

“DIALOGUE IS ACTIVE AND HAPPENING”

ZONAL MEETINGS OF THE COORDINATORS OF DIALOGUE AND THEIR COLLEAGUES IN MINISTRY

NORTH ZONE

(Provinces/Regions of Calcutta, Darjeeling, Delhi, Patna, Kohima, and Nepal)

(November 21st 2018 - St. Xavier’s College, Kolkata)

On 21st November 2018 North Zone Dialogue Commissions’ Coordinators along with their partners met at St. Xavier’s College, Kolkata under the leadership of Fr. Vincent Sekhar, the Secretary of JCSA Secretariat for Dialogue. Coordinators and their partners involved in Dialogue Ministry from the Provinces of Hazaribagh, Patna, Kolkata, and Kohima attended this valuable meeting. The members from the Provinces of Delhi, Nepal and Darjeeling did not or could not attend this one day meeting.

Fr. Timir Singha, Coordinator for Kolkata Province made all the necessary arrangements for the meeting and explained all the practical details to the visiting members in the beginning. Thereafter Fr. Vincent Sekhar expressed the importance of having the meeting on Dialogue in Kolkata which has the spirit in its rhythm of life. Then he conducted an Inter-religious Prayer with readings from various religious traditions leading all to a mood of communion and religious harmony.



With the blessings and prayers of RR. DD. Linus Nirmal Gomes the inaugural session started. Rev. Fr. Dr. Dominic Savio S.J., Rector of St. Xavier’s College community welcomed all the participants with a warm heart. After welcoming all the participants, Fr. Rector in his felicitation highlighted

some of the points in the papers of Fr. Michael Amaladoss S.J., namely, *Pope Francis and Dialogue* and of Fr. Rui Heredia, namely, *Another India is Possible*. He said that the ministry of Inter-religious Dialogue is significant and challenging in the current situation of India. Fr. Timir Singhe gave vote of thanks.



I Session: After Coffee/Tea break, in the first session, Fr. Philip Abraham from exposed the main points of the paper of Fr. Michael Amaladoss S.J. – *Pope Francis and Dialogue*. The highlights of Fr. Amaladoss’ paper as presented by Fr. Philip Abraham are:

- 1) Pope Francis is a man of Dialogue.
- 2) This fact is very clearly revealed by the attitudes and the writings of Pope Francis.
- 3) The main aspects of Pope Francis’ attitudes are that the Pope is very much convinced that God doesn’t belong to only the Catholic Church and He has redeemed the entire humanity. The Pope has very deep respect for the dignity and freedom of each and every human person. The Pope has deep devotion to St. Peter Faber who was known for dialoguing with others to arrive at

consensus. Further the Pope's conviction is that we should draw people to Christ by attracting them rather than by baptizing them.

- 4) Referring to the writings of Pope Francis, Fr. Amaladoss points that Pope Francis advocates Social Dialogue as a means for establishing Peace in Society. Development of all humans and specially the Poor with the equitable distribution of profit is a special concern of the Pope. As a summary of all the writings of Pope, Fr. Amaladoss says that Pope proclaims a sense of hope in the midst of divisions in the world by saying finally *Unity will prevail over Conflicts*. Thus Pope Francis stands out as a tall figure in the modern world who promotes dialogue at all levels to promote PEACE in the world.



II Session: In the second session, Fr. P.J. James, Coordinator of Hazaribagh Province, presented the paper written by Fr. Rui Heredia with the title *Another India is Possible*. The highlight of Fr. Rui Heredia's paper is that we should differentiate between Electoral and Substantive Democracies and work for an integrated perspective where Dialogue and Reconciliation will diffuse into a symbiosis. Fr. Rui Heredia expounds many other insights in his paper which calls for deeper study and reflections.

III Session: Sharing of the Coordinators of North Zone Provinces

- a) Dialogue Activities in Hazaribagh Province: The third session began with the sharing of Fr. P.J. James regarding the Inter-religious activities that are carried on in the Hazaribagh region. He mentioned two Inter-religious organizations, namely MURDA KALYAN SAMITI which buries the orphaned dead bodies and ROTI BANK which collects food from people to feed the poor in the city. The Jharkhand Land Issue is also uniting many tribes to fight for their Land Rights unitedly.

