

***FABC Papers***

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***COUNTRY REPORTS***

***FABC 50 GENERAL CONFERENCE***

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# I. VICARIATE APOSTOLIC OF NEPAL

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF NEPAL

The history of the service of the Catholic Church to the people of Nepal is short in the context of the 2000-year long history of the Church. As far as it is known that the Portuguese Jesuit Fr. Juan Cabral enter into this country for the first time in 1628. He was graciously received by the King of that time, probably King Lakshminarasimha Malla of Kathmandu.

The first attempt to a more permanent presence in Nepal dates from a special session of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1703 when it was decided to open a mission in Tibet which would include a section of the North India and the whole of what now is Nepal. This new enterprise was assigned to the Italian Capuchin Fathers. The first Capuchins set out from Europe in May of 1704. Of the six who set out for Tibet two died on board ship, one was put ashore at Cyprus, too ill to carry on; one remained at Chandanagore in West Bengal, India. Only two were able to set out from India for Tibet. They arrived in Kathmandu on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1707 but stayed only long enough to arrange their journey to Tibet, departing on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1707. The first part of their work was beset with many difficulties; illness, lack of manpower, and lack of resources.

It was only after a reorganization in 1714 that the Capuchins were able to send three men to open a more permanent station in Nepal. They arrived in Kathmandu in the middle of January 1715, settling first in the kingdom of Kathmandu where they were favorably received by the King.

Over the next fifty-four years, despite many difficulties arising from suspicions, misunderstandings, lack of manpower and lack of material resources their work grew and the Capuchins extended their service to the kingdoms of Bhaktapur and Patan. In addition to this, they were in contact with the Kings of both Gorkha and Tanahun. On 18<sup>th</sup> November 1737 King Ranajita Malla of Bhaktapur issued a Decree of Liberty of Conscience in favour of the Fathers. King Jayaprakash Malla of Kathmandu had issued a similar decree in the previous month. On 24<sup>th</sup> March 1760 Fr. Tranquillus blessed a small Church, situated in *Wotu Tole* in Kathmandu under

the title of the Assumption of Our Lady. There was also a small chapel in Bhaktapur dedicated to Our Lady under the title Annunciation and another one in Patan.

In 1744 King Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha had begun his military campaign that ultimately ended in the conquest of the three kingdoms of the valley in 1768 and 1769. The Capuchin Fathers had known Prithvi Narayan Shah earlier and were on friendly terms with him providing medical aid to his brother who was wounded in an attack on Kirtipur. Towards the end of this period, however, when King Jayaprakash Malla of Kathmandu sought the help of the East India Company in his fight against Gorkha, suspicion fell on the Capuchins as having been involved in this scheme. After the Gorkhali conquest of the valley this suspicion hardened. This suspicion, plus the lack of manpower and resources, made the position of the Capuchins, who numbered only three at the time, untenable. They asked the new King for permission to leave Nepal. Permission was given for one of them to leave and Father Joseph of Rovato left the valley on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1769 with some fifty-seven Christians who settled at Chuhari, India where their descendants still live. Within a few weeks the remaining two Capuchins, who had been retained as a sort of hostages against any further interference from the plains, were given permission to leave.

The Capuchins left Nepal with a promise to return, but it was 1786 before they were in a position to fulfill their promise. In that year Father Joseph of St. Marcello came to Nepal where he stayed for three years, being joined for one year by Fr. Charles Mary. Lack of manpower in India forced the superiors in the plains to recall Fr. Joseph in 1789. In 1794 Fr. Joseph along with Fr. Romuald of Senigallia returned to Nepal. Fr. Romuald left because of ill health after a few months, but Fr. Joseph stayed on until his death in Kathmandu on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1810.

The year 1814 saw the outbreak of war between Nepal and the East India Company. The treaty of Sugauli of 1816 brought an end to the war, but one stipulation of that treaty stated that the King of Nepal must not "Take or retain in his service any British subject, nor the subject of any European and American State, without the consent of the British Government." This stipulation effectively closed the

borders of Nepal to all foreigners, and both sides observed the stipulation until Indian Independence in 1947.

Tribal people from Bihar particularly present day Jharkhand State, started coming to East Nepal in search of employment in the tea gardens from the early decades of the last century. A number of these people were Catholics. Priests from the North Bihar region bordering Eastern Nepal kept visiting *incognito*, these Catholics who had migrated to Nepal, at least from the early 1940's. However, no systematic ministry was possible due to the prevailing condition in the country at that time.

