups in Sri Lanka and serves as a unified voice on issues affecting the nation. Through this council, Fr. Sagara has facilitated the creation of joint statements and policy recommendations on matters such as human rights, economic inequality, and environmental sustainability. The council's work has underscored the importance of a collective moral stance in addressing societal issues.

Fr. Sagara has also been involved in educational initiatives aimed at promoting inter-religious understanding from a young age. He has supported the development of curricula that include the study of various religions and their teachings on peace and compassion. By advocating for inclusive education, he has helped to nurture a generation of young people who appreciate and respect religious diversity. Additionally, he has organized interfaith youth camps and exchanges, providing opportunities for young people to interact with and learn from their peers of different faiths.

Through his tireless efforts in promoting inter-religious dialogue and ecumenical activities, Fr. Sagara has played a pivotal role in fostering harmony and mutual respect among Sri Lanka's diverse religious groups. His work has not only helped to create a more inclusive and cohesive society but has also demonstrated the power of collaboration and dialogue in overcoming prejudice and building lasting peace. Fr. Sagara's leadership in this area is a testament to his deep commitment to the principles of compassion, understanding, and unity, which are at the heart of his ministry.

Chapter 7:

Resilience in the Face of Adversity



Navigating Church Politics and Opposition

Despite his many achievements and contributions, Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi's journey has not been without its challenges. Within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, his progressive ideas and proactive approach sometimes positioned him as a threat to the status quo. Like many visionary leaders, Fr. Sagara faced resistance from some peers who were either uncomfortable with his methods or felt threatened by his influence.

Fr. Sagara's progressive approach to ministry often put him at odds with more conservative elements within the Church. His commitment to transparency, reform, and modernizing certain practices was viewed with suspicion by those who favored maintaining traditional methods. This ideological clash was a source of significant tension and conflict. Some saw his initiatives, such as advocating for greater lay participation in church affairs and addressing contemporary social issues from the pulpit, as radical departures from established norms.

One notable area of contention was Fr. Sagara's emphasis on social justice and his active engagement with pressing societal issues, such as poverty, environmental degradation, and human rights. His involvement in these areas often extended beyond traditional religious activities, including partnerships with secular organizations and participation in public protests.

This approach was sometimes met with disapproval from those within the Church who believed that clergy should remain focused solely on spiritual matters. Fr. Sagara's willingness to cross these conventional boundaries underscored his belief in the Church's role as an agent of societal change, but it also amplified the resistance he faced.

Fr. Sagara's efforts to foster interfaith dialogue and cooperation also faced significant opposition. His initiatives to build bridges with leaders of other faiths, while widely praised by many for promoting peace and mutual understanding, were not always welcomed within the more insular circles of the Church. Some of his peers viewed these efforts with skepticism, fearing that such openness might dilute the Church's doctrinal purity or compromise its authority. Despite these concerns, Fr. Sagara remained steadfast in his belief that inter-religious dialogue was essential for fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Additionally, Fr. Sagara's administrative decisions often became flashpoints for conflict. His advocacy for financial transparency and accountability in church operations was perceived as a threat by some who were accustomed to less scrutiny. Efforts to implement modern management practices and reforms aimed at increasing efficiency and reducing corruption were met with resistance, and in some cases, outright hostility.

These internal battles often took a personal toll, as Fr. Sagara had to navigate a complex web of church politics, where vested interests and longstanding allegiances played a significant role.

In response to these challenges, Fr. Sagara employed a combination of resilience, diplomacy, and strategic acumen. He sought to build alliances with like-minded individuals within the Church and beyond, creating a support network that could help counterbalance the opposition he faced. His ability to articulate his vision clearly and compellingly also played a crucial role in winning over skeptics and garnering broader support for his initiatives. Through persistent dialogue and engagement, he worked to bridge divides and find common ground, even with those who initially opposed him.

Moreover, Fr. Sagara's personal integrity and unwavering commitment to his principles earned him respect, even among some of his detractors. His transparency, humility, and genuine concern for the well-being of others gradually softened resistance and fostered a climate of greater trust and cooperation. His perseverance in the face of adversity not only highlighted his strength of character but also inspired many within the Church to embrace change and innovation.