- b) Dialogue Activities in Kohima Region: Fr. Philip Abraham from Kohima recounted that the main task in Kohima region is promoting Ecumenical Unity since the members of the Baptist Church are quite against the Catholic Church. Through dialogue slowly the situation is improving but still a lot could be done to deepen the unity among Christians belonging to different denominations living in the North Eastern States.
- c) Dialogue Activities in Kolkata Province: Fr. Timir and Mr. Dipankar Basu enumerated the different dialogue activities taking place in West Bengal. They pointed out that the Ramakrishna Mission is fighting against the divisive activities of RSS by organizing celebrating the memory of Swami Vivekananda through the country who proclaimed co-operation and mutual respect between all religions. Further in January during the Unitive Octave people from all religions joined together and prayed for PEACE. Diwali festival is also celebrated with people of all religions gathering together. Thus Kolkata always promoted Inter-religious Harmony and Peace as its way of life.



- d) Dialogue Activities in Patna Province: Fr. Sumit representing the Coordinator of Patna Province from Patna narrated the activities undertaken by Fr. Jose Kalapura in Patna. Fr. Jose organized many Nukkad Natak shows for National Unity in many schools in Patna area. Inter-religious celebration of religious feasts and talks by different spiritual gurus are regularly organized in Patna. Another important initiative taken by Fr. Jose is publication of a book which explains the salient features of different religious feasts in India.

Fr. Soosai Eucharist Lawrence from Bodh Gaya (Patna Province) shared the dialogue activities carried out by him in Bodhgaya which is the most sacred land to the Buddhists. He conducts retreats, recollections and seminars for Catholic religious sisters, brothers and priests integrating Buddhist Psycho-spirituality and Biblical Spirituality. Also he conducts Workshops for students, youths and teachers to enhance their moral and spiritual development through PEACE EDUCATION

PROGRAMS. He is promoting Meditation in schools and colleges to promote Concentration and Character-formation among students and teachers. Conducting Inter-religious celebrations of Diwali, Mahavir Jayanti, Buddha Jayanti, Christmas, Guru Nanak Jayanti and Id is a regular activity by him in Bodhgaya every year.

IV Session: In the final session, a National level Dialogue meeting was deliberated upon to be conducted in October 2019. Chennai or Bangalore was cited as the possible venue for the meeting.



At the end Fr. Vincent Sekhar, the Assistancy Secretary for Dialogue thanked all the participants for having participated in the meeting in the midst of their busy schedule. He extended special gratitude to Fr. Dominc Savio, Rector of St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, the Jesuit Community particularly the Minister for having gone out of their way by being hospitable to the North Zonal participants, especially for providing the hospitality and special Dinner. The participants were much thankful to Fr. Timir for his meticulous and painstaking preparations and arrangements. Indeed it was a meaningful coming together of Partners in Dialogue in the North Zone.

(Report prepared by Fr. Eucharist Lawrence SJ, Director of Jivan Sangham, Bodh Gaya)

SOUTH ZONE

(Provinces of Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala, Madurai, and Sri Lanka)

(November 15-16, 2014 - Ashirvad, Bengaluru)



JSD had the second Zonal meeting of the Southern provinces in Bengaluru. The first was held in Jamshedpur for the Central-Northern provinces. Fr. Vincent Sekhar, the Asst. Secretary briefed the coordinators and partners in dialogue on the encouraging and growing positive attitude and practices within the Catholic Church and the Society in the ministry of interreligious dialogue, especially after Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate*. He mentioned about the several Interreligious/cultural/animation centres in various provinces, their activities and the challenges they face, etc. After inculturation in the 70s and 80s, dialogue with the poor and the dalits has taken the upperhand in the last two decades, moulding the Jesuit ideals and thrust. In educational institutions, dialogue with the youth in the several areas of academic and spiritual life is taking a shape. Foundation courses and value education classes and training are being given to faculty and students. Campus Ministries are becoming more and more innovative and vibrant, given the institutions' autonomous set up. But interreligious thrust is still to catch up and spiritual animation programmes for the Hindus and others are minimal.