In the fall of 1949 Fr. Marshall Moran, SJ then Principal of St. Xavier's school in Patna and a member of the Senate of Patna University, was asked by the University to go to Nepal to supervise the annual examinations at Trichandra College, then affiliated to Patna University. On 1<sup>st</sup> October 1949 he crossed the border into Nepal from Raxaul. While in Nepal he was taken to meet the Prime Minister, Mohan Shamsheer Janga Bahadur Rana, who raised the question of the possibility of the opening of a school in Nepal similar to St. Xavier's in Patna. Negotiations were begun and a year later on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1950, General Mrigendra S.S Rana, the Director of public education, arrived in Patna to inform Fr. Moran that the Government of Nepal was inviting him to open a school at Godavari. Within a few days, however, the Rana Government was overthrown through the initiative of King Tribhuvan; further planning had to await confirmation by the New Government. In March of 1951 formal approval came from the Government through the Minister of Education, Mr. Nrip Jung Rana.

Fr. Moran returned to Kathmandu in May 1951 to prepare for the opening of Godavari school, which opened on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1951 with three Jesuits, Fathers Moran, Francis Murphy and Edwin Saxton, two Nepali teachers and sixty-five students, classes one through six. Facilities at Godavari soon proved inadequate for the growing number of students and in September of 1954 Father Moran acquired a piece of property in Jawalakhel for the primary section of the school. St. Xavier's Jawalakhel opened officially on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1954.

Work in Nepal began with the Jesuits from the Patna diocese and their work was thus a part of the diocese of Patna. On his first pastoral visit to Nepal in November of 1954 Bishop Wildermuth of

Patna brought with him two IBMV Sisters from Patna (Srs. Benigna and Rita) to explore the possibility of the Sisters offering education to the girls of Nepal. The proposal met with approval and three Sisters arrived on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1955 to open St. Mary's school.

From these humble beginnings the work of the Church in Nepal has spread to other areas and includes social service, research, education for the poor and disadvantaged, pastoral and retreat work. In 1983, after the Government of Nepal requested diplomatic relations between Nepal and Holy See, the Vatican separated Nepal from the Patna diocese and erected a '*Missio Sui Iuris*'. On October 7, 1983, Pope John Paul II separated the territory of Nepal from Patna Diocese and created the "*Missio Sui Iuris*" (Self-governing Catholic Mission) and after six months, he appointed Msgr. Anthony Sharma, the first native Catholic priest of the Jesuit order as its first ecclesiastical superior of Nepal on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1984 and Archbishop Agostino Cacchiavillian presented his credentials to the King as the first Pro-Nuncio in 1985. Archbishop George Zur was the next Nuncio and Archbishop Lorenzo Baldisseri followed him in 1999. In July 2003, Archbishop Pedro Lopez Quintana presented his credentials and became the fourth Nuncio to Nepal. With these events the Church in Nepal entered a new era, no longer an appendage to an Indian diocese but a Church in its own right. The Holy See has appointed His Excellency Archbishop Salvatore Pennacchio as the new Apostolic Nuncio to Nepal in 2010.

After Msgr. Anthony Sharma took the responsibility to lead the Catholic Church of Nepal, she began expanding her presence outside Kathmandu valley both to the East and to the West. Several missions were opened outside Kathmandu Valley and many Congregations of men and women were invited to work in Nepal. It was a period of great political changes too, in Nepal, absolute monarchy along with its "*Panchayathi*" system of governance was abolished and parliamentary democracy was introduced in the country. The new Constitution promulgated by the late King *Birendra Bir Bikram Shah* in 1991 gave freedom to practice one's religion provided that there was no attempt on conversion. Part III article 19 of the Constitution states, "*Every person shall have the freedom to profess and practice his/her own religion as coming down to hereditarily having due regard to traditional practices – provided that no person shall be entitled to convert the religion of any person*". Msgr. Anthony Sharma tirelessly led

the Catholic Church of Nepal as its Vicar and from the year 1984 to 1996 as its Ecclesiastical Superior and from 1997 on as Apostolic Prefect and then from February 10, 2007 on as the country's first Nepali Bishop until he retired in 2014. Bishop Anthony Sharma passed away on December 8, 2015.

Bishop Paul Simick succeeded Bishop Anthony Sharma in June 2014. Bishop Paul Simick was born on August 7, 1963 at Gitdubling in Kalimpong in the Diocese of Darjeeling, India. He was ordained Priest on April 9, 1992. He was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Nepal on May 25, 2014 and was ordained Bishop on June 29, 2014 by the then Pro Nuncio to India and Nepal, His Excellency Archbishop Salvatore Pennacchio.

## **PRESENT SITUATION OF NEPAL**

### *GENERAL OVERVIEW*

#### **A. TERRITORY:**

Himalayan Country of Nepal. It has an area of 147, 516 Kilometers (56, 956 Sq. miles) The Apostolic Vicariate of Nepal covers the whole of Nepal.