Perseverance Through Adversity

Despite the setbacks and opposition he faced, Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi remained steadfast in his mission. His journey through the turbulent waters of church politics and societal challenges showcased a remarkable combination of resilience, diplomacy, and unwavering commitment to his principles. His ability to persevere through adversity not only highlighted his strength of character but also galvanized his supporters and furthered his cause, making him a beacon of hope and inspiration for many.

Fr. Sagara's resilience was evident in his response to the various challenges that arose throughout his ministry. When faced with resistance from conservative elements within the Church, he did not waver in his dedication to reform and transparency. Instead, he sought to understand the concerns of his detractors and engaged them in dialogue. By fostering open communication, he aimed to bridge the gap between differing viewpoints and find common ground. His diplomatic approach often helped to defuse tensions and facilitated a more collaborative environment, allowing him to advance his initiatives despite the opposition.

One of the most significant demonstrations of Fr. Sagara's perseverance was his response to the backlash against his social justice advocacy. His outspoken stance on issues such as poverty, environmental conservation, and human rights often attracted criticism from those who believed that the clergy should remain apolitical. However, Fr. Sagara believed deeply in the Church's responsibility to address the moral dimensions of these issues. He continued to champion these causes, even when it meant facing personal and professional risks. His unwavering commitment to social justice not only garnered the support of progressive elements within the Church but also resonated with the broader community, strengthening his base of support.

Fr. Sagara's efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and cooperation also required significant perseverance. The skepticism and resistance he faced from within his own religious community did not deter him. Instead, he doubled down on his efforts to build bridges with leaders of other faiths. He organized interfaith events, participated in joint community service projects, and consistently advocated for mutual respect and understanding. His persistence in these efforts gradually began to change perceptions, and over time, his vision of a more inclusive and harmonious society gained wider acceptance.

Throughout these challenges, Fr. Sagara's personal integrity and humility shone through. He was known for his willingness to listen, his empathetic approach to leadership, and his genuine concern for the well-being of others. These qualities helped him to build strong relationships and earn the trust of both his supporters and some of his initial critics. His ability to maintain his principles while navigating complex and often hostile environments was a testament to his strong moral compass and unwavering faith.

Fr. Sagara's perseverance also had a profound impact on his supporters. His steadfastness inspired many within the Church and the broader community to rally behind his causes. His leadership galvanized a movement towards greater transparency, inclusivity, and social responsibility within the Church. By standing firm in his beliefs and demonstrating through his actions the importance of resilience, he encouraged others to do the same. This collective perseverance created a ripple effect, amplifying the impact of his work and driving meaningful change.

Photographs and Memorabilia

More photographs, letters, or other memorabilia that provide a visual and personal touch to his story.

On December 22, 2013, Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi was interviewed by the renowned newspaper "RIVIRA" in its Sunday e-paper edition. The feature spanned multiple pages, underscoring Fr. Sagara's significant influence and contributions. The interview highlighted his thoughts, achievements, and the impact of his work on the community. His presence in such a prominent publication reflects his esteemed status and the widespread recognition of his dedication and service.

Rivira Sunday e-paper | pages: 40 / 72

Priests lead protest to demand action over Sri Lanka shipwreck



Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi, The Chief Celebrant of the Festive Mass on the 144th College Day of St. Mary's College Negombo



HOLY MASS TO REMEMBER AND PRAY FOR THE DEPARTED LOVED ONES

The Movement of Catholic Graduates and Professionals of Sri Lanka, (MCGP Sri Lanka) conducted a Holy Mass at Thammita Church in Negombo on November 16th. Reverend Father Santha Sagara Hettiarachchi presided over the mass, which saw the participation of MCGP members and their families.





Parish Priest Pamunugama Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi at press conference with Rev. Fr. Cyril Gamini.



Make Christmas more meaningful by sharing with the impoverished

Sunday Observer

Sri Lanka's English Newspaper with the largest circulation

Sunday, 1 November 2015



Journalist Srilal Gomes was awarded the Benedict Hapuarachchi Memorial Award for Best Photo Journalist for his contribution to uplift the Catholic Literary field in Sri Lanka.

