

Faculty Exchange Program Report

Host Institution	: St Joseph's College, Darjeeling, India
Date of Visit	: 22 nd May to 31 st May 2025
Name of Participant	: Rector, Prof. Th Lic. Mgr. Miloš Lichner SJ, D.Th. Trnava University, Slovakia
Institution Represented	: Trnava University (TRUNI), Slovakia.

Introduction

The academic and cultural landscape of St. Joseph's College, Darjeeling, was significantly enriched by the visit of Prof. Milos Lichner, SJ, Rector of Trnava University in May -June 2025. His time at the college, spanning formal addresses, workshops, academic lectures, strategic meetings, and cultural immersion, contributed immensely to the development of a more globally connected, ethically oriented, and intellectually dynamic educational environment. The primary objectives of the program included:

- To engage in collaborative teaching and academic exchange with Trnava University
- To explore potential joint research opportunities.
- To understand the academic environment and higher education system in Slovakia.
- To foster cultural exchange and institutional partnership development.

As per the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Trnava University (TRUNI), Slovakia, and St. Joseph's College, Darjeeling, the esteemed Rector, Prof. ThLic. Mgr. Miloš Lichner SJ, D.Th., visited the college campus from 22nd May to 31st May 2025. This report documents the major highlights of Prof. Lichner's visit, underscoring the impact of his engagements on students, faculty, and the institution as a whole.

Activities and Engagements

1. Commencement Address

Prof. Lichner's arrival was one of the most momentous events on the college calendar: the Commencement Ceremony for the graduating class of the 2024–2025 academic year. Held on 22nd May, the event served not only as a milestone for students but also as a ceremonial gateway for the collaborative engagements outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between St. Joseph's College and Trnava University. As the chief guest, Prof. Lichner delivered a Commencement Address that blended intellectual depth with spiritual insight. The speech was framed around three core themes: wisdom, responsibility, and global citizenship. Drawing from his extensive academic background in theology and ethics, as well as his pastoral commitment to social justice, Prof. Lichner urged students to embrace lives of purpose, compassion, and leadership. He reminded the graduates that their education was not merely a personal achievement but a communal trust—one that called them to act as stewards of knowledge and advocates for change. He quoted various philosophers, theologians, and cultural leaders, invoking both the Ignatian tradition and contemporary global challenges. Notably, he emphasized that “to be truly wise is to be radically human—to listen deeply, to respond justly, and to walk humbly in solidarity with others.”



He awarded prizes to the department that performed best throughout the year, recognizing their outstanding achievements and contributions with appreciation and celebration for their excellence and dedication to success.

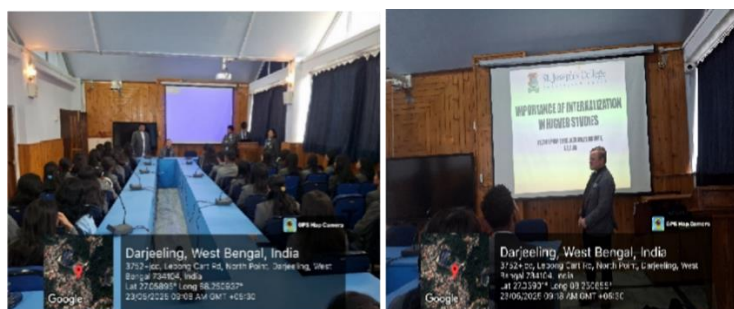


After the formal address, Prof. Lichner engaged in **informal interactions** with graduates, faculty members, and parents.

2. Leadership Workshop and Lecture Series for Student Representatives

The following day, 23rd May, Prof. Lichner led a Internationalisation of Education Workshop designed specifically for student representatives drawn from all academic departments. This session was designed to strengthen the qualities of critical thinking, intellectual formation, and ethical leadership among the student leaders. During this interactive workshop, Prof. Lichner:

- Emphasized the importance of intellectual humility and lifelong learning.
- Encouraged students to lead through service and example, inspired by the Ignatian principle of cura personalis (care for the whole person).
- Highlighted the necessity for student leaders to engage in constructive dialogue, even amid disagreement.
- Fostered discussions on real-world ethical dilemmas and the role of personal integrity in public life.



3. Academic Lectures in the Faculty of Pedagogy

From May 26th, Prof. Lichner embarked on a profound intellectual and pedagogical journey with

the Faculty of Pedagogy, presenting a series of academic lectures that deeply resonated with students, faculty members, and future educators. These lectures, meticulously designed and passionately delivered, focused on three interrelated thematic domains: preparation for the teaching profession, the principles of Ignatian pedagogy, and the understanding of teaching as a vocational calling. The sessions were primarily attended by students enrolled in teacher training programs and courses in educational theory, but the discussions extended their impact far beyond the confines of any single classroom or curriculum.