##### ***1. Nation:***

All the Nepalese people, with multi-ethnic, multilingual, multi-religious, multicultural characteristics and in geographical diversities, and having common aspirations and being united by a bond of allegiance to national independence, territorial integrity, national interest and prosperity of Nepal, collectively constitute the nation.

##### ***2. State of Nepal:***

Nepal is an independent, indivisible, sovereign, secular, inclusive, democratic, socialism-oriented, federal democratic republican state.

With the promulgation of its constitution in 2015, Nepal replaced a unitary government with a federal system of government. This process has made Nepal a federal democratic republic governed with three levels of government: a federal level, seven provinces and 753 local governments.

### **3. *Civil Division:***

Nepal shall be exercised by courts and other judicial bodies in accordance with this Constitution, other laws and the recognized principles of justice. All shall abide by the orders or decisions made in the course of trial of lawsuits by the court.

*Nepal has the following courts:*

- (a) Supreme Court,*
- (b) High Court, and*
- (c) District Court.*

*Apart from the above courts, there are judicial bodies at the Local level.*

### **4. *Borders with neighboring Dioceses:***

Nepal is a landlocked country located in South Asia with China in the north and India in the south, east and west. The Apostolic Vicariate has Bagdogra, Darjeeling Raiganj and Purnia dioceses in the east, Gorakhpur, Allelahabad and Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh in the west and Bathai Diocese in the South.

### **5. *Climate of Nepal***

In northern Nepal summers are cool and winters are severe, while in the south, summers are very hot while winters are mild to cold. Nepal has five seasons: spring, summer, monsoon, autumn and winter.

In the Tarai, (plains) in southern Nepal, summer temperatures exceed 40° C and above 45 in some areas, while winter temperatures range from 7°C to 23°C. In mountainous regions, hills and valleys, summers are temperate while winter temperatures can fall to subzero. The Kathmandu Valley has a pleasant climate with average summer temperatures of 20°C - 35°C and 2°C - 12°C in winter. Average temperatures in Nepal drop 6°C for every 1,000 m you gain in altitude.

### **6. *Means of Communication:***

Nepal has integrated itself fully with the changing world. It has enough flexibility in itself to come in terms with modern technology and changes. The same stands true for communication mediums as well. Nepal has a good network of Telephones and

Internet. Apart from that, State-run as well as Private-operated T.V. channels and radio stations are in ample numbers in Nepal. Nepal has many dailies and weeklies. Most of these newspapers are in Nepalese. Very few newspapers are published in English. The contents and editorials of these newspapers are not very convincing and that too come through heavy state censorship.

### ***7. Brief sketch of the local civil history:***

The history of Nepal is intertwined with the history of the broader Indian subcontinent and the surrounding regions, comprising the areas of South Asia and East Asia.

Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multiracial, multicultural, multi-religious, and multilingual country. The most spoken language is Nepali followed by several other ethnic languages.

The Kingdom of Nepal was established in 1768 and started a campaign of unifying all of Nepal that would form modern territories of Nepal. Some former territories had been lost due to the kingdom having participated in the Sino-Nepalese War which ended in both victory and losses, ultimately accepted as a tribute state of Qing dynasty of China from 1792 to 1865. The Anglo-Nepalese War ended in British victory and ceded some Nepalese territory. In a historical vote for the election of the constituent assembly, the Nepalese parliament voted to abolish the monarchy in June 2006. Nepal became a federal republic on 28 May 2008 and was formally renamed the 'Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal' ending the 200-year-old reign of the Shah monarchs.

### **B. POPULATION OF NEPAL**

*The current population of Nepal is 29,807,273.*

Ethnic groups in Nepal are a product of both the colonial and state-building eras of Nepal. The groups are delineated using language, ethnic identity or the caste system in Nepal. They are categorized by common culture and endogamy.

Nepal's diverse linguistic heritage evolved from three major language groups: Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman languages, and various indigenous language isolates



92 different living languages are spoken in Nepal Based upon the 2011 census, the three major languages spoken in Nepal are Nepali, Maithili and Bhojpuri.

There are more 125 caste and tribe group in Nepal belonging to five broad ethnic categories, namely: Khas-Aryan (Hill Caste Group), Hill Adibasi & Janajati, Newars (Caste Group), Medhesi (Tarai Caste Group), Others (Marwadi, Bangali, Punjabi [Business Group]) and Migrants (Indians, migrants from Myanmar, Pakistani etc.)

### C. LITERACY RATE IN NEPAL

In 2018, the adult literacy rate for Nepal was 67.9 %. Adult literacy rate of Nepal increased from 20.6 % in 1981 to 67.9 % in 2018 growing at an average annual rate of 36.06%.