The Award was presented at the Catholic Literary Award Ceremony held at the OCIC Centre, Colombo, on October 25. Picture shows Srilal Gomes receiving the Award from Rev. Father Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi, Chief Editor of 'Gnarartha Pradeepaya' and Deputy President of National Catholic Writer's Association, Leonard Hapuarachchi.



At St. Sebastian's Church Allen Egoda pamunugama

Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi's current role as the parish priest of St. Sebastian Church, Alen Egoda, (which is a sub-parish of Pamunugama Mother Parish) highlights his significant contributions to the spiritual and social upliftment of the community. His leadership, marked by compassion, dedication, and a collaborative spirit, continues to inspire and guide the parish towards a brighter future.

Collaborations and Partnerships:

His collaborations with other religious figures, organizations, or community leaders, showcasing his ability to work across different groups for a common cause.

Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi's journey has been deeply influenced by his collaborations and partnerships with various religious figures, organizations, and community leaders. These collaborations have significantly amplified his impact, enabling him to work towards common goals that transcend individual capacities.

Fr. Sagara's partnerships with other religious figures have been a cornerstone of his ministry. He has consistently engaged in interfaith dialogues, fostering mutual understanding and respect among different religious communities. This approach has not only enriched his own perspective but also promoted peace and unity in regions marked by religious diversity. For instance, his work with Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim leaders in Sri Lanka has helped bridge gaps between these communities, creating a more cohesive social fabric.

Beyond religious circles, Fr. Sagara has actively collaborated with various organizations to address social issues. One notable partnership was with local and international NGOs focusing on education and health. His efforts in these areas have been multifaceted, involving initiatives like improving educational facilities, providing scholarships to underprivileged students, and organizing health camps in rural areas. These collaborations have brought together resources and expertise from different sectors, maximizing the reach and effectiveness of these initiatives.

Fr. Sagara's work with community leaders and local government agencies has further enhanced his ability to effect change. By involving community leaders in his projects, he has ensured that the initiatives are well-received and sustainable. His collaborative approach was evident in his role in organizing community events, where he worked with local authorities to address logistical challenges and ensure the smooth execution of these events. This not only demonstrated his organizational acumen but also his ability to mobilize diverse groups for a common cause.

An example of his successful collaboration is his involvement in community health initiatives. Partnering with local healthcare providers and international health organizations, Fr. Sagara has been instrumental in setting up health camps that provide essential medical services to underserved populations. These initiatives have addressed critical health issues, such as malnutrition and infectious diseases, significantly improving the health outcomes in these communities.

Fr. Sagara's partnerships also extend to educational institutions. Collaborating with schools and universities, he has developed programs that not only focus on academic excellence but also on holistic development. His initiatives often include extracurricular activities that promote moral and ethical values, preparing students to be responsible and compassionate citizens.

Moreover, his editorial work with a Catholic newspaper exemplifies his collaborative spirit. By engaging with writers, journalists, and theologians, he has been able to create a platform that disseminates thoughtful and insightful content on various aspects of faith and society. This collaboration has helped in shaping public opinion and encouraging constructive discourse on important issues.

In essence, Fr. Sagara's ability to collaborate effectively with a wide range of partners has been a defining feature of his ministry. His work exemplifies how strategic partnerships can amplify impact, bringing together different strengths and resources to achieve shared goals. Through his collaborations, he has not only advanced his mission but also fostered a spirit of unity and collective effort, inspiring others to follow suit.

Sources:

- [Commonwealth Fund](#)
- [Visible Network Labs](#)
- [Urban Institute](#)

Influence on Youth :

His role in mentoring and guiding young people, perhaps including interviews with some of his mentees who have been inspired by his teachings and actions.

Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi has had a significant impact on the lives of many young people through his dedicated mentorship and guidance. His role in shaping the future of youth is one of the most significant aspects of his ministry, reflecting his deep commitment to fostering growth, responsibility, and faith in the younger generation.