Prof. Lichner's lectures reflected not only academic rigor but also a sincere commitment to the moral, spiritual, and philosophical dimensions of education. His engagement with the audience was dynamic and participatory, allowing students to both absorb and contribute to the discourse. What made his lectures particularly compelling was the ability to synthesize theoretical frameworks with lived educational experiences, resulting in an atmosphere of inspiration and critical reflection.

I. Preparing for the Teaching Profession: Philosophical and Practical Insights

The first thematic area that Prof. Lichner addressed was the multifaceted process of preparing for the teaching profession in the 21st century. Rather than focusing solely on techniques or institutional expectations, he took a holistic approach, intertwining philosophical reflection with practical wisdom.

Developing a Reflective Teaching Practice

A key tenet of Prof. Lichner's pedagogical philosophy is the cultivation of reflective teaching. He emphasized that the effective educator is not merely a conveyor of content, but a reflective practitioner who continuously interrogates their own assumptions, practices, and decisions. Drawing on the works of educational theorists like John Dewey and Donald Schön, Prof. Lichner encouraged students to view teaching as a dynamic process that evolves through experience, feedback, and introspection.

He illustrated how reflective practice enhances professional growth, deepens empathy, and strengthens pedagogical effectiveness. The students were urged to maintain reflective journals, engage in peer observations, and seek mentorship as ways of sustaining this ongoing critical engagement with their own development.

Building Meaningful Teacher-Student Relationships

Another crucial point raised in this session was the importance of teacher-student relationships. Prof. Lichner argued that learning occurs most effectively within a framework of trust, respect, and mutual understanding. He challenged future teachers to transcend transactional relationships and foster environments where students feel seen, valued, and empowered.

Using case studies and narratives, he explored how positive relational dynamics can impact motivation, behavior, and academic performance. He also highlighted the ethical responsibilities

of teachers in nurturing inclusive and emotionally supportive classrooms, particularly for students from marginalized or vulnerable backgrounds.

Emphasizing Holistic Education

Rejecting narrow models of instruction that prioritize rote memorization and standardized assessments, Prof. Lichner advocated for holistic education. This approach considers the full development of the learner—cognitively, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. He referenced the educational philosophies of Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner, and connected them to contemporary research on emotional intelligence and social learning. He encouraged prospective educators to design curricula that engage the whole person and foster creativity, resilience, and lifelong learning. Through this discussion, it became clear that preparing for the teaching profession requires not just academic knowledge but also ethical clarity, personal reflection, and emotional intelligence. Prof. Lichner succeeded in positioning teaching as both an art and a moral endeavor.

II. The Spirit of Ignatian Pedagogy: Foundations of Jesuit Educational Philosophy

The second lecture series delved into the foundational principles of Ignatian pedagogy, a distinctive educational philosophy rooted in the Jesuit tradition. Prof. Lichner, drawing from both historical sources and contemporary applications, provided students with an immersive understanding of this spiritually grounded pedagogical framework.

Prof. Lichner’s lecture offered a comprehensive insight into Ignatian pedagogy, emphasizing the significance of contextual teaching. He began by stressing the need to understand students’ backgrounds, realities, and challenges, urging educators to adapt their instruction accordingly. This approach, rooted in cultural and social awareness, makes learning more relevant and responsive.

He highlighted experience-based learning as a vital pillar of Ignatian education. By engaging students in real-life situations—such as community projects, fieldwork, and service-learning—becomes more meaningful and fosters civic responsibility.

Reflective thinking, described as the “heart of deep learning,” was another key focus. Prof. Lichner emphasized the value of structured reflection—through journaling, silence, and dialogue—as a way for students to process their experiences and align them with personal and ethical values.

He then addressed action and evaluation, linking education to Paulo Freire’s concept of liberation. Learning, he said, should prompt transformative action, while evaluation should measure growth in character and social impact, not just academics.

Lastly, he explored Jesuit principles such as *Magis*, striving for excellence, and *Cura personalis*, caring for the whole person. He also underlined discernment—making wise, ethical decisions—as central to both teaching and learning in today’s complex world.

III. Living the Teaching Vocation: A Call Beyond Profession

Perhaps the most impactful aspect of Prof. Lichner’s lecture series was the discussion on teaching as a vocation—a sacred calling rather than merely a profession or career path.