## CONTEXT OF NEPAL

### 1. Reading the Signs of the Times: A Challenges

We experience in our pilgrim journey of life, as in the journey of the disciples on their way to Emmaus, apprehension for ourselves, for our families and for society at large. These fears, anxieties and confusion are deep, real and disturbing. As responsible pilgrim partners, catechists need to analyse constantly the local and national situations of our society and our Church in order to be active and prophetic participants in the Catechesis of our people. As Jesus on the road to Emmaus, we must be signs of hope in India today.

Pope John XXIII underlined the need to *read the Signs of the Times* in his apostolic Constitution of December 25, 1961, convoking the Second Vatican Council, interpreting them as *challenges* and *opportunities*: “We seem to see now, in the midst of so much darkness, a few indications which augur well for the future of the Church and of humanity. The *Pope of the Council* reminded the bishops that the responsibility of the Church’s teaching authority - *Magisterium* - is not only to guard the faith but also to present it meaningfully and form sensitive consciences in the faithful, all the while being faithful to the substance of ancient doctrine. It became a constantly recurring theme in Vatican II’s *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*:

*At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task. In language intelligible to every generation, she should be able to answer the ever-recurring questions which people ask about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other. We must be aware of and understand the aspirations, the yearnings, and then often dramatic features of the world in which we live.<sup>[1]</sup>*

Thus the Church in Nepal, in its prophetic duty of building up the Kingdom of God, has a triple obligation: a) to *identify* the bright spots and strengths of the Nepal Church; b) to *highlight* the challenges to Catechesis, that arise from the social-political, economic, cultural and religious scenario and c) to *discern* a positive approach to build positive elements and to devise ways and means of responding to the challenges, for the effectiveness of Catechesis. We must inspire the Disciples of Christ to become agents of change and hope, in collaboration with our brothers and sisters of other religions and all people of goodwill.

We, however, do not examine the situation of our pilgrim people as neutral observers, nor as social scientists, economists or political analysts, but as catechists, from the vantage point of catechetical renewal. We are fully aware of how difficult it is to generalize such a vast Vicariate and our perceptions are limited or even unconsciously partial. However, by an objective overview, we can discern certain directions and major trends. We believe that they are important for a comprehensive action plan for an effective Catechesis.

## **2. Nepal's struggles and Challenges:**

Identifying the challenges that arise from our Nepal situation for Catechesis is a part of announcing the Good News of Jesus Christ. While it is important to be very clear about our aim, i.e. to build up and contribute to the faith-development of our Catholic people in Nepal, it is equally important to understand the main weaknesses and wounds in both our civic and Christian communities. We want to identify them and courageously assess their root causes so that we can find healing by collaborating with God's all-powerful grace through purposeful remedial action.

### **3. Poverty, Inequalities and Injustices:**

The Nepali situation is characterized by 'poverty, inequality, injustice and oppression.' Most of our people lack the 'necessities of life: food, clothing, shelter, hygienic conditions and even the minimum education.' They don't have productive assets like fertile land, irrigation and credit facilities. They also suffer from unemployment, low wages, debts and exorbitant interests for loans.

The majority of Catholics are poor, belonging to the categories of landless laborers, marginal farmers, daily wage laborers, Scheduled Castes (hereafter SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (hereafter STs). They have no assets or have assets with low productivity

Poverty does not consist only in a low economic status. It means hunger, disease, illiteracy, lack of shelter and privacy. It implies exclusion, discrimination, powerlessness, a feeling of inferiority and a sense of helplessness. It is a struggle for survival, being enslaved to seeking a crumb. It is criminal because it does not allow a people to be people.

### **4. Current Ideologies:**

We need to become aware of powerful ideologies existing in our society, which challenge and direct our catechetical initiatives. These contemporary ideologies forcefully influence the minds and hearts of our Catholics. They fire up public behaviour and supply target-values for long-range socio-economic and political goals. Ideologies are also, without any doubt, currents of continual tensions and deadly conflicts among our castes, classes and communities

### **5. Religious Fundamentalism:**

Fundamentalism, though akin to revivalism, goes much beyond it. For, religious fundamentalists, once formed into a community, impose their narrow understanding of religion on others and on all areas of human activity. They insist that their dogmas have a privileged omni-competence. Their religious leaders claim dictatorial powers for major decisions, no matter the topic, sacred or secular. Understood in this way, fundamentalism is a religio-psychological mechanism. It is a regression that can afflict individuals, small groups, large communities and whole nation. No religious group can claim to be impregnable or invulnerable to it;

because the malady of fundamentalism comes not only from disposition within but from circumstances from outside. Today in Nepal, significant numbers of every major religion show unmistakable signs of suffering from this dangerous distortion of religiosity. In the context of religious freedom envisaged by the Constitution of Nepal (2015, Article 26, #3), fundamentalism is a serious aberration of authentic religion.

## **6. Communalism:**

Communalism tends to separate people on the basis of religions, language, territory and ethnic origin. This creates a group mentality, generates selfishness and is one of the main obstacles to unity.

