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## *Foundation on Hope in 1969*



The story of Hayden Hall began in 1969 with a simple yet powerful vision — to bring hope, dignity, and opportunity to the marginalised communities of Darjeeling. Founded by Fr. Edgar Peter Burns, Hayden Hall was the concrete realisation of his dream to establish a centre in town where students and alumni of St. Joseph’s College could gain hands-on experience working with and for their poorer brothers and sisters. His vision was not only to support the development of vulnerable communities, but also to inspire educated local lay people to become agents of change and “men and women for others” through loving service, compassion, and dedication.

During those years, many families living in the hills and remote villages of Darjeeling faced immense social and economic hardships. Access to healthcare, education, employment opportunities, and social welfare services was extremely limited, especially for the poor and vulnerable sections of society. Moved by compassion and guided by his deep faith in humanity, Fr. Burns believed that every individual deserved dignity, care, and equal opportunity regardless of caste, religion, or social background.

What began as a humble initiative gradually evolved into a trusted institution dedicated to social welfare, healthcare outreach, education, youth empowerment, and community development. Fr. Burns strongly believed that the poor deserved only the very best — in education, medical care, skill training, and opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. Inspired by this belief, a new Hayden Hall building was constructed in 1972 on the site of the old Albert Lodge. The building was inaugurated by Fr. Hayden, whose legendary discipline, sense of fairness, love for the poor, and encouragement of Hayden Hall’s mission inspired the institute to be named in his honour.

As the organisation continued to grow, Hayden Hall II was established in 1976 and inaugurated by Cardinal Picachy, followed later by Hayden Hall III in 1994. These buildings became centres of hope and transformation, serving countless individuals and families across Darjeeling and surrounding villages.

From its earliest days, Hayden Hall focused on integrated health and social welfare services. Medical outreach programs, health awareness campaigns, mother and child care initiatives, tuberculosis prevention and treatment, paramedical training, nutrition rehabilitation, and community health services were introduced to support underserved communities where proper healthcare facilities were scarce. Families living in remote villages often had to travel long distances for even basic medical assistance, and Hayden Hall worked tirelessly to bridge that gap by bringing care directly to the people.

Education and youth development also became central to the institution’s mission. Programs in adult education, pre-school and primary education, supervised after-school tuition for children from economically weaker communities, and vocational and skills training were established to empower individuals through learning. Hayden Hall believed that education was one of the most powerful tools for long-term social transformation, helping young people discover their potential and build brighter futures for themselves and their families.

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The institution also extended support through housing initiatives, income generation programs, feeding schemes, rehabilitation services, and assistance for the elderly, abandoned, homeless, and differently-abled. Women's empowerment and community participation became important pillars of the organisation's work, encouraging people to become active contributors to the development of their own communities.

The work of Hayden Hall was never limited to charity alone. Under the leadership of Fr. Burns, the institution embraced a deeper mission rooted in love, dignity, and empowerment. All its programs reflected his core beliefs — a profound love for the poor, faith in local people working for the development of their own communities, and a commitment to witnessing God's love through service to the sick, the handicapped, the illiterate, the unskilled, the elderly, and the hopeless.

Over the decades, Hayden Hall became much more than an institution; it became a symbol of trust, compassion, and humanity in Darjeeling. Volunteers, teachers, healthcare workers, students, social workers, and community members came together with a shared purpose of building a society where every person could live with dignity and hope. Many former students eventually became part of the staff, managing committee, and governing board of Hayden Hall, continuing the legacy of service inspired by Fr. Burns himself.

Fr. Burns remains remembered not only as a visionary founder, but also as a teacher, pioneer, and a true "man for others." His life has been a remarkable witness to faith, compassion, and selfless service. Despite enduring numerous health challenges and major operations over the years, his dedication to humanity and commitment to serving the poor never diminished.

Today, the foundation laid in 1969 continues to guide the mission of Hayden Hall. The institution stands as a beacon of hope in Darjeeling, carrying forward the values of compassion, service, empowerment, and community development. What began as one man's dream has grown into a lasting legacy that continues to transform lives, inspire generations, and build a future rooted in dignity, inclusion, and hope for all.

