

Bandel prior's Good Friday message stresses forgiveness, tolerance



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Bandel: The prior of the oldest Catholic church in eastern [India](#) has called people to forgive others and tolerate each other “[as](#) a practical way” to form a [community](#) of peace and harmony.

“Whatever be our religion or culture, forgiveness, the hallmark of Good Friday, is the only path to co-existence and peaceful living,” says Father T L Francis, head priest of Marian shrine at Bandel in Hooghly district. The church was established by Portuguese missionaries in 1599 on the banks of Hooghly River, some 60 km northwest of Kolkata.

The 63-year-old prior spoke to [pilgrims](#) to the shrine [as](#) the Church began the Holy [Week](#) when Christians commemorate events related the last days of Jesus Christ.

The priest’s Good Friday and Easter messages came in the wake of attacks on Christians and [Muslims](#) in the name religion spreading across the country.

“Forgive others and tolerate each other,” he told the visitors, who seemed alarmed by growing intolerance and strident Hindu belligerence unfolding in various parts of the country.

According to media reports, six states ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have banned beef consumption and enforced cow protection laws with the help of vigilante groups that target [Muslims](#).

The Evangelical Fellowship of [India](#), a Christian [group](#) based in [New Delhi](#), has noted that Palm Sunday services on April 9 were disrupted and Christians at five places in Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh in the north and Tamil Nadu in the south.

Recently in West Bengal, various affiliates of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh took out processions with swords and other lethal weapons on Ram Navami. Radicals chanted slogans in Hindi [as](#) they marched through the streets of Kolkata, Birbhum, Burdwan, Nadia, Malda, Midnapore and Darjeeling.

Amid such ominous signs, the Bandel prior explained, echoing Pope Francis' words: "Forgiveness and tolerance can be achieved only by works of peace."

The prior also warned that "no development was possible without peace."

A significant visual treat awaits visitors to the shrine on Good Friday, says Subrata Ganguly, head of the Church Art Kolkata. His firm has installed a [10](#) feet high and [7](#) feet wide mural of "Resurrected Christ" just on the left side of the isle near the altar of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The mural, a unique piece of art executed in bronze finish is the only one installed in entire eastern [India](#), Ganguly told.

It is placed just above the statue of body of Christ laid out at 14th Station of the Cross.

“The innocent man [Jesus] who was crucified by wicked people on Good Friday has triumphed [over](#) death and evil, by rising glorious on Easter Sunday giving us all hope beyond despair,” said Ganguly, a devout Hindu.

Ganguly’s earlier artistic installations in Bandel Church include bronze finish church doors in four places with liturgical symbols and figurines; open air Stations of the Cross which has 54 life size statues; a galaxy of popular saints’ life size statues [as](#) well [as](#) a musical fountain placed in the church ground in front of the shrine.

[As](#) in the past, the Good Friday and Easter services at the Bandel Church will also be broadcast live on local cable television channel.

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