

INDIA – A LAND OF UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Fr Peter Jose, currently based in Sea Lake, was guest speaker at the Action for World Development AGM at the East Charlton Hotel on Monday, April 25. Fr Peter has been in Australia for four years. He grew up in Kerala, one of the smallest states in India but one that boasts 100% literacy and also claims to be one of the wealthiest states. It has a population the same as Australia – 24 million.

Fr Peter had guests reeling with some amazing facts and statistics which made for a very colourful and entertaining talk. After growing up in Kerala, he attended the seminary at Bangalore where he studied for fifteen years and is a member of the CMI Order or the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate.



Back: Kath Armstrong, Margaret Fradd, Fr Peter Jose, Simone Mason, Chris Mason, Bill Russell

Front: Noreen Ryan, Beth Dillon, Jo Russell, Val Bourke

Fr Peter wanted to give the meeting a different picture of India from the usual one of teeming millions and beggars and cows on the streets to show us the positive side of India. He illustrated his talk with some stunning pictures. From towering snow-capped mountains to lush green tea plantations, amazing feats of engineering and architecture, from the Taj Mahal to modern edifices. It was a feast of colour and contrast.

English is Fr Peter's third language. Hindu is of course his first, the main language of India, and Malaysian his local language. Then there's Sanscrit, the world's oldest language and the basis of India's many modern languages. He said it is a spiritual language.

India's diversity is not just in its many different races and cultures, its castes and religions, its deserts and mountains, forests and holy rivers, but in its inventions, discoveries and achievements. From buttons to the number zero to the value of pi which was calculated by Budhayana, from plastic surgery to water on the moon.

India is the largest milk producer in the world. Bollywood, the film studio located in Mumbai, has a greater output than Hollywood! India has the most vegetarians in the world, the third largest army in the world (you don't need to guess who has the first and second largest!) It is the world's largest continuous civilisation and while it is the largest importer of arms it has never invaded a country. It has many religions and cultures within its borders but its people live relatively peacefully together and all celebrate their feast days and festivals with great colour and gusto.

On the lighter side it also boasts the largest family – 1 man, 39 wives and 94 children! And the world's largest school – the City Montessori School with 47,000 students, 3,000 staff, over 1,000 classrooms and 3,700 computers! It's in

Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh and began in 1959 with five pupils. India is truly a great democracy. More people voted in the last election than ever before. While there are hundreds of languages English still plays a unifying role.

Many of Fr Peter's photos were of his home state Kerala and it looked a paradise to us. He described it as God's own country. He said the people of Kerala are very hard-working and religious.

Chris Mason, AWD's vice president, in his vote of thanks, said Fr Peter painted such a beautiful picture that they all would like to visit Kerala.

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