

An imaginary Day with Abbot Francis at Emaus Mission dating 1904

Time Travel Event - 15 August 2024

Time Travel Event

Time Travel Event is a role-play at a historical site in a community. It is one story, one event, one site and one particular day/year that expresses a particular issue in key questions.

In a *Time Travel* participants dress up in period clothes and for some hours take part in the life of the historic site. With all their senses they experience the life of a historical time and site in their own neighborhood. *Time Travel Event* is always about a specific year and what happened on the site that year, that day, e.g. the opening of the brick building in 1904 by Abbot Francis Pfanner.

Emaus Mission Station

On 15 August, 2024, Emaus Mission and Emaus Junior Secondary School had the privilege to experience one such *Time Travel Event* organized by Gulshera Pillay Khan of *Time Travel and Applied Heritage* from Port Shepstone Twinning Association, S. Africa. She is a former elected president of Bridging Ages International, a network that supports and inspires *Time Travels*. Gulshera Khan, an Indian lady, is a Muslim. I particularly mention her Faith, because surprisingly she has an incredible passion for Abbot Francis.

I am fascinated by the life of Abbot Francis,

reiterated Gulshera when she sensed that I was amazed by her knowledge of the person of Abbot Francis and his legacy.



As mentioned earlier on, *Time Travel Event* focuses on one story, one event, one site and one particular day/year that expresses a particular issue in key questions. The one historical event and story chosen was the opening and blessing of the Emaus new Church, St. Francis Xavier Parish, by Abbot Francis Pfanner on **9 December, 1904**. We will recall that when Abbot Francis arrived at Shimper's Nek on 24 April 1894 and named it Emaus, there were no buildings in place. He

first lived in a tent which also served as chapel and then in a temporary wooden hut. Until the required bricks were made for a chapel, Abbot Francis said Mass in the original *tent*. Soon it proved too small for the growing number of local people attending Mass on Sundays. He decided to build a church. After many years of hard work of making thousands of bricks and even bricklaying by his loyal sisters Angela, Edmunda, Pacifica, Laurentina, brother Xavier and brother Melchior, the church building and his brick house were finally completed in 1904.

It was a spectacular sight then for the local communities who saw Emaus Mission Station grow and now the church building was going to be officially opened and blessed.

This was the scenario that formed the *Time Travel Event* on 15 August 2024.

The day before the *Time Travel Event*, Gulshera and her four companions from Port Shepstone, met with Emaus Junior Secondary School Principle, two teachers together with grade 7 learners and two youth members from Emaus village to introduce them to the Event. Deacon Khumalo Mbulelo, CMM serving at Emaus Mission and CPS Novice Judith Missa currently on her Formative Apostolic Experience at Emaus community, were also present at the briefing session to take the role of Abbot Francis and teacher of artwork respectively. The goal of the *Time Travel Event* was to:

- make people realize the work of Abbot Francis Pfanner
- appreciate the foundation of Emaus Mission Station and the relations to the local communities
- introduce the *Time Travel Method* as a way to reflect and learn
- reflect on the needs of the community in a rural area and the role of the Mission Station

At 8.30 am on 15 Aug, all participants gathered on the Mission compound to begin the celebration. Two ladies taking the roles of Sisters Angela Michel and Edmunda Freundorfer appeared glamorous in the Red Sisters' habit, while deacon Mbulelo and one teacher who took the roles of Abbot Francis and brother Nivard respectively, were fitted well in the Trappists' habit. One of the visitors took the role of *Inkosi* (traditional chief). The learners and some teachers, representing the young people and adults from the local communities, looked attractive in their traditional attire. All the enacting costume and props were brought along by Gulshera.

Participants were then divided into groups to carry out different activities, like decorating the premises, traditional games, learning English and poetry, artwork, carpentry, gardening, kitchen etc. These were going to be showcased before the Abbot and his visitors. As the participants went on with their activities and the makeshift kitchen prepared a simple meal (fruits, juice, bread and jam), they had a chance to talk about their community needs.

How are they to be met? Is it first with prayer then work (ora et labora) or first work and then prayer (labora and ora) ? How are the two connected?

They all eagerly awaited the arrival of the Abbot. Lo and behold, there he was descending from the hill, most probably from praying the Stations of the Cross. He was met by brother Nivard. The air was filled with joyous singing of welcome. Before Abbot Francis and the *Inkosi* addressed the participants, they walked around to see what everyone was busy doing and asking them about their excitement for the day.





Everyone was then served with the simple *meal* before showcasing their different items



In his address that was translated into Zulu by the *Inkosi*, he commended the participants for their hard work and encouraged them to appreciate working together for the good of the community. He reiterated his famous quote:

We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love.



It was now time to officially open and bless the new church. All moved in procession, with song and dance, to the original church of 1904. They were still to imagine themselves in the year 1904. Abbot Francis gave his address of joy to see so many people turn up for the celebration, as he said,

Today is a celebration for the new brick church. It has taken many years to make thousands of bricks for it. I am excited and pleased to see everybody... Remember again:

We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love.



After the brief but meaningful speech, characteristic of Abbot Francis, Gulshera told all the participants to close their eyes and imagine themselves once again in 1904. She reckoned how important it was for the community to continue to work and pray together in harmony for the common good. Slowly, she told the participants to open their eyes and get back to the year 2024.

The learners were asked to share their imaginary experience of the difference between the year 1904 and 2024. They exuded much interest.

To wind up the *Time Travel Event*, all the participants moved to the Emaus Heritage Centre to get back into their own attire and for the learners to do an evaluation of the experience of the *Time Travel*. Though this *Time Travel Event* was for educational purposes, to create reflection on a contemporary issue, like addressing the needs of the local community by going back to what was at a particular moment in time, it provided the participants with a deeper appreciation of Abbot Francis and his works.



Gulshera talking to “Brother Nivard” and “Abbot Francis”

Reported by Sr. Caroline Mjomba, CPS, Emaus Mission, August 2024