Other Destructive Trends: Corruption, Consumerism, Criminalization of Politics.

Nepal has once again plunged into a new political crisis when on July 12, the Supreme Court of Nepal overturned Prime Minister K.P Sharma Oli and dissolved the House of Representatives, and issued a judicial writ to appoint Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba as the country's new Prime Minister. Political situation is not stable.

With this change in the Government, Secularism in Nepal is under threat. Growing calls for a Hindu State underline popular dissatisfaction with Nepal's long stretch of political instability.

## **7. Economic and Social Situation:**

The **Economy of Nepal** is largely dependent on agriculture and remittances. The COVID 19 pandemic is having a significant economic as well as health impact in Nepal. The economy of Nepal is also grappling with the severe public health crisis of the Covid19. As the public health emergency is heavily interconnected with economic affairs, it has impacted each of the pillars of the economy. This COVID19 pandemic has a great impact on economic growth in Nepal.

Nepal is also face an economic slowdown and fall in a great difficulty because this country largely depends on foreign remittance and exports of cardamom, jute goods, polyester yarn and threads, noodles, pashmina, palm oil, pulses, zinc sheet, handicrafts, and skin. Due to COVID-19 crisis migrant workers returning to Nepal from

foreign countries. The exportation declined. A huge number of the population is unemployed and increasing depression among the unemployed. The flow of foreign remittance significantly decreased because a large number of people were unemployed abroad, and most of them were back home due to worldwide lockdown. The result shows the Nepalese economy was fully affected by COVID-19. The flow of the situation is slightly improving which shows a positive sign because, worldwide lock down opened.

Although the level of poverty in Nepal dropped significantly in recent years, a quarter of the population are still below the poverty line. The international community has been heavily involved in supporting Nepal's economic progress.

### **8. Social Situation of Nepal:**

Nepal is one of the underdeveloped countries of the world. There are different social problems and evils in society. Social problems and evils are issues which affect the members of a society. A social problem is normally a term used to describe problems with a particular area or group of people in the world. Some of the common social evils would be alcoholism, racism, child abuse, human trafficking, etc. It also affects how people react to certain situations. Nepal is facing a large number of social problems such as caste system, child labor, illiteracy, gender inequality, superstitions, religious conflicts and much more. Social problems and evils are the barriers to development and progress.

Nepal is facing a large number of social problems such as caste system, child labor, illiteracy, gender inequality, superstitions, religious conflicts and much more. A single person is not responsible for these social problems. It is high time to get relief from these undesirable social evils.

## **PRESENT SITUATION OF THE APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF NEPAL**

### *GENERAL OVERVIEW*

### **Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles**

#### **Vision**

We envision a collaborative, participatory and Self-reliant Parishes oriented towards Integral development, vibrant in faith, growing towards the fullness of life in Christ.

### **Mission**

To proclaim the good news through creative ministries and collaborative efforts, engaged in dialogue with cultures and religions for a holistic development of the faithful.

### **Guiding Principles**

- Life rooted in prayer and Gospel Values
- Collective decision
- Team spirit
- Enculturation
- Transparency and proper communication
- Encouraging lay leadership
- Promoting Network and collaboration
- Nurturing local vocation.
- Animation and innovation
- Creativity and generosity
- Love for the people of God especially the poor

### **PRESENT STATE OF THE APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF NEPAL**

Catholic Population:	7,979 (2020)
Christian Population:	2.5 million+
Non-Christian population:	24.1 million+

### **The Official of the Vicariate are the Following:**

Vicar Apostolic:	Bishop Paul Simick
Pro Vicar:	Fr. Silas Bogati
Consultors:	Fr. Silas Bogati (Secretary), Fr. Pius Perumana (Chancellor), Fr. Boniface Tigga, SJ (Dean of East Nepal), Fr. Michael Chirayath CST, (Dean of West Nepal), Fr.

Richard Rai (Dean of Central Nepal), Fr.  
Amrit Rai (Regional Superior, Nepal Jesuits),  
Fr. Florence Damta, SDB, Fr. Sunil Ekka.

