

Report of the Meeting of the Diocesan directors of Evangelization

In view of co-ordinating and revitalizing of the missionary endeavors of the Syro-Malabar Church, the Major Archiepiscopal Commission for Evangelization and Pastoral Care of the Migrants convened a meeting of the Diocesan Directors of Evangelization at Major Archiepiscopal Curia, Mount St Thomas, Kakkanad, from 10.00 am- 04.00 pm on September 1, 2009. This was the first ever meeting of the diocesan directors of Evangelization.

1. Participation

Of the 27 dioceses of the Syro Malabar Church, 24 priests participated in the conference, including the representative from the diocese of Chicago. Due to some reasons, there were no representatives from the dioceses of Chanda, Gorakhpur and Belthangady. The Commission Chairman, Bishop Sebastian Vadakel and the Episcopal members Bishops Mar Simon Stock Palathara and Mar Antony Chirayath were present for the conference and spoke to the participants.

2. Resource Persons

Rev. Dr Paulachan Kochappilly from Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore was the main speaker who gave the orientation talk on the topic: The Syro Malabar mission *ad gentes* Initiatives, the Present Day Concerns and Challenges. Rev. Dr Xavier Kochuparampil from the diocese of Kanjirappally initiated the sharing session and moderated over the same.

3. Inaugural Session

The conference started with a short prayer session led by Rev. Dr Kurian Mattam (from Pala) and Rev. Fr Biiu Kallingal (from Palghat). Fr Justin Vettukallel, the secretary of the commission, welcomed the dignitaries, the resource persons and the participants and presented the dynamics of the conference. His Beatitude Mar Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil, the Major Archbishop delivered the inaugural address and inaugurated the conference. He emphasized evangelization as the fundamental duty of the Church of Christ and praised the contribution of the Syro Malabar Church in the evangelization of India and of the world even working in the Latin territories. He instilled the spirit of courage and enthusiasm by challenging to take daring steps in preaching the good news. He emphasized the need for doing mission in the spirit and tradition of the Syro Malabar Church and called on better collaboration of the Mother dioceses and the mission territories in making the process easy and more efficient. His Excellency Mar Antony Chirayath, the Episcopal member of the Commission clarified the misunderstandings about the life of the missionaries as easy going and drew the attention of the participants regarding the challenging and hard conditions of the missionaries and reminded the task of the diocesan directors of evangelization and invited the support of the Mother dioceses in Kerala by way of vocation, financial contribution etc.

In his presidential address, Mar Sebastian Vadakel, the chairman of the commission set in motion the theme, "Co-ordination and revitalization of the missionary endeavors of the Syro-Malabar Church". The dynamism of the church is directly related to the dynamism

in missionary activities. He called it as an occasion to think and plan together for the growth and mission of the Syro Malabar Church

4. Session I: Orientation Talk:

In order to achieve the scope of the conference, base was laid by the orientation talk on the theme: Syro Malabar mission *ad gentes* Initiatives, the Present Day Concerns and Challenges by Rev. Dr Paulachan Kochappilly CMI from Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. He highlighted the contributions of the missionaries from our Church and the religious congregations who pioneered in starting the Syro Malabar mission from 1962 in Chanda. The presentation was based on the Mission Policy of the Church inviting the participants start executing the Mission Policy where by proper mission awareness in the Mother Dioceses and missionary dynamism in the mission territories can be achieved by proper collaboration and support. The session was moderated by His Excellency Mar Simon Stock Palathara CMI.

5. Session II Sharing

The afternoon session that started at 1.30 was solely dedicated for sharing by the diocesan directors. To give an orientation to the sharing, the moderator, Rev. Dr Xavier Kochuparampil, spoke on the necessity of collaboration and mutual support since mission work is an ecclesial act. Three minutes were given to each diocese. The content of the sharing included the gist of missionary activities undertaken in each eparchy and an appraisal of the existing co-ordination and collaboration among the mission dioceses/regions and the mother dioceses in Kerala.