Discovering the Strength to Create, Serve, and Grow

He began this session with a moving invitation to all present: “Be those who discover within

themselves the strength to create, to serve, to grow.” This phrase encapsulated the essence of vocation as a journey of self-discovery and dedication to others. Teaching, in this vision, becomes a way of life characterized by creativity, service, and continual personal and professional growth.

Embracing the Inner Calling

Prof. Lichner urged students to listen deeply to their inner calling-to recognize the profound sense of purpose that brings them to the field of education. He acknowledged the many challenges that teachers face-low pay, bureaucratic pressures, emotional labor-but insisted that the joy and fulfillment of positively impacting lives far outweigh these burdens. His words inspired a renewed sense of mission among many students, particularly those who felt disillusioned by the current state of educational systems. He invited them to see themselves as agents of hope and transformation, especially in underserved and marginalized communities.

Promoting Values-Based Learning

A final emphasis of the vocational theme was the necessity of values-based education. Prof. Lichner argued that in a world increasingly marked by polarization, technological distraction, and moral ambiguity, educators have a critical role in cultivating ethical awareness and civic responsibility. He encouraged students to integrate values such as justice, compassion, and stewardship into their teaching practices and curricula. This, he insisted, does not mean imposing a specific moral code, but rather fostering an environment where students can explore their own beliefs and develop a grounded sense of responsibility toward others and the planet.

4. Address to the Education Commission Members

On 31st May, Prof. Lichner was invited to address the Education Commission of St. Joseph’s College, a strategic body comprising senior faculty, administrative heads, and external academic advisors. This meeting was a significant platform for dialogue on long-term academic strategy, internationalization, and research collaboration.



Prof. Lichner’s address centered around several key areas:

- **Knowledge Creation and Dissemination:** He emphasized that universities must not only transmit knowledge but also generate it. He advocated for a research culture that is inclusive, socially grounded, and globally engaged.
- **Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Collaborations:** Prof. Lichner pointed to the success of transdisciplinary projects and global teaching models that bring together diverse fields and worldviews, highlighting the need to break academic silos.
- **Alignment with the SDGs:** Echoing the priorities of global higher education, he recommended that St. Joseph’s align its academic priorities with UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially in the areas of quality education, gender equality, and reduced inequalities.

- Institutional Partnerships: He invited the Education Commission to consider joint degree programs, faculty and student exchanges, and co-hosted academic conferences with Trnava University and other international collaborators.

This session ended with a **roundtable discussion**, where commission members proposed follow-up steps, including drafting collaborative proposals and initiating feasibility studies on inter-institutional research.

Cultural Engagements

Between 28th and 30th May, Prof. Lichner participated in a series of cultural and community-oriented engagements, which offered him a more nuanced understanding of the region's social and historical textures.

- A visit to a Buddhist Monastery in Darjeeling offered a serene moment of spiritual reflection and a deeper appreciation for the region's rich interfaith ethos.
- He also traveled to **Gangtok**, where he toured the **Museum of Tibetology**, furthering his engagement with the historical and philosophical dimensions of **Buddhist culture** in the Eastern Himalayan context.



- At the Gandhi Ashram, a music school dedicated to supporting the economically underprivileged, Fr Milos attended a heartwarming concert featuring performances by students. The event beautifully showcased Darjeeling's rich traditions in music, dance, and storytelling. Each act reflected the region's vibrant cultural diversity and deep artistic roots.



Prof. Lichner, a guest at the event, expressed his admiration for the area's pluralistic identity. He praised the students for their remarkable creativity, passion, and discipline. The evening was a powerful reminder of how art can empower communities, bridge divides, and celebrate the resilience and talent of young individuals from marginalized backgrounds.

Future Directions

Prof. Lichner's visit marked a milestone in academic diplomacy and intellectual collaboration. It fostered not just mutual learning but also strategic direction in alignment with global educational imperatives.

The most notable outcomes include:

- **Initiation of Joint Research:** The visit opened up possibilities for collaborative research on topics such as migration, gender studies, and indigenous knowledge systems.
- **Planning for Academic Exchange:** Early frameworks were laid for student and faculty exchange programs, co-hosted symposia, and virtual classrooms connecting Trnava University with St. Joseph's College.
- **Strengthening Ethical and Global Discourse:** Students and faculty alike gained exposure to international perspectives on ethics, pedagogy, and global citizenship, enriching academic debates on campus.

Through a blend of academic lectures, leadership sessions, policy dialogues, and cultural interactions, Prof. Lichner contributed significantly to the objectives laid out in the MoU between Trnava University and St. Joseph's College, Darjeeling. This collaboration has sown seeds for a long-term partnership, grounded in the Jesuit spirit of holistic education, intercultural empathy, and the pursuit of justice.

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