There is also a lacuna from the Jesuit side. Hardly any new members are recruited and trained in this area. There could be people from the Formation sector, possibly sociologists, Religionist, Indologist... to take up Interreligious dialogue as part of their job. Meanwhile young scholastics need to be identified particularly in Philosophy stage, encouraged and animated. They should be sent

for higher studies relevant to this field. The Secretary is appealing this to the Provincials and the PCFs. Our scholastics also are motivated to learn to be open to other cultures and religions, equip themselves in professional learning and deep involvement. The next years' plan for the Secretary is to go round the common Juniorates, Philosophates and Theologates to address the scholastics on this ministry of Interreligious dialogue, fostering openness to diversity as he did several years ago during his first-time engagement as JCSA Secretary from 2000-2007.

Then Fr. Devadhas presented the summary form of the 2014 document “Instrumentum Laboris” (Education Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing passion) by the congregation for Catholic Education. The document highlighted the diversity of learners in our institutions and its challenges. It called for being ‘truly Catholic’ and ‘truly open’, as the real challenges of dialogue. Fr. Victor Lobo summarized another document “Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools – Living in Harmony for a civilization of Live” (2013 from the Congregation for Catholic Education). This document again highlighted the plurality of cultures and the importance of the curriculum in teaching world religions for acquiring knowledge of their own religions, aiming at the values of dignity, honour and respect of human persons: “The Values of other cultures and religions must be respected and understood”. The educational community should enhance in different ways intercultural exchanges and dialogue in order to experience intercultural relationships.



Then the coordinators of the respective southern provinces Fr. Victor Lobo (Karnataka), Fr. Devadhas (Madurai), and Fr. Roy Thottathil (Kerala) [Fr. Packiaraj for Andhra was absent but sent a report] shared about their province/centre's activities relating to interreligious and cultural dialogue: Interreligious Harmony Movement in Bengaluru, interreligious retreat, interreligious and walking pilgrimages (candlelight walks to different places for praying), school/college seminar on “Religions”, etc. Karnataka province did a SWOT analysis in view of the evaluation of the ministry of dialogue, an inspiring model and act to be emulated by other provinces and regions.

Kerala province highlighted the activities of Sameeksha, Sahayatri Sangamam, value education handbooks, use of other scriptures, Dharma Sameeksha (seminar) on every Saturday. They also plan for a Centre for Religion and Culture in Cochin and a Centre for Arts and Heritage in Trissur. In Kerala, zonal wise dialogue forums are planned.

Fr. Devadhas highlighted the general dialogue activities in the province and Fr. Vincent Sekhar shared on the various centres within the province such as IDCR (Aikiya Alayam - Chennai), Bodhi Zendo (Kodaikanal), Fr. Korkonius' Ashram (Dindigul), etc. and their important activities and new initiatives (IFTAR prayer & meal, Research Project on the challenges of Interreligious Marriages in India, Yoga & Natural Healing, Interfaith Christmas in parishes, Zen initiation, apart from the several activities undertaken in educational institutions. He circulated the newsletter of IDCR to all the participants.

On the second day, the participants joined the Interreligious Harmony Movement of Bengaluru to visiting the different religious sites within the city. The exposure brought about a good feel among the participants in learning and understanding the various religious communities.



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SOUTH ZONE

(Provinces of Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala, Madurai, and Sri Lanka)

(March 18, 2017 – IDCR, Loyola College, Chennai)

- Inspired by the invitation of the GC 36 *to row into the deep and to have an audacity of faith*, the South Zone Dialogue Coordinators met at IDCR, Loyola College, Chennai.
- An article by Fr. Michael Amaladoss titled “Pope Francis and Dialogue” was briefly shared. Then the Coordinators for Dialogue presented their conflict-harmony situation (challenges, opportunities, and hope) in their respective regions.
- Growing religious fundamentalism and extremism, communalizing politics and religion, polarizing the citizens, etc. were the major concerns.



Acknowledging POSA’s efforts:

- Having observed the ongoing events and incidents that disturb the secular character of our country, the Jesuit Provincial of South Asia (POSA) formed a core team of Jesuits from various disciplines on 1st of May 2017 to make proposals on *how to respond to the challenges to secularism in the country*.
- As one of the responses, Dr. Sunny Jacob SJ, Secretary for the School Education, called for the meeting (*South Zone Action Plan*) of the south-zone principals.

