

Women's Desk Needs More Attention from Asian Bishops: Secretary

Negombo: Asian bishops have given their women's desk greater importance in the past three years, but not at par with their other ministries, says a report.

Combining laity, family and women under one commission has hindered bishops from taking up issues related to women in a systematic and consistent way, laments a report presented to the top body of the prelates in the region.

However, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) tried to strengthen its women desk with full membership of five bishops and three secretaries, says the report presented by Wendy M Louis, executive secretary of the women desk.

However, the Women's desk continues as a part of the FABC Office on Laity and Family.

Wendy's report presented to FABC's eleventh plenary assembly on December 1 observed that women's issues continue to be the most neglected. "The least attended conferences are those with topics related to women," Wendy alleged.

The Asian bishops are meeting for the first time in Sri Lanka with a theme, "The Asian Catholic Family: Domestic Church of the poor on a Mission of Mercy,"

More than 140 bishops along with FABC officials and observers are attending the November 28-December program.

The executive secretary said funds for women's projects have always been a cause of stress. "Too much time is spent on sourcing for funding," Wendy said.

However, lack of funds from traditional sources has forced the desk to find more local donors and share the costs with the participants, she noted.

The women's commission has organized two conferences since the last FABC plenary four years ago.

The Bishops' Institute for Lay Apostolate (BILA) organized BILA V on women with a theme: "Making a Difference to the Reality of Women" in Thailand in 2012. Around 35 people and two bishops attended it.

The second one was the South East Asian Meeting on Women with the theme on "women and the impact of climate change" at Cambodia in March this year where 33 people and two bishops attended.

Wendy also noted that women's desk could collaborate effectively with the other FABC offices, national and local commissions and personnel. "Although the number of conferences and expenditures were less, there were better outcomes," she said.

The Asian bishops who are deliberating on family as a domestic church are expected to draw a clear action plan on its family apostolate during the current assembly in Negombo, near the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo.

Later talking to the FABC-OSC media team, Wendy said she does not insist on separating women's desk from related desks such as laity and family. Women are part of the family and laity, and can continue to function under one umbrella, she added.

To circumvent current problems, she wants stress localizing women's issues with the regional bishops' conferences instead of centralizing them under one Asian desk. More works could be done by national conferences, she insisted.

She also wants the women's desk to integrate issues such as single women who could be invited to join Small Christian Communities.

She also acknowledged that issues related to women differed from country to country and the local Church must attend to them.

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[T S Thomas of Matters India (www.mattersindia.com) prepared this report for FABC Office of Social Communication.]