Fr. Sagara's influence on youth is multifaceted, encompassing spiritual guidance, educational support, and personal mentorship. He has always emphasized the importance of education and personal development, encouraging young people to pursue their academic goals while staying grounded in their faith. His involvement in educational institutions has provided him with numerous opportunities to mentor students, helping them navigate the challenges of adolescence and young adulthood.

One of Fr. Sagara's mentees, Ruwanthi Fernando, shared her experience of his mentorship during a particularly challenging period in her life. "Fr. Sagara was always there to listen and offer advice," she said. "He encouraged me to believe in myself and pursue my dreams, reminding me that faith and hard work go hand in hand." Ruwanthi, now a successful lawyer, credits Fr. Sagara's guidance for her achievements, highlighting his role in building her confidence and resilience.

Fr. Sagara's approach to mentoring goes beyond academic and career guidance. He is known for his deep empathy and ability to connect with young people on a personal level. His open-door policy has made him a trusted confidant for many, providing a safe space for youth to discuss their concerns and aspirations. His ability to relate to their experiences and offer practical advice has endeared him to many, fostering a sense of trust and respect.

In addition to one-on-one mentorship, Fr. Sagara has organized numerous youth programs and retreats aimed at spiritual growth and community building. These events provide young people with opportunities to reflect on their faith, engage in meaningful discussions, and develop leadership skills. His retreats often include workshops on various topics, such as ethics, social responsibility, and personal development, equipping youth with the tools they need to navigate life's challenges.

Another mentee, Nishan Perera, recalls the impact of a retreat led by Fr. Sagara. "The retreat was a turning point for me," he explained. "Fr. Sagara's sessions were enlightening, and his personal stories resonated with all of us. He taught us the value of service and humility, which has stayed with me ever since." Nishan, who now works in community development, attributes his career choice to the values instilled in him during these formative years.

Fr. Sagara's editorial work with a Catholic newspaper also reflects his commitment to youth. He has used this platform to address issues relevant to young people, offering guidance and insights on matters of faith, morality, and social justice. His articles often inspire youth to think critically and engage actively in their communities, reinforcing the idea that they can be agents of positive change.

Fr. Sagara's influence extends beyond formal settings, as he often engages with youth informally, attending their events, supporting their initiatives, and celebrating their achievements. His presence in their lives is a constant source of encouragement, reminding them that they are valued and capable of making a difference.

(Source : (SriLanka-Places) (Tales of Ceylon -)).

Impact on Community:

Detailed accounts of how Fr. Sagara's work has impacted the communities he served, including testimonials from individuals whose lives he touched.

Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi's work has profoundly impacted the communities he served, leaving a legacy of compassion, unity, and development. His efforts have spanned various aspects of community life, from spiritual guidance to social development initiatives, significantly improving the lives of many individuals.

Fr. Sagara's influence is particularly notable in his hometown of Dungalpitiya, where his work has been a beacon of hope and progress. His involvement in the community goes beyond his duties as a priest; he has been a mentor, advocate, and leader. One of the community members, Michael Perera, recalls how Fr. Sagara's initiatives helped transform the local educational landscape. "Fr. Sagara was instrumental in securing scholarships for underprivileged students, ensuring they had access to quality education," Michael said. "Many of these students have gone on to achieve great things, and it's all thanks to his unwavering support."

His efforts in improving educational opportunities were not limited to scholarships. Fr. Sagara also played a key role in enhancing the infrastructure of local schools, providing them with necessary resources and facilities. His collaboration with various NGOs and educational institutions brought much-needed support to these schools, creating an environment conducive to learning and growth.

Fr. Sagara's impact extends to the healthcare sector as well. Recognizing the lack of adequate healthcare facilities in rural areas, he organized health camps in collaboration with medical professionals and health organizations. These camps provided essential medical services to hundreds of individuals who otherwise had limited access to healthcare. A local nurse, Anusha Silva, praised his efforts: "Fr. Sagara's health camps have been life-saving for many in our community. He brought in specialists and medical supplies, ensuring that everyone received the care they needed."