Procurator: Fr. George Kalapurackal

Chancellor: Fr. Pius Perumana

Defender of Bond: Fr. Robin Rai

Reviser: Fr. Pius Perumana

Finance Committee: Bishop Paul Simick, Fr. George  
Kalapurackal, Fr. Richard Rai, Fr. Lalit Tudu,  
Fr. Robin Rai, Fr. Pius Perumana

Catechistic and Liturgy: Fr. Jacob Punnliparambil, SDB

Dialogue and Inter-religious affairs: Fr. Silas Bogati and Mr.  
Chirendra Satyal

Seminary Formation: Fr. Silas Bogati & Fr. George Kalapurackal

Vocation and Youth Apostolate: Fr. Robin Rai

Laity & Family: Fr. George Kalapurackal & Sr. Monique  
Niraula, SJC

Education: Fr. Amritharaj Arociksamy

Media: Fr. Stephen Bishwakarma, SDB & Mr.  
Chirendra Satyal Conference of Religious of  
Nepal: Sr. Jessy, CJ

Social Work: Fr. Lalit Tudu (Caritas Nepal)

Couples for Christ: Fr. Robin Rai, Mr. Gyan Prakash Rai & Mrs.  
Sujata Rai

Women's Association: Mrs. Sanu Amathia & Soma Rai Sitling

Legionaries of Mary: Fr. Pius Perumana & Mrs. Anupa Fitzpatrick

Vincent de Paul Society: Fr. Robin Rai & Fr. Augustine Lepcha

Holy Childhood: Br. Hermon SJ

**Particular achievements:**

Establishment of Catholic Identity in the Country,





## **RELIGIOUS:**

Number of religious priests: 102

Number of Men Congregations: 07

### **Relation between Vicariate and Religious priests:**

There exists a friendly and cordial relationship between vicariate and religious priests. We have some common pastoral programs and the priests both vicariate and religious take active parts. They share their pastoral ministries in the parishes and in the institution.

### **Activities of Religious Priests in the Vicariate:**

Religious priests engage in pastoral (parish), educational, catechetical, social and health ministries.

**Number of Nuns: 211**

**Number of Women Congregations: 22**

### **Activities of Women Religious in the Vicariate:**

Religious Sisters engage in pastoral (parish), educational, catechetical, social and health ministries.

## **CHURCH RESPONSE**

### ***PASTORAL MINISTRIES***

All priests in the Vicariate (Vicariate & Religious) are directly or indirectly engaged in pastoral ministry. Even those who have no parochial responsibilities are available for and help out in parish ministry by taking up Mass assignments. Our 13 parishes and 8 quasi parishes and 24 Mass stations need the service of these priests.

### ***FOSTERING THE FAITH:***

The mission of the Church is expressed in terms of sowing the seed of the Word initiated by Jesus Christ. Catechesis is *fostering*. Fostering indicates nurturing, nourishing and caring. Through Catechesis, one fosters the roots of faith-life and enables the faithful to receive more substantial nourishment in the ordinary life of the Christian community. Nurturing and maturing of faith had been considered always the catechetical activity in the Church. But we believe that the effectiveness of Catechesis is and always will be a gift of God, through the operation of the Spirit of the Father and the

Son. St Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, confirms this total dependence on the intervention of God when he writes: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:6-7). The ministry of first proclamation of the Word to those who do not know Christ explicitly is likened to the sowing itself. The catechetical ministry is that service rendered under the Holy Spirit's guidance to help the faith-seed grow. It is a holistic fostering of this precious and living seed by which the new relationships with God, with his body the Church and through it with all people may become mature and strong.

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council calls the Church the *People of God*. We are all members of that pilgrim people. Every Christian is a pilgrim in this world. We consider this sacred journey a powerful means to deepen our faith. Catechesis is a journey of faith. Pilgrims, unwrapped in the great mystery that surrounds them, seek the face of God by seeking the meaning of life. "Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths" (Ps. 25:4).

The Vicariate is blessed with the presence and services of 8 men congregations (Including that of Vicariate priests) and 22 women congregations. The total number of priests living and working in the vicariate is 102 (22 being Vicariate priests), that of religious brothers is 7 and religious sisters are

#### ***CATECHETICAL SITUATION TODAY: DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES:***

The Vicariate of Nepal has approximately 8500 Catholics in the whole country. Though there were restrictions in evangelization in the country till the beginning of this Century, Things are different now being a secular country. Of course, each one is free to practice his/her religion and no one can force or impose his views on others. This is the present Law of Nepal.

The various Protestants have made great inroads due to their strenuous efforts and local leader or catechists' involvements. It is a great achievement they have made. The idea of local involvement germinated less than a decade ago and the idea is picking up and more and more local involvement is being generated. By local involvement we mean local catechists. In 2015/16 onwards an initial initiative was taken up especially in the Eastern part of Nepal

and later on to the whole vicariate of Nepal to find proper people for this. Nearly 40 youth and elders came forward and they were given 15 days training on this and sent out. Due to the Covid-19 in the later years it was temporarily halted and now we have started back.

#### *IMPORTANCE OF CATECHISTS IN NEPAL:*

The importance of Catechists in Nepal for proclaiming the word of God is so urgent and important that we cannot think of a growth in the Church without them. Some parishes and Mission centers are in remote areas. Besides the Catholics are in the village set up which some of them are as far as 25 to 30 kilometers from the center, which make the priest almost impossible to reach on all Sundays. Some of the parishes have nearly 20 to 25 such villages which are further clubbed into 4 or 5 villages under a catechist, who conduct prayers, Rosary, visiting the sick and other duties assigned to him. They also conduct village church prayers on Sundays when the priests are not available.

