

## FR. JEROME FRANCIS DURACK, S.J. (88/70)

Died in Patna, India, on the 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2018

Born : 07.11.1929      Came to India : Dec., 1951      Final Vows: 02.02.1965  
Entered the SJ : 21.08.1947      Ordained : 13.03.1960      Died : 12.02.2018



### Studies & Formation

Elementary : St. Dorothy's School, Chicago, 1935-43  
Secondary : St. Ignatius School, Chicago, 1943-47  
Novitiate : Milford OHIO, USA, 1947-1949  
Juniorate : Milford OHIO, USA, 1949-1951  
Philosophy : De Nobili, Pune 1952-53,  
                  : SH College, Shembaganur, 1953-55  
Regency : St. Xavier's Jaipur, 1955-57  
Theology : St. Mary's Kurseong, 1957-1961  
Ordination : St. Joseph's Pro-Cathedral, Patna 1960  
Tertiaship : St. Stanislaus, Hazaribagh, 1961-1962  
Province Delegate to 33 GC, Rome, Sept- Nov., 1983  
Final Vows : XTTI, Patna, 1965

### Apostolic Assignments as a priest

Teacher, Mission Home, Palai, 1962 – 1964  
Teaching (Dean), XTTI Juniorate, 1964-1970  
Dir. Candidates, XTTI & X.Hall (Patna)1969-1974  
Sp. Director Sisters of the SH, Bettiah1974-1976  
Parish Priest, Bettiah, 1976-1983  
Province Consultor, 1978-1986  
Secretary, Bp of Muzaffarpur & PP, 1983-1992  
Parish Priest, Latonah, 1992-1994  
Parish Priest, Kurji, Patna, 1994-1998  
Parish Priest, Bettiah, 1999-2007  
VG, Diocese of Bettiah, Bettiah, 1999-2008  
Secretary to Bp. of Bettiah, Bettiah. 2007-2014  
Spiritual Ministry Sanjivan Niwas, Patna, 2014-18

A great missionary, pastor, confessor, spiritual guide, doctor of Bihar Church, a model of priests, and an exemplary Jesuit – Fr. Jerome Francis Durack passed away on 12 February at 6.20 a.m. at Xavier Bhawan, Patna. He left us to be united with his Lord and Master in a final way. On 11 February at 5.30 p.m., we, five Jesuits, visited him in Xavier Bhawan, where he had been resting for the last couple of weeks. He raised his hands blessing us; he informed us that he is all well. In the morning of the following day, 12 February, his Jesuit companions in Xavier Bhawan along with Bro. Francis gathered around him at 4. 30 am; prayed with him; anointed him with the Holy Oil; and Fr. Durack peacefully and in absolute freedom commended his spirit in God's Hand at 6.20. May his soul rest in Peace!

The Church in Bihar will miss him. We, his companions at Sanjivan Niwas, in particular, are sad. We wished to have him with us for a longer time, much longer, but as we have always seen him, he chose what a Jesuit should choose! He chose to be obedient to the call of Jesus to be united with him; and this time, it was in the 'final way'. This is what he always did - know Jesus more deeply, love Jesus more intimately, and follow Jesus more closely, true to his vocation as a Jesuit. We companions are witnesses to this.

Till a month ago, his day would begin at 4.30 am. Celebration of the Holy Eucharist and the offering of his daily prayers constituted the central activity of his daily routine. The rest of his time he spent in maintaining Sanjivan Jesuit Community accounts; teaching catechism to those recommended to him by the Kurji Parish Priest; offering spiritual guidance to religious, laity, and youth who visited him through the day; and visiting the families of Christians in the evenings. Along with these daily activities, he wrote, translated, and edited Christian literature and prayers entrusted to him by Prabhat Prakashan, or by the Archbishop, or by others. Sunday was the most important and joyful day for Fr. Durack. He spent the Sundays doing what had been central to his pastoral work - visiting Christian families, sharing their joys and sorrows, and above all guiding the young ones in matters of faith. He ate with them, rested in their homes, reached Holy Communion to the elders, and prayed with them. He returned home tired, dragging his bandaged feet only in the evening with his missionary cloth bag on his shoulders.

Fr. Durack was born in 1929, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A. in an ordinary middle class family of Jeremiah Durack and Lillian Durack. Having completed his high school from St. Ignatius High School, Chicago, he entered the Society of Jesus in 1947. On completion of his novitiate and juniorate studies in USA, he decided to be a missionary in India. He reached India in 1951. Recalling the journey, one of his companions, Fr. Ted Bowling writes, "Fr. Jerry Durack, myself and the other Chicago province Jesuits left New York by boat on 8 November, 1951, and landed at the port city of Le Harve, France, some 7 or 8 days later. After we had spent one day in Paris touring the city, our group split into 2 groups. Jerry Durack just out of his Juniorate and 2 others of our group chose to go to Paray le - Moniaie to visit the convent where St. Margaret Mary received visits from Jesus and where Fr. Claude de la Columbiere was her confessor. Myself and 2 others chose to go to the Marian Shrine at Lourdes. The choice that Jerry made, revealed his inclination to self- renunciation and gift of the loving service of others."(Fr. Ted Bowling, SJ, *De Nobili College, Pune*). He completed his priestly studies from Pune, Shembaganur, Jaipur, and Kerseong and was ordained a priest at St. Joseph's Pro-Cathedral, Patna in 1960. He pronounced his final vows at XTTI, Patna on 2 February, 1965.

