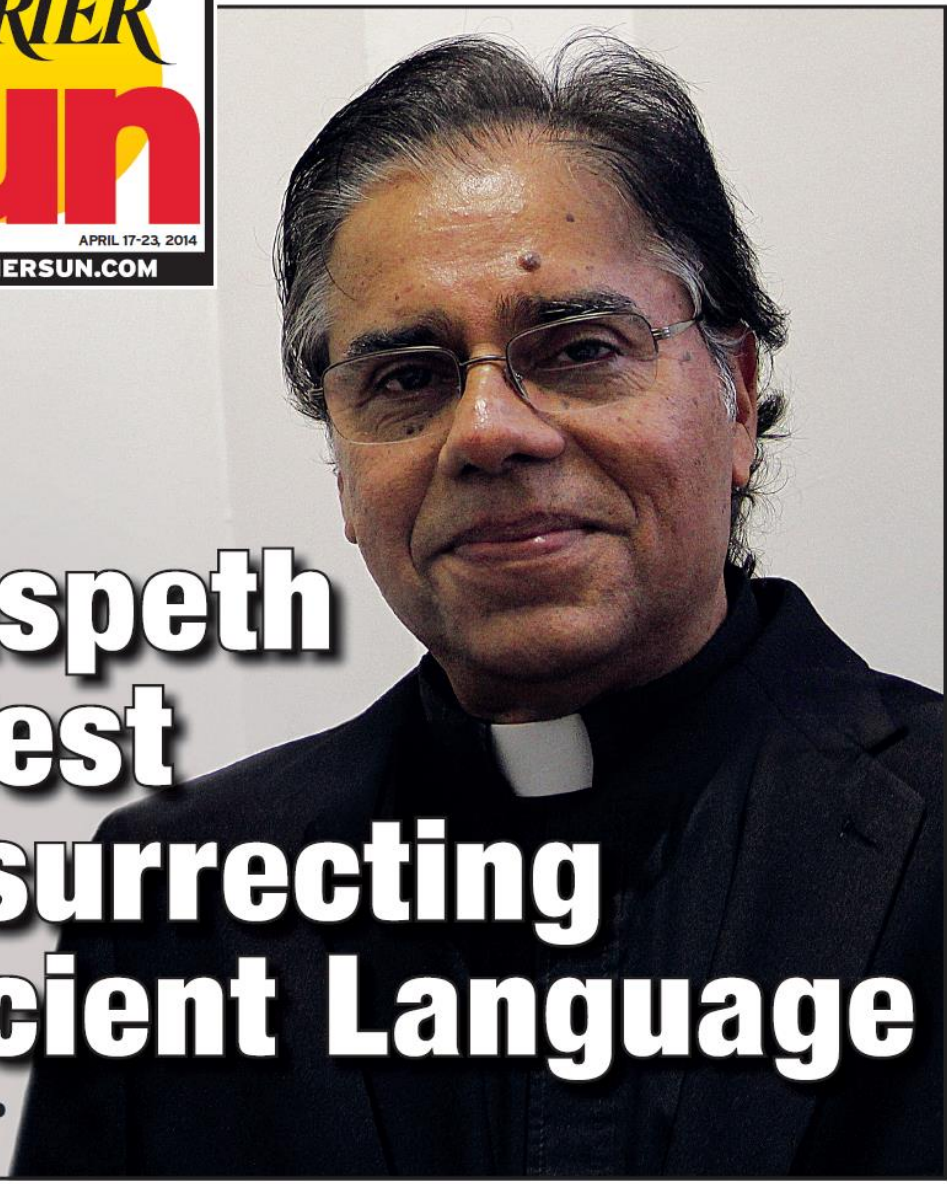


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Maspeth Priest Resurrecting Ancient Language

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THE COURIER/Photo by Eric Jankiewicz

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Queens priest seeks to preserve ancient language

BY ERIC JANKIEWICZ

The Rev. Joseph Palackal saves more than souls. The parochial vicar at St. Stanislaus Kotska Church in Maspeth is trying to save the ancient language of Aramaic, said to be spoken by Jesus and early Christians.

This summer he plans to revisit the unlikely home of the last Aramaic speakers — in the southern Indian state of Kerala, where many Christians trace the origin of their faith to Thomas the Apostle.

"Few people know this, but up until recently Christian Indians held religious services in the ancient language Aramaic," Palackal said.

He explained that since the 1960s the churches in India held mass in the ancient language that much

of the Middle East spoke in the early Christian years. Much like Latin, the spoken language has since faded into history.