During the last 2 months the catechetical commission head had been travelling to all the parishes and Mission stations trying to establish and strengthen catechists. For the better administration of vicariate it is divided into 4 deaneries.

East Deanery: There are 25 catechists actively involved in catechetical works mentioned above. Of this Damak parish has 11, Sadakbari Mission station has 6, Laukhi substation 1, Maheshpur 3, Sirsia Parish 3 and Dharan Parish 1.

In Kathmandu deanery there are 7 catechists, One each in Centre Kathmandu and Banyatar Parishes and 3 in Tipling Parish, one in Lubhu parish and one in Techo Mission station.

In the Far West Nepal Deanery there are 4 catechists in Kohlpur and substations of Chinchu.

In the Western Deanery there are 2. One in Pokhara and Parsan parishes.

A total of 38 catechists spread all over Nepal doing enormous work for the Church. They have sometimes very difficult tasks of reaching remote villages contacting new people interested in Church and catechizing. Since most of them do not have proper training, we have a 5 day catechetical training programme twice a year. The last

one conducted was in March and November 2021. The training programme for this year is in May and November. Besides that, the head of the catechetical commission goes around the parishes meeting the catechists of the area, strengthening them and encouraging them to be faithful to their commitment to proclaim Christ and reach as many people as possible.

Growing Catechetical Consciousness: Nepal has to go a long way ahead in the catechetical development. the re-awakening of lay ministries; the increasing demand for religious formation; the new forms of rediscovering and the popular reading of the Bible; the growth in various catechumenal itineraries; the recognition of the role and place of women; the experiences of family Catechesis and the new initiatives of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue; the media in Catechesis.

#### *INADEQUATE CATECHESIS OF ADULTS:*

This is the most important form of Catechesis. The Church in Nepal, however, is aware that poor and inadequate catechetical formation given during the early stages of life with very little or no catechetical follow-up in the later stages can lead to an infantile and imitative faith. As a result there is a tendency towards fixation on the spirituality that has remained imitative, devotional and individualistic. High pastoral priority needs to be given to the building up of this infantile faith-life into one that is community and kingdom building in its dynamic concern for the Church and society, especially the poor and oppressed. Adult Catechesis, practically, does not exist or if it is carried out, it does not make their faith an adult and responsible faith.

#### *CATECHESIS TO THE FAMILIES - A BIG CHALLENGE:*

Family Catechesis remains a big challenge today in Nepal. Marriage and family life, the sacredness of human sexuality, as the expression of a total loving within the bond of fidelity, and the sacredness of the gift of life in the begetting of children are being attacked as never before. Added to this, one could find the adverse conditions that families face today in our cities as well as in rural areas, among the well-to-do, the economically backward and the oppressed, and among the growing inter-faith families in the multi-religious context. These families present a real challenge to catechists

whether at parish or institutional levels. Parents either do not practice their religion, or often they do practice in an entirely inadequate way. The fundamental concern of the Church is “to proclaim and to promote the faith among contemporary men and women, who live in a society subject to profound socio-cultural change. The struggle of families in living their faith in such difficult situations arise also due to lack of preparation to the sacrament of marriage, Marriage Course, and lack of proper marriage and family counselling in the first years of marriage.

#### *CATHOLIC CHURCH AND OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS:*

One of the challenges is that there are a growing number of Catholics who leave the Catholic Church and join the other Christian Churches, fundamentalist sects and cults. The reasons are many: lack of Catechesis which keeps their faith infantile, prone to acceptance of any faith; lack of pastoral care; finding other Christian Churches or some sects more appealing and attractive, for instance in their ways of praying and breaking the Word, lack of proper Catechesis on the understanding of and approach to the Christian Churches and non-Christian religions.

#### **YOUTH OF NEPAL**

##### *OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ARE IN SEARCH OF GOD-EXPERIENCE:*

Young adults in Nepal seek genuine God-experience and stand for justice and social change. They are generous in giving themselves to causes they believe in to the point even of offering their lives in pathetic gestures for obtaining justice and liberation. These youth possess an ability for sensing and exposing duplicity in untruth, dishonest and inhumane behavior, no matter in whom or where these are found.

However, more than any other community, the youth feel the frustration, anger and outrage at a situation where millions of youth are on the disadvantaged position in our country’s highly one-sided development. In fact, while there is a development of the elite in Nepal that is on an even level with the most advanced countries of the world, there is the “other kind” of development in which most of the poorest youth are enmeshed. These youth from poor families, when seeking meaningful employment, face challenges and realities of high walls separating Nepal’s privileged classes from the majority

poor. It is not, therefore, surprising that many youngsters express their dissatisfaction through protests, revolts and even violence. Many also resort to thefts and drugs and even commit suicides.