5.1. Sharing by the diocesan directors in the proper territory

There were 15 directors from the proper territory except from the diocese of Belthangady. The diocesan directors from the proper territory in Kerala spoke about the evangelization activities they are undertaking in their won dioceses and the kind of collaboration with the dioceses being sponsored by them. Some of the directors were able to explain the kind of joint activities they have with the dioceses they are sponsoring. The Cherupushpa Mission League (CML) is an important organ in creating mission awareness among the children and the youth. Some of the diocese had close collaboration with the dioceses they sponsor. One or two parishes or the Cherupushpa Mission League units have adopted particular mission stations in the mission dioceses. They do specially pray for their adopted mission centre and sent contributions. The missionaries in return share their experiences by letter or by visiting the particular centers in Kerala during their vacation. The bishops of these dioceses are invited to share their experiences to large parishes of the sponsoring diocese. Some of the CML units make visits to the mission territories as part of mission exposure program.

Among the dioceses in Kerala, Palakkad, according to the Mission director from the diocese, has to be considered a mission diocese thanks to the vast area extended till Salem,, minimal number of Catholics population in the region etc. The diocese of Idukki

is in its infancy and hence is not in a position to support the mission dioceses immediately, as they are in shortage of priests, infrastructure and finance. Both these dioceses sought the possible support of the Commission especially for the support of the formation of priests, arranging mission animation programs etc.

The Diocesan directors from outside Kerala (from Thuckalay and Bhadravati) but within the proper territory had their concerns too. The diocese of Thuckalay as a mission diocese has many mass centers with very few number of Catholic population. Some of their centers are purely missions. Bhadravati as a new diocese also has many mission centers with nominal number of Catholics. Both these dioceses seek support from the dioceses in Kerala for vocation, finance etc. Currently they have the support of some religious congregations and Missionary Societies by providing priests. They have CML in all the established parishes.

5.1. Sharing by the diocesan directors outside the proper territory

There were representatives from nine dioceses outside the proper territory (except from the diocese of Gorakhpur and Chanda). Among them, the diocese of Chicago had a unique face as the only diocese outside India. There are CML units in many of the erected parishes/mass centers and they do pray for the missions and make financial contributions to different mission centers in India. The CML director of the diocese is trying to set units in every centre and is planning methods to foster vocation among the children. The diocese of Kalyan had few other different stories to tell, as a diocese with many parishes and mission regions. The evangelization activities in the mission territories of the dioceses are done both directly and indirectly. There are cases of new entrants to the church in certain places, even some one joining the seminary recently from a newly baptized community. The CML units in the diocese are very active. There are now many vocations from the parishes of Kalyan. The missions of the diocese are in need of financial and personnel support.

The other seven mission diocese had similar stories to tell. The evangelization activities are carried out both directly and indirectly. They explained their struggles amidst the adverse political, communal and climatic situations of the mission and the changes they made thanks to their evangelizing efforts.

Some of them were very happy with the sponsoring dioceses those help them with vocations, priest-personnel and financial support. Whereas some others complained that they were being totally ignored by the sponsoring diocese, some even for many years. All of them invited visitors from the parishes in Kerala to the mission for mission experience and promised to arrange such programs with the help of the concerned in charges in Kerala. They also asked the directors in Kerala to provide more opportunities to the missionaries to speak about mission and asked for greater support with vocations and finance.

6. Concluding Words

His Excellency Mar Sebastian Vadakel, the chairman of the commission spoke at the conclusion of the conference, bringing forth the main thrust of the discussions. He thanked every one for the systematic and creative sharing and appreciated the existing collaboration among the dioceses in Kerala and in the mission and asked for improving the same by fostering mission animation programs in the dioceses in Kerala. He also asked the participants to bring out lay missionaries like Kunjettan who would inspire the young people to go to the missions. In the light of the discussions, he suggested the following to encourage mutual collaboration among the dioceses and to make the mission work more participatory:

- Have more communication among the directors of the sponsored and sponsoring dioceses.
- Assign each mission centre to particular parishes in the sponsoring diocese and have periodical correspondence among them.
- Encourage visiting the mission territories, so that the people will have first hand experience of the missions.
- Arrange exposure program for the seminarians in Kerala to experience mission.
- Organize mission animation/awareness program in the dioceses in Kerala to promote vocations.
- The sponsoring diocese may help the vocation promoters of their respective mission dioceses to recruit seminarians.
- There should also be concerted efforts to help the mission dioceses financially, especially to support the formation of the minor seminarians.
- The Commission for Evangelization shall try to facilitate the above task by helping the diocesan directors.

Father Justin Vettukallel proposed vote of thanks and the meeting came to the close at 4.00 pm with a thanks giving hymn.