

# Father Zach returning to India after making mark in Tennessee

KATIE LEWIS

Those who have worked and laughed alongside Father Zacharias Payikat, C.M.I., all note how greatly he and his tomato sauce will be missed when he leaves Nashville for his native India later this month.

Father Payikat, who served as associate pastor of the the Cathedral of the Incarnation and pastor of St. Frances Cabrini Church in Lebanon during his 17-year stay in the United States, said he'll certainly miss the people. But that isn't all.

"Probably I will miss making spaghetti sauce with homegrown tomatoes and my secret ingredients and (showing) it off," he said.

Deacon Thales Finchum said Father Payikat is known for his green thumb, which he has put to good use in the Cathedral's courtyard area and rectory. He said Father Payikat alleges "that it is protected by cobras to keep those away who might decide to help themselves to the fruits of his labor."

He may be stepping down from his role as head chef, but Father Payikat noted there's no retirement as such for a priest; he'll continue to serve in India.

"Many people ask me why I am retiring from here," he said. "I think it is time for change in my life."

A different community won't change the mark he's made on this one.

Ann Krenson got to know Father Payikat when she was chancellor of the diocese and through the 250-acre Carmel Center of Spirituality in Liberty, Tenn., where he was the director. She said he's called to wear many hats: "a reconciler, a problem solver and a mentor to many who have benefited from his wise counsel," she said, calling his deep spirituality an "especially rich blessing."

Krenson said that a project to build two hermitages for overnight retreats on 235 acres, begun in 1998 by then-Cathedral pastor Father William Fleming, was seen through under Father Payikat's support after Father Fleming died.

"Although Father Zach has had a big, diocesan-wide impact with his work with the hermitages and Carmelite retreat center," said Ann Krenson's son, Deacon John Krenson, "it has been in his simple, holy ministry and



Tennessee Register file photo by Andy Telli  
**Father Zacharias Payikat, CMI, associate pastor of the Cathedral of the Incarnation, will return to his native India on Monday, Aug. 29, after serving in the Diocese of Nashville for 17 years. The Cathedral will host farewell receptions for him after the 8:30 and 11 a.m. Masses on Sunday, Aug. 21.**

presence that he has made a real difference in our lives, being there when it counted in the way it counted."

Deacon Krenson tells a story of when he was out of town and a friend called him to go to the hospital because her sister was dying. Deacon Krenson tracked down Father Payikat, who he said walked to Vanderbilt Medical Center to be with the family during the woman's passing.

"I arrived later, and they told me how touched and appreciative they were of his presence," Deacon Krenson said.

Deacon Finchum agreed and said parishioners are drawn to Payikat's engaging manner.

"No matter the hour, Father Zach cheerfully responds to requests for anointing of the sick or priestly visits to the hospital. His concern for parishioners is evident in knowing what is going on in their lives and visiting them in their homes," said Deacon Finchum. "Father Zach's ability to create community wherever he happens to be endears him to our parish and to the clergy in the diocese."

Deacon Mark Faulkner said Father Payikat has always been around at

the right moments, just when he's needed.

"That pastoral 'nearness' is like what Father Fleming use to call 'a ministry of presence,'" Deacon Faulkner said. "He is a good, good man, and I am

better for knowing him."

But let's get back to the food. Deacon Jayd Neeley said Father Payikat has been teaching him to make Indian cuisine, and that those lessons often include teachings on economics and Indian history. For 25 years, Father Payikat was an economics professor, principal and president of the governing body at the Sacred Heart College in Kochi, India.

Deacon Finchum said he'll miss Father Payikat's tea parties, which he calls "an adventure for the taste buds, and his cooking is filled with the essence of India. He has the ability to create a variety of wonderful teas that are rich, tasty and refreshing."

Just as his associates appreciate his culinary skills and quiet piety, Father Payikat has an appreciation for what his celebrating Mass brings to people's lives. He's been a part of their major moments: births and deaths, sacraments and anniversaries. He said he finds joy and fulfillment in making a difference in people's lives.

"People often talk about the sacrifice priests make in leading a celibate and lonely life. I never felt lonely in my life," he said. "I think of the Lord's promise: 'Everyone who have given up houses or brothers or sisters, father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more.' ... I got it all." ✠



## Sumner Special Housing dedicates fourth home

Sumner Special Housing Inc. dedicated its fourth home serving people with developmental disabilities in Sumner County on July 27. Sumner Special Housing was created by Knights of Columbus councils at Our Lady of the Lake Church in Hendersonville and St. John Vianney Church in Gallatin. The homes are operated by Habilitation and Training Services Inc. On hand for the dedication were: (lower level) State Rep. Mike McDonald and two residents, Diane and Jane; (upper level) Father Eric Fowlkes, pastor of Our Lady of the Lake, SSHI Board Member Jon Hoscheit, Sumner County Commissioner Steve Graves, HATS Director Ben Minnix, SSHI President Bob Johnson, SSHI Board Member John Bolger, SSHI Board Member Chris Fenton, Our Lady of the Lake Council 9132 Grand Knight Mike Murray, SSHI Board Member Doug Blake, Dave Evjen of Our Lady of the Lake, SSHI Board Member Jim Holleran, SSHI Board Member Lenny Soro, SSHI Board Member John Janicek, SSHI Board Member Murray Wimmer, and Bill Gunter of the MR Foundation.

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