- *Harmony Week* and *Interreligious Prayer* were considered priorities in schools among other things, giving the young minds awareness of interfaith conflicts and training in peace-building. Hopefully, other Secretariats would follow suit.
- Now the Official JCSA Statement is out. And I have circulated this Statement to nearly 2000 persons and institutions through email.

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WEST ZONE
(Provinces of Bombay, Goa, Gujarat, and Pune)

(April 5, 2018 – Vinayalaya, Mumbai)

Vincent Sekhar SJ, Secretary of JCSA for Dialogue organized a meeting of the co-ordinators of the four Jesuit provinces of the Western region along with their lay collaborators on 5th of April, 2018 in Vinayalaya, Mumbai. The co-ordinators present in the meeting were the following: Prashant Olalekar SJ of Bombay Province, Prakash Bhalerao SJ of Pune Province, Jose Panadan SJ of Gujarat Province, and Menino Gonslaves SJ of Goa Province. Besides the four coordinators, there was one lay associate from Bombay province who is a social scientist and two lay associates from the Pune Province, who work in close touch with Sneha Sadan, Pune.



The meeting began with a prayerful reflection led by Vincent Sekhar which emphasized on the theme *Diversity and Tolerance*. This was followed by a summary presentation on the given articles

by each of the co-ordinators. After each presentation there was a moment of silence followed by a response at the feeling and discursive level.

Prashant Olalekar presented the article titled *Pope Francis and Dialogue* written by Dr. Michael Amaladoss SJ, which focused on some of the approaches and initiatives taken by Pope Francis in certain contexts with a focus on dialogue and reconciliation both in words and deeds. Menino Gonsalves gave a summary of the document *Dialogue in Truth and Charity: Pastoral Orientations for Interreligious Dialogue*, which was published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 2014. The group resonated with the basic openness towards dialogue shown by the above-mentioned document but at the same time strongly felt that South Asia must play a much more effective role by providing greater doctrinal clarity and practical implications. The third paper was presented by Prakash Bhalerao under the title *Managing Diversity: the Challenges for India*, which was a unique paper in the sense that it offered certain perspectives on managing diversity from the point view of the corporate secular world. Just as the corporate companies use diversity to gain a competitive advantage in the market, the model invited us to promote diversity and dialogue to build a better society. Jose Panadan gave a brief summary of Sunny Jacob's article *Peace Education: the Need of the Hour*, which provided concrete proposals to make peace education more effective through educational apostolate.

After the Eucharist presided over by Prakash Bhalerao, the group met again in the afternoon to listen to one another the initiatives taken by different provinces towards inter-religious dialogue. Of many positive efforts, the following are worthy to mention: the monthly magazine *Niropya* edited and published by Sneha Sadan; the *Interreligious gatherings* on Christmas and other occasions; the *Interreligious Studies* initiated in St. Xavier's College; and the several activities planned and executed in an established institute like the IDCR, Chennai. Many initiatives are taken by several individuals, but sadly discontinued after the time of their departure from their places. And some centres with political overtones are at the verge of closing!



The meeting came to an end with a short presentation by Vincent Sekhar on the statement issued by the JCSA titled *Contesting Hindu Rashtra: An Alternative Narrative and Strategies for Reconciliation in the New India*. This document imposed a great challenge on the minorities and the well-intended citizens of India in preserving the twin-pillars of democracy and secularism, guaranteed by the Constitutions of India. The present religio-political scenario in the country called for the conviction in and promotion of the Constitutional values of liberty, equality, justice, and fellowship. But the participants generally felt that the discussed JCSA Statement on Hindu Nationalism has not really picked up in the provinces for various reasons. The West Zone meeting gave a new impetus to the participants to once again assure their individual and networked collaboration with their religious neighbours and institutions towards ensuring dialogue and harmony.

(Report prepared by Jose Panadan, S.J.)