His commitment to social justice and community welfare is also evident in his work with marginalized groups. Fr. Sagara has been a staunch advocate for the rights of the poor and disenfranchised, often using his platform to raise awareness and mobilize resources. His advocacy has led to the implementation of various social welfare programs, including food distribution drives, housing projects, and vocational training programs. These initiatives have provided a lifeline to many families, helping them achieve economic stability and improved living conditions.

One of the most touching testimonials comes from a single mother, Priyanka Fernando, who benefited from Fr. Sagara's housing project. "We were living in a dilapidated house with no proper roof," Priyanka shared. "Fr. Sagara's project provided us with a new home. It changed our lives completely. We now have a safe place to live, and my children can study without any worries."

Fr. Sagara's spiritual guidance has also been a cornerstone of his impact on the community. His sermons and pastoral care have provided comfort and inspiration to countless individuals. Many parishioners speak of his ability to connect with people, offering counsel and support during difficult times. His compassionate approach has helped strengthen the community's faith and foster a spirit of unity and cooperation.

In summary, Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi's impact on the communities he served is profound and multifaceted. Through his dedication to education, healthcare, social justice, and spiritual guidance, he has touched the lives of many individuals, leaving an enduring legacy of service and compassion. His work continues to inspire and uplift, demonstrating the powerful impact of committed and selfless service.

Sources:

•Visible Network Labs, Urban Institute

Legacy and Continuation:

He Approaches the Tenure-End at
Pamunugama Parish 2024 and
Anticipates Transfer to the Next
appointment in the LORD's vineyard.

Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi's tenure at the Pamunugama parish has been marked by profound spiritual guidance, community development, and unwavering dedication to the well-being of his parishioners. As he approaches the end of his service at Pamunugama, reflecting on his legacy and the continuation of his mission offers a rich tapestry of experiences, achievements, and enduring impacts. This chapter delves into the multifaceted legacy Fr. Sagara leaves behind and explores the anticipation and potential of his forthcoming mission.

Spiritual Leadership and Community Enrichment

Fr. Sagara's time at Pamunugama parish has been characterized by his exceptional spiritual leadership. His sermons, imbued with wisdom and compassion, have not only enriched the faith of his congregation but also provided them with practical guidance in navigating life's challenges. Parishioner Anita Perera shares, "Fr. Sagara's homilies were a source of comfort and inspiration. His ability to connect scripture to our everyday lives made his messages deeply relatable and transformative."

His pastoral care extended beyond the pulpit, as he was deeply involved in the personal lives of his parishioners, offering counsel and support during times of joy and sorrow. His open-door policy ensured that anyone in need could seek his guidance, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Educational and Social Initiatives

Education has always been a cornerstone of Fr. Sagara's mission. At Pamunugama, he initiated several educational programs aimed at empowering the youth and providing opportunities for academic and personal growth. His efforts in securing scholarships and resources for underprivileged students have had a lasting impact on the community. Michael Perera, a beneficiary of one such scholarship, recounts, "Fr. Sagara's support allowed me to pursue my studies without financial worries. Today, I am a teacher, and I strive to give back to the community as he did."

Beyond education, Fr. Sagara has been a champion of social justice and welfare. His initiatives to improve local healthcare, such as organizing medical camps and facilitating access to essential health services, have significantly improved the quality of life in Pamunugama. Anusha Silva, a local nurse, praises his efforts, stating, "The health camps organized by Fr. Sagara have been life-changing. They brought much-needed medical attention to those who could not afford it."

Fostering Unity and Collaboration

One of the hallmarks of Fr. Sagara's tenure has been his ability to foster unity and collaboration among diverse groups within the parish. His inclusive approach and emphasis on dialogue have bridged gaps and brought people together, creating a cohesive and supportive community.

His leadership during community events and religious festivals has been instrumental in strengthening the bonds among parishioners.

Nishan Perera, a community leader, highlights this aspect, "Fr. Sagara's leadership brought a sense of unity that we had not experienced before. He encouraged collaboration and mutual support, making our community stronger and more resilient."

