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INDIA Church's green campaign gains wider support

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BHOPAL, India (UCAN) -- A Church tree-planting initiative among students in central India has sparked enthusiasm not only among them but in the wider community as well.



Students of St. Francis Convent Senior Secondary School in Bhopal plant a sapling in their school compound on Aug. 9, as nuns, teachers and other students look on.

The initiative, dubbed Matr Chhaon Abhiyan (shading mother earth movement), was launched in 50 Catholic schools in Madhya Pradesh state on July 29 and will be expanded to cover all 500 Catholic schools in the state.

Under the project, students from grades five to nine will each plant at least one sapling and care for them over three years.

Each student who is successful in nurturing their tree will gain additional credits in the final practical examination on environmental study, said program director Father Anand Muttungal.

He added that that he plans to ask the state government to include the program in the formal academic curriculum to promote environmental protection, and will also write to

the prime minister, members of parliament and chief ministers of others states on the initiative.

"To protect nature is our collective responsibility. Future generations will not forgive us if we fail to do this," the priest said.

Each participating school has assigned a teacher to monitor the initiative's progress.

Students have welcomed the scheme.

Pradiksha Mahurkar, a ninth grader of Bhopal's St. Mary Senior Secondary School, described the project as "motivational." She told UCA News that it would not only help to increase tree cover but would also help to curb the effects of pollution.

Mahurkar said she joined the campaign for the additional academic credit but within a fortnight her motives had changed as it had brought her closer to nature.

She planted saplings at her home and encouraged her parents to tell their friends about the campaign.

Her mother, Vasundra, a government school teacher, said the Church initiative inspired her to tell her own students to plant saplings. Her younger son, Pradhesh, a fourth grader, had joined in after being inspired by his sister. He had planted rose and basil plants at their home. "I'm doing it for a better future," he said.

Aditi Jadli, a seventh grader student in Mahurkar's school, said she is proud to be part of the campaign. She has persuaded 15 families in her condominium to plant saplings.

Jadli's mother, Vaishali, occasionally helps her daughter. "Everyone should do it instead of thinking of it as a movement for children alone," she said.

She was full of praise for the Church for launching “an environmentally friendly initiative.”

Vijay Laxmi, Mahurkar's environmental science teacher, said students in her school have joined the campaign enthusiastically.

“It is a wonderful gift to the younger generation to prepare for a bright tomorrow free of environmental pollution and other problems attached to it,” she added.

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