CENTRAL ZONE

(Provinces of Dumka-Raiganj, Hazaribagh, Jamshedpur, Madhya Pradesh, and Ranchi)

(November 17th 2018 - MANRESA, Purulia Road, Ranchi)

On 17th of November 2018 the Central Zone dialogue coordinators, particularly Fr. Sudhir Kumar Kujur and Fr. Victor Edwin (preferred to meet in Ranchi) met with Fr. Vincent Sekhar at Manresa, Purulia Raod, Ranchi. Fr. Sudhir had made excellent arrangements for us to meet. Fr. Victor Edwin summarized the ideas of the paper written by Fr. Michael Amaladoss on “Pope Francis and Intrerreligious Dialogue”. He highlighted the Pope’s message of the deeper awareness of the mercy

of God and not judgement in the context of other religions and their communities. Quoting Fr. Peter Fabre that dialogue with all in simplicity, the Pope stressed discovering one another anew and element of the Joy of the Gospel. Fr. Amal stressed that dialogue can happen by witnessing, by service, and by proclamation, initiating processes than occupying spaces and possessing power. There must be an effort at synthesizing beyond syncretism and relativism. Fr. Victor said that there each tradition has to be acknowledged in its uniqueness and distinction without too much generalizing, essentializing, synthesizing, including, and so on, especially with respect to Islam and Muslims. In the absence of Fr. Deepak Tirkey,

Fr. Vincent Sekhar summarized Fr. Rudi Heredia's paper on "Another India is possible" highlighting the dialectics of the freedom struggle and the Sangh Pariwar and Hindutva forces, majorities and minorities, question of substantive democracy and equitable growth. Fr. Rudi's hopeful note that another India is possible depended on what he calls "the prophetic agenda" of the three-fold dialogue with the poor, the cultures, and religions. There was a good discussion on the contemporary challenges and the way out.

Fr. Sudhir said that the Jesuit social and educational apostolate are good grounds for youth formation in secular, democratic values, and harmony of life with one and other and the environment. He stressed that introducing a self-learning course on the Constitution of India will bring desired fruits. Enumerating several recent issues related to Hindu fundamentalism in Ranchi, the Sat Bhavana Manch is consistent in responding adequately. Fr. Sudhir said that there needs to be *accountability* of this apostolate within provinces and regions and also networking with coordinators of other commissions.



Fr. Victor Edwin shared about his engagement in this regard both in Delhi province and as professor of Islam in Vidya Jyoti (VJ). Some schools have introduced the *Constitution of India* and *Sowing*

Seeds of Peace as welcome courses. Apart from the regular courses in VJ, the course on Hindutva has been initiated along with involvement in public activities like Dharna. As an effort at Contextual Theology, there is an apostolate called “Open to Public Space” initiated and several scholastics have joined organizations like *Harsh Mandar* and *Sat Bhavana Manch* and some in the Farmers’ Strike, etc. There seems to be a change in approach in teaching Islam, focusing on Muslims and less on Islam.

Fr. Victor continued to share about the *Islamic Studies Association*, aged almost 40 years (founded on 1979) of publication and Christian-Muslim dialogue. Its offshoot, *VJ Institute of Islamic Studies* has initiated Endowment Lectures in the name of Fr. Christian Troll SJ. Fr. Victor mentioned that similar efforts are being made in Bangladesh by Fr. Bob McCahill, a Maryknoll priest, engaging with the Muslim-poor. Fr. Bob has published a book titled “*Indeed I am your Brother: A Servant of Jesus among Allah’s Poor*”, (Orbis, November 2018 ASIN: B07K8W5GLL). Fr. Kalathil is trying to get an Indian Edition of this book through Henry Martin Institute of Hyderabad.

Among valuable suggestions, one was to bring together Indian Jesuit scholars on various religions and related languages under the auspices of St. Xavier University, Kolkata for initiating a confluence of religions for academic and other purposes. Names were mentioned: Victor Edwin for Islam, Lawrence Eucharist for Buddhism, Vincent Sekhar for Jainism, Victor Lobo for Sufism Henry Almeida (Pun), Sandeep Jagdeep (Pune), Anil Almeida (Kar for Sanskrit), and others –And Delhi province could take initiative in introducing Sikhism studies. Fr. Vincent Sekhar welcomed these suggestions and would try his best to initiate preliminary discussions.

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