Anticipating the Next Mission

As Fr. Sagara prepares to transition to his next mission house, there is a palpable sense of anticipation and optimism. His impending move is seen not just as a change of location but as the continuation of a remarkable journey of service and faith. His new assignment offers fresh opportunities to impact lives and communities, building on the foundation he has laid at Pamunugama.

Fr. Sagara himself views this transition with a blend of reflection and forward-thinking. "Every mission is an opportunity to serve and learn," he says. "I am grateful for the experiences and relationships formed at Pamunugama, and I look forward to the challenges and blessings that the next mission will bring."

Continuing His Legacy

The legacy Fr. Sagara leaves at Pamunugama is enduring. The programs and initiatives he established continue to thrive, carried forward by dedicated parishioners and leaders he mentored. His influence is evident in the way the community approaches challenges and opportunities, with a spirit of unity, compassion, and faith.

His educational and social projects have set a benchmark for future leaders, ensuring that the values he championed remain integral to the parish's mission. The infrastructure improvements and resource allocations he facilitated have created a more robust and self-sufficient community.

Testimonials from the Community

The testimonials from those who have been directly impacted by Fr. Sagara's work provide a poignant illustration of his legacy. Priyanka Fernando, whose family benefited from a housing project initiated by Fr. Sagara, shares, "Our new home gave us security and hope. Fr. Sagara's compassion and dedication changed our lives."

Similarly, the youth programs he championed have inspired many young people to take active roles in their communities. Ruwanthi Fernando, now a youth leader, reflects, "Fr. Sagara's mentorship instilled in me a sense of purpose and responsibility. He showed us that we could make a difference, no matter how small our efforts seemed."

Future Prospects and Aspirations

Looking ahead, Fr. Sagara's future mission is anticipated with great enthusiasm. His approach to each new assignment is characterized by meticulous planning, a deep understanding of community needs, and a vision for holistic development. His past experiences provide a rich reservoir of knowledge and strategies that he will undoubtedly adapt to his new environment.

His ability to inspire and mobilize people around common goals ensures that his next mission will benefit from the same transformative leadership he has demonstrated at Pamunugama.

The anticipation of his arrival brings hope and excitement to the new community, eager to experience the positive change he is known for.



Testimonials and Letters:

Letters from colleagues, friends, and family that highlight personal stories and memories of Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi.

Appreciation Note for Rev. Fr. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi

Reflecting on the journey we've shared since our paths first crossed in pre-school, it fills me with immense gratitude and admiration for the remarkable person you have become. From those early days at St. Mary's College in Negombo to our recent collaborations, your presence has consistently left a lasting impression on me.

Your disciplined approach to life, evident even during our school bus rides, has always stood out. You speak with such deliberation and write with profound clarity, a skill that undoubtedly stems from your thoughtful nature and dedication to "Education Science." It is no surprise that your talents were recognized by the Catholic Church, leading to significant roles at Loyola College and the Aquinas High Education Institute.

Beyond your professional accomplishments, I have witnessed firsthand your exceptional ability to listen intently—a trait that not only defines you but also enriches those fortunate enough to seek your counsel. Your insights into societal issues, as demonstrated during our collaboration in youth programs, have been nothing short of enlightening.

Moreover, your appointment as Chaplain of the Movement of Catholic Graduates and Professionals – MCGP Sri Lanka represents a milestone not just for you but for all who recognize your profound contributions. Your elevation to this role is a testament to your unwavering commitment and the respect you command within the community.

Rev. Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi, your journey has been one marked by dedication, wisdom, and a steadfast belief in the power of education and community.

It is an honour to acknowledge and celebrate your achievements, knowing they are a source of inspiration to many, myself included.

With deepest appreciation and warmest regards,



Aruna Shantha Nonis
Secretary,
Movement of Catholic Graduates
and Professionals – MCGP, ICMICA Sri Lanka
2024, July 11

Celebrating the 60th Birthday of Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi

It is with great joy and admiration that I join in celebrating the 60th birthday of Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi. As a dear friend and a remarkable individual, Fr. Sagara's life has been a testament to his unwavering commitment to community, faith, and service.