"In Kerala, the language was kept in a time capsule," he said, explaining that Christians in Kerala, unlike those in the Middle East, weren't persecuted and could thus speak the language freely. "And so I've been trying to record as many people as possible who have knowledge of the language."

The trick, Palackal said, is finding people who were born no later than the 1950s and attended the local church, where Aramaic was used for songs and worship. People born after that time wouldn't have been exposed to the language because the church adopted the local language of Malayalam.

"So it is a very time-sensitive project and I have to

hurry before all those who remember the language are gone," Palackal said, explaining that he tracked down Indians who were part of the Syro-Malabar Church, the largest of the St. Thomas Christian denomination, which has its own forms of worship and theology. Many were able to sing the Aramaic religious songs of their youth.

Palackal hopes to have enough recordings of the language, which is preserved through religious song, to submit it to the Library of Congress.

And if he succeeds in his quest, the movie "The Passion of the Christ" won't be the only place where Aramaic is heard or appreciated.

"It's like a gold mine of musical melodies," he said. "And if I don't do it, no one else will. It will be a complete loss for humanity."

St. John's selects new president, first layman in university history

BY LIAM LA GUERRE

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After a major scandal that rocked the school and a yearlong search for a new leader, the St. John's University Board of Trustees announced Dr. Conrado Gempesaw as its 17th president.

Gempesaw is the first layman who will serve as president of St. John's, a private Catholic university with three campuses in New York City and others in Europe. Gempesaw, provost and executive vice president for academic affairs at Miami University



Photo courtesy of Miami University

St. John's University Board of Trustees announced Dr. Conrado Gempesaw as its 17th President.

St. John's on July 1, replacing Interim President Rev. Joseph Levesque.

"In Dr. Gempesaw, we have found a visionary leader who understands and embraces St. John's mission as a Catholic and Vincentian university, and has the skills necessary to realize our goals for the future," the Board said in a letter. "We are confident he will help St. John's continue its remarkable transformation from a commuter school into a global educational institution with enhanced and expanded facilities and new academic initiatives, while maintaining its mission of providing a world-class affordable education."

Father Donald Harrington, the former St. John's president of 24 years, announced he would step down last year in May, following immense media pressure over gifts he received from former dean Cecilia Chang, who was facing charges of embezzling \$1 million from the school. Chang ultimately committed suicide before the end of her trial, increasing the attention on Harrington and his chief of staff, Robert Wile, who also resigned.



The Department of Education voted on the temporary co-location proposal that will send P.S. 11 students, such as incoming kindergartener Enda, to P.S. 171 in Astoria for the next three years.

THE COURIER/SUN PHOTO BY ANGY ALTAMIRANO

DOE votes to bus over 200 Woodside students to Astoria

BY ANGY ALTAMIRANO

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A group of Woodside parents have lost the fight to keep their children close to home.

The Department of Education (DOE) voted Wednesday, April 9, to temporarily relocate 250 students from P.S. 11 in Woodside to P.S. 171 in Astoria for the next three years.

The relocation of the students, expected to begin for the 2014-15 school year, comes as the School Construction Authority (SCA) plans to build a brand-new mini-building addition to P.S. 11 with a capacity of 856 seats.

"I have maintained that the expansion of P.S. 11 is a necessary investment in our children's education and is vitally important to alleviating our overcrowded schools," Congressman Joseph Crowley said. "However, I am disappointed and troubled by the DOE's lack of foresight to avoid this terrible situation."

Crowley added, "The DOE's poor planning and judgement will now place a significant burden on 250 of our youngest students and their families. Our children only get one real opportunity at a great education and it is unfortunate our city cannot do right by them."

Seven members of the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP) voted in favor of the proposal, while two were against and one abstained from voting.

Since December, parents and elected officials fought to keep the students closer to their Woodside homes and last month asked the DOE to consider renting space in the nearby former St. Teresa School building.

But P.S. 11 parents say the DOE told them the former Catholic school would not be practical for the students due to lack of adequate resources at the site.

"Where there is a will there should be a way," said Martin Connolly, whose youngest son is expected to start kindergarten at the school next year and faces being bused to Astoria. "We are just disappointed. At the moment we are just accepting the situation."

"We are now looking very seriously at our son's future," the father of three said.

Connolly also has two other children currently at P.S. 11, a daughter in second grade and son in kindergarten.

"After extensive outreach to the community, we decided to move forward on delivering a state-of-the-art addition to P.S. 11 that will enrich students' academic experience and reduce overcrowding," DOE spokesman Harry Hartfield said.