He dedicated the first 12 years of his ministry from 1962 to 1974 to the formation of Jesuits as a teacher in St. Joseph's Mission Home, Palai, Kerala, as the dean of Junior Jesuits at XTTI, and as the director of Candidates at XTTI and Xavier Hall (Patna). He was called upon to serve the Christian Community as a pastor in 1976 and the rest of his life till his death – four decades and three years- he spent serving as a 'good shepherd' who cycled and walked into Christian families; administered the Sacraments without fail; preached the Word of God with passion; taught catechism with urgency; guided the laity (families, young and old), bishops, clergy, and religious with clarity in Christian faith and Christian living. During this long period of pastoral ministry, he served as Parish Priest of Bettiah (1974-76 & 1999-2007), Latonah (1992-94), and Kurji, (1994-98); as secretary to the Bishop of Muzaffarpur (1983-92) and then as secretary to the Bishop of Bettiah (2007 – 14); as the Vicar General of the diocese of Bettiah (1999-08). He also served as the spiritual director of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Bettiah from 1974 to 1976.

Fr. Durack's death is a moment of special significance for the history of the Church and of Jesuits in Bihar. He has been the last American Missionary working in Bihar. With his death a significant chapter in the history of Christian faith and Patna Jesuits comes to a graceful end. During his long years of service in the dioceses of Bihar, he visited his home only once, in 1976, and that too under obedience to his Jesuit Superior. He had left his home where he was born to own up thousands of our homes in Bihar. He led us to Jesus. Hundreds of families and thousands of Christians would miss him, but would remember him with love and devotion in years to come.

We Jesuits have lost a dear companion. To us, he is a model of missionary zeal, Jesuit Charism of knowing, loving, and following Jesus carrying the Cross with complete fidelity, availability and obedience to the Will of God. The Holy Bible, the Spiritual Exercises and the Constitutions of the Society (all in Latin) were his prized possessions. He read them again and again. They had become his life. He was a loyal Jesuit. Writing a letter to his Provincial in 2 February 2007, Fr. Durack writes, "I have never asked for any work and never will; I have never refused any work and never will. I may volunteer for extra work but not for an assignment. I am convinced that where I am sent I can do God's work. That is enough. And I have enough projects in my mind to keep me busy till the end of my life." In the same letter, he concludes, "As I said in the beginning, I am ready for anything and will be happy in any work or place provided I know that I am not doing my own will." May he intercede for us to be true companions of Jesus!

Fr. Durack had been a mentor, guide, and confessor to the Congregation of the Sacred Heart from the time of his appointment as the spiritual director of sisters of the Sacred Heart in 1974. He guided the General Chapters of the congregation as he always admired the unique contribution of the sisters in the faith formation of Catholics in Bihar. The sisters have lost their long time mentor, guide, and confessor.

Fr. Durack's contribution to the growth of catholic literature in Hindi would ever be remembered. His *Dharma Gyan*, *Prem Apaar*, *Krusveer Eucharistiya Andolan*, *Roshini* (a book of Christian prayers and a short history of the Bihar Church) are basic Christian literature used for teaching Catechism and faith formation. He has translated many lives of saints, namely, Theresa of the Child Jesus, *Dhanya* Peter Faber, and "Lives of Saints". Recognizing his contribution to Hindi Catholic Literature, he was awarded the Cherubim Barno Sahu Award by *Prabhat Prakashan* in 2014. Besides his contribution to Christian literature, his books "English Speech Drills", "Let Us Learn English Grammar", and "Some Principles and Practices" are still being used as source books to teach English to religious and seminarians.

There are a lot of stories on his austerity and his holiness. As a matter of fact, his austerity and holiness, while remaining an inspiration for us, are not the focus of his life before us. There was only one thing that was central to his life and mission. JESUS and His Bride, the CHURCH. To him Jesus was everything and leading people to Jesus is all that he did. God's love revealed in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus has made us God's beloved sons and daughters by forgiving us our sins and by freeing us from all bondage. He believed that this Grace of freedom is primarily brought to us through the Sacraments and the mission of the Church. He was not about himself, but about JESUS and His Bride the Church. He was the John the Baptist among us! 'Seeing Jesus coming towards him, he said, behold the lamp of God who takes away the sins of the world'. His death as much as his life would guide us Jesuits, religious, and laity to JESUS!

- **Fr. Anto Joseph T., SJ**

*Note: As we remember with gratitude all that God has done through Fr. Durack's life of service to God and God's people, we are reminded of our privilege and obligation to offer Masses and prayers for his eternal repose. All members of the Patna Province are to offer one Mass intention for Fr. Jerome Durack. Members of the Sanjivan Community will offer one additional Mass intention.*