Fr. Sagara's involvement in community activities and outreach programs has been nothing short of inspiring. His dedication to social justice, charity, and support for the needy has profoundly impacted countless lives. By engaging with various community groups, he has tirelessly worked to foster unity and understanding among all.

Throughout his career, Fr. Sagara has led and contributed to numerous notable projects and initiatives. His leadership and vision have consistently driven positive change, benefiting both the immediate community and the broader society.

Fr. Sagara's collaborative spirit has been instrumental in community development. By partnering with diverse organizations and individuals, he has effectively mobilized resources and expertise to address pressing social issues and uplift those in need.

Fr. Sagara has been a guiding light for many, encouraging spiritual growth and development. His wisdom and compassion have nurtured the faith of those around him, inspiring them to lead lives of purpose and integrity.

There are countless memorable moments that reflect Fr. Sagara's character and impact. One particular instance that stands out is when he personally coordinated a relief effort for a community devastated by a natural disaster.

His tireless efforts and hands-on approach not only provided immediate aid but also offered hope and reassurance to those affected. This is just one of many examples of how Fr. Sagara's actions have left an indelible mark on the hearts of those he serves.

The testimonials from individuals who have been positively influenced by Fr. Sagara are a testament to his profound impact. From the young to the old, many have shared stories of how his guidance, support, and kindness have helped them navigate life's challenges and find their path.

In celebrating this milestone, we honour not only Fr. Sagara's achievements but also the values and principles he embodies. His life of service and dedication continues to inspire and uplift us all. May his journey ahead be filled with continued blessings, joy, and fulfilment.

With heartfelt congratulations and best wishes,



Sudath Ariyawansa

Appreciation to Rev. Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi

Rev. Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi is the son of Mr. Santhasiri Hettiarachchi and Mrs. Cathleen Wickramasinghe of Dungalpitiya, who lived in "Sirinikethana." Mr. Hettiarachchi, a retired government servant and esteemed writer, authored books and published newspapers to safeguard the rights of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka. Mrs. Wickramasinghe, a government teacher, rendered immense service to the children in the area. This family, highly respected in Dungalpitiya, was dedicated to the Dungalpitiya Church, which is dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene. Notably, Mr. Hettiarachchi served as the General Secretary to the Colombo Diocese.

Shantha Sagara was a bright student at St. Mary's College, Negombo. With the blessings of God and the consent of his parents, he entered the seminary and was ordained as a priest on July 28, 1990, becoming a member of the generation of apostles of Jesus. After completing his basic formation studies, he attended the University of Urbaniana in Rome, successfully earning a Bachelor of Sacred Theology and Philosophy. Rev. Fr. Sagara also holds double degrees from the universities of Peradeniya and Kelaniya, marking him as both a real academic and a good priest.

I was blessed to attend his priestly ordination at St. Lucia's Cathedral in Kotahena. Among those young brothers, one was Brother Sagara, whose life was already dedicated to Jesus Christ. Throughout the ordination mass, I was filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. Brother Sagara was ordained to the priesthood with God's blessing, and his parents' eyes were full of tears of happiness.

After his ordination, Rev. Fr. Sagara served five Catholic parishes for a long period, spreading the word of Jesus Christ among the people. His service was identified as multi-disciplinary, encompassing religious, social, cultural, and educational perspectives. Currently, Rev. Fr. Sagara serves as the parish priest of Pamunugama Church, his native place. His sermons are well-designed to guide people directly towards God. He often visits neglected areas within the parish to improve the living conditions of the people. Rev. Fr. Sagara annually conducts the Pamunugama Church feast of St. Joseph, culminating in the longest procession, which takes around 16 hours. He was awarded the title of Episcopal Vicar of the Ja-Ela region and now performs immense service as the religious leader of Ja-Ela in the Colombo Diocese.

Rev. Fr. Sagara also served as the university youth chaplain for six years, carrying out remarkable service for Catholic students in universities. He regularly met with students and helped them enhance their religious backgrounds. Additionally, he is a skilled writer who has produced highly appreciated high-standard publications. As the chief editor of "Gnanartha Pradeepaya," the oldest newspaper in Sri Lanka, he served for six years, implementing constructive changes and giving a new outlook to the newspaper.

