

Ektha-UNITY

THE SAVE A FAMILY PLAN NEWSLETTER



SAVE A FAMILY PLAN

IN INDIA SINCE 1965

🎉 Celebrating 60 years! 🎉

In this newsletter, Fr. Michael Ryan, former President of Save A Family Plan, recounts the early days of the organization he has supported for more than half a century.

At age 98, Fr. Michael is the oldest and longest-serving priest in the Diocese of London.

I was ordained on June the third, 1950, and after I had been in Parish life for nine years, the bishop asked me to go to the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, and study for a PhD in philosophy, so that I could return and join the faculty at St. Peter's Seminary in London, Ontario, Canada. Father Augustine was studying there too, and we became close friends.

He was, first of all, very smart. Everybody agreed that if he had decided not to be a priest and become a businessman, he'd have been a millionaire. He was also a very spiritual man, very prayerful, and he lived very simply. He had practically no possessions, just an old car that he needed to get around. He was personable and once you got to know him, he had a great sense of humor.

In 1964, Pope Paul VI spoke very movingly at the Eucharistic Congress in Mumbai about the poor. One of the things that I think Fr. Augustine picked up when he heard the pope speaking was the fact that even before we're citizens of a country, we're all citizens of this one world, we're all one people. The sense of solidarity means that we can't ignore one another, we've got to care about one another.

And I think one of the reasons why Save A Family Plan has always had such appeal is that it embodies that idea. One of the features of the Plan that Fr. Augustine had right away was that he wanted families to be in touch with families. It was not just a matter of collecting money, it was never that; it was a matter of putting Canadian and American families

in touch with poor families in India.

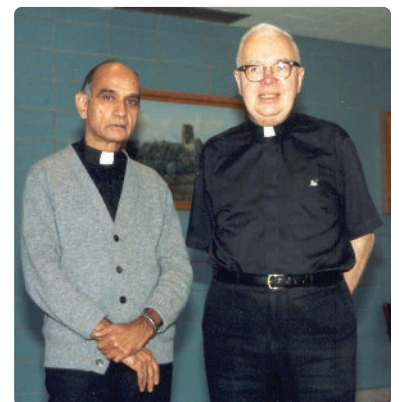
He wanted families to write to one another and to exchange ideas, care about one another in solidarity. That was a picture of the plan that came out very quickly and a picture that I think appealed to many people.

In 1971, Fr. Gus had a heart attack and he was concerned—not for himself—but for the fact that the Plan was by now very successful (they had over 4,000 families) and he was afraid that if he should die the Plan would die with him. So he said, "Can you help me find a religious community that would take over the Plan?" Because though people die, religious communities go on.

It occurred to me that perhaps St. Peter's Seminary could house the Plan. I was vice-rector at the time and spoke to the rector, Fr. James Carrigan. He took the cause to then-bishop Emmett Carter, who agreed to provide office space and accommodations. And so, in the fall of 1973, SAFP moved in.

Msgr. Gus later told me that it had been one of the best things that could have happened because the Seminary gave the Plan great visibility. It was also great for the students because many of them served as volunteers.

Early on, the Plan had been a very informal thing, and we needed to give it a legal basis. I put Fr. Augustine in touch with a good friend of mine, Joe Beachy, who was involved with the Catholic School Board. Joe took us through the whole process of getting Save A Family Plan incorporated, first at the provincial level, and then at the federal level.



Fr. Gus and Fr. Michael

So, by 1975, Save A Family Plan was fully incorporated. We had to have Officers, and so I was asked to become SAFP President. I served for 30 years, until 2005.

Fr. Augustine stayed at the Seminary until 1989, when he decided he should return to India and manage the operations there. A new priest was installed in Canada as the Director of the Plan in Canada: Fr. Sebastian Adayanthrath, now bishop.

So, Fr. Gus returned to India in 1989. I had always hoped that I'd see him again in his lifetime, but I didn't. He died in 2001.

In 2011, I had the opportunity to go to India for the first time. I spent a month there and I witnessed how it actually works. It was not a welfare plan but a development plan; it was not a question of handouts but of helping families become self-reliant, and eventually take care of themselves. Save A Family Plan helps people become what they could be, what the Lord meant them to be.

The consciousness-raising within the Plan was particularly important for women because they had a very big role in the operation of these families. They could become aware of their dignity and of their ability to manage their own lives and families.

I was amazed how well it worked. The field staff would go out and help these families, they would be checking with them each month and helping them, gradually to the point where they could sustain themselves and able to educate their children.

One of the courses that I taught at the Seminary was Catholic Social Teaching and that became one of my



SAFP staff, circa 1989

specialties. It certainly was very transformative. One cannot teach the Church's social Doctrine and not change one's own life. I taught that course for 30 years and Save A Family Plan was part of that.

After Cardinal Carter, Bishop John Sherlock was deeply involved. He got to know Msgr. Kandathil and really was very impressed with the Plan. He would talk to everybody about it. "You know," he said, "They won't even waste a postage stamp." He was right. Bishop Sherlock went to India and saw the work being done there, for himself, and attended when Fr. Sebastian was made Bishop. Bishop Sherlock was heavily immersed in Save A Family Plan, very much so, and he loved it.

Today, Bishop Ronald Fabbro has come to know Save A Family Plan and has been very supportive, and, particularly, he likes to stress the fact that this is our Plan: the Plan that the Diocese of London has committed itself to, because our Diocese has adopted it and made it our own.

Celebrating 60 years!

Save A Family Plan 1965 – 2025: Celebrating 60 years!

Thank you!

Since 1965, generous donors like *you* have worked together with impoverished people and communities in India as partners against poverty.

Dear donors: effective April 1, 2024, we are asking you to increase your support from \$22 to \$25 per month per family. For the people we serve, this small difference will have a huge impact! Read more at www.safp.org/increase-of-support.