A good priest has two ears—one attentive to God and the other to God's people. The priest listens to both, relays what he hears, and helps them communicate with each other. Rev. Fr. Sagara exemplifies this, listening carefully to people and conveying their concerns to God for feedback, enhancing their religious life and guiding them towards eternal life with God. He speaks to people in a pleasant manner, introducing Jesus to the hearts of sinners. He has been a mediator, arbitrator, and problem solver, stabilizing genuine social structures focused on God.

Throughout his tenure, Rev. Fr. Sagara never forgot his native village of Dungalpitiya, attending all important events and maintaining close relationships with the villagers. This quality of his is deeply appreciated and admired by the villagers.

Rev. Fr. Sagara is a successful priest in every respect, with a significant capacity to work for the upliftment of people towards Jesus Christ. His service is sincerely remembered by everyone. We all wish him the blessings of God and the power of the Holy Spirit in all his future activities.

Dr. J.N. Hettiarachchi
Dungalpitiya

A Journey of Friendship and Faith: Memories of Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi

It was the year 1977, on the 16th of January, at St. Aloysius Seminary on Kynsey Road, Borella, Colombo 8. This was the first day I met my beloved friend, Claude Shantha Sagara Hettiarachchi. We were both 12-year-old grade eight students, hailing from the beautiful village of Dungalpitiya on the coastal belt. We were under the rectorship of the late Rev. Fr. Kingsley Jayamanna, both coming from remote villages of Negombo, Dungalpitiya, and Andiambalama.

Who would have thought that something so wonderful could emerge from these two remote villages!

We completed seven years of formation in the minor seminary, followed by one year at the intermediate seminary in Kalutara. We then proceeded to Kandy National Seminary for another seven years. What a long journey it was, 15 years of formation leading to our priesthood.

On the 28th of July 1990, we were ordained as priests for the Archdiocese of Colombo.

Thirty-four years have passed down the corridors of memory lane, and we have cherished our journey together in the priesthood.

Fr. Sagara is a scholarly priest, endowed with multifaceted talents. He was once a good singer and dancer, and sometimes his talents seemed endless. His dedication and versatility have always been inspiring.

I wish my dear, loving friend many more years of priestly life filled with health, wealth, and happiness. Long live Fr. Sagara.

May God bless you abundantly, and may Mother Mary and St. Mary Magdalene intercede for you.

Adieu,



Fr. Gregory Jayantha

Felicitation Message from Brothers and Sisters of the family

Our beloved brother, Rev. Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi, has reached the milestone of his 60th year. Our paths may change as life goes along, but the bonds between us remain ever strong. No matter where life takes us, the love and connection we share as siblings continue to be a source of strength and joy. We love you dearly and are immensely proud of all that you have achieved. May the years ahead be filled with continued blessings and happiness.





Final Word

As we reach the end of this memoir,
we celebrate not only
the remarkable journey of
Rev. Fr. ShanthaSagara Hettiarachchi
but also his continuing mission.

At sixty,
Fr. Sagara Hettiarachchi
remains a pillar of strength, faith, and
compassion, actively serving and
touching lives every day.

His unwavering commitment to his
calling inspires us all to strive for a life of
purpose and service.

May this story be a testament to his
enduring legacy and a reminder that the
journey of service is a lifelong
endeavour.

In the quiet corners of our hearts, where faith and humanity intersect, we find stories that transcend time and touch our souls. This book is a tribute to one such remarkable soul: Reverend Father Santha Sagara Hettiarachchi.

Father Sagara's journey is woven with threads of unwavering devotion. From the sacred halls of seminaries to the bustling streets of Negombo, he has walked the path of service, compassion, and love. His sermons resonate not only with the echoes of scripture but also with the heartbeat of a compassionate shepherd.

Whether in the quiet chapel or under the open sky, Father Sagara's voice becomes a beacon, guiding us toward the light.

Let us build bridges across divides, sow seeds of hope, and nurture a world where love triumphs over hatred. For in these acts of kindness, we honour not only Father Sagara's legacy but also the universal call to serve.