#### ***SUBSTANCE ABUSE:***

In recent years, however, there are two very serious national indicators which show that more and more our Indian youth are not coping with the strain of under-development: *drug-abuse* and *suicide*. Both these forms of self-destruction are alarmingly high in the new millennium. Around the country, media reports the regularly increased drug-addiction among all classes of Nepali society, poor and rich, especially among adolescents and young adults.

Some of the significant causes cited for young Christians being among drug-abusers are: (1) the lack of love they have experienced in their families; (2) catechetical literature says *practically nothing* about drug-abuse and its harmful effects; (3) Nepali Christian culture is seen as westernized and therefore one in which alcoholic consumption is already deemed socially acceptable.

#### ***CATHOLIC YOUTH:***

Young people are the “hope” and “a great challenge for the future of the Church.” In their struggle to acquire freedom and independence, the young people of today are caught up with the strong influence of media, the rapid socio-cultural changes and the permissive culture. They need to be accompanied in their search for meaning, in their longing to establish deeper and lasting relationships. It is precisely here that the unique role of Catechesis of the young becomes evident. The heart of every youth Catechesis must be the “explicit proposal of Christ to the young man in the Gospel.

#### ***CATECHESIS TO HOLY CHILDHOOD CHILDREN:***

Today, more than ever, a new challenge is thrown open to the Church in Nepal to dedicate her time and attention to those infants and children who study in international, public or other schools managed by members of other religions. Another challenge that has already been identified and catered to in various parts of our country is the growing number of children belonging to inter-religious or inter-faith families. Devising ways and means of catechizing the

illiterate and school drop-out children remains another challenge. In most places, there is no clear distinction between Catechesis carried out in catholic institutions and in the parishes. An effective and systematic sacramental Catechesis is another area of concern

## **EDUCATION MINISTRY**

### ***CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NEPAL AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEPAL***

The only reason the Jesuits were invited to Nepal in 1951 by then reigning King was to offer educational opportunity to the ordinary people of the country. His instruction to them was: “teach but don’t preach”. To date the education of the common people is the main thrust of the Catholic Church in this land.

Catholic Church and institutions have been contributing a lot to the development of the country in Nepal. Many present and past students are proud of being educated in our catholic institution. The value -based quality education for life in our institutions are appreciated and demanded for many years. Catholic institutions have produced many professionals like teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers and above all good, talented, skilled and loving human beings and responsible citizens of Nepal. The students have a lot of regards and a profound respect for all the religious and priests who play a vital role in making them better human beings.

#### ***PRESENT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES ARE:***

College	1
Higher Secondary School	9
High School	19
Primary School	5
Technical Colleges	2
School for special children	3

The total number of beneficiaries of these educational institutions are about 24,000.00 of whom about 13000 are female students.

### *THERE ARE FIVE REASONS FOR OUR ENGAGEMENT IN THIS MINISTRY:*

1. The reason the Church personnel were invited to the country. Because the Rana oligarchy which rule the country before the restoration of monarchy was against the education of the common people (“hoi polloi”). They thought that education would make them rebels and so the opportunity was denied.

2. The hunger for education is still there. While travelling around and through the country one notices children walking for miles to go to the nearest schools.

3. It is the only means we have to empower women. The girl-child was and still is considered a burden and a property soon to depart from parents’ home to slave for the in-laws. So why waste money in educating her.

4. It is the only way to fight against the deeply ingrained caste feeling. In our Catholic institutions today every caste community is represented.

5. It is where and when we come into contact with the young. The latest census shows that about 60% of the country’s population is under 25 years of age.

The Church in Nepal considers education of evangelical import – a means to liberate from social shackles and empower the voiceless. It is the only Christian community which is so heavily engaged in this ministry.

### **HEALTH MINISTRY**

It is said that Nepal today has fourteen thousand medically trained personnel (doctors) of whom nine thousand live and work in the valley of Kathmandu (financial capital) for a population of four million. Remaining five thousands are found in major towns and districts headquarters of the country at the service of twenty-six million people. It often takes days for the village people to reach these towns and headquarters and patients frequently succumb to sickness while journeying towards health outposts. As a response to this, the Church has begun providing mobile health services to a number of far-flung villages.



## **MAIN OBJECTIVES OF MOBILE CLINIC:**

- a. To help the poor and the neediest by improving their health conditions.
- b. To create awareness through programs especially for women
- c. To treat minor ailments and distribute medicine.

We target the poor and marginalized women and children of rural areas especially of low caste. We render our Mobile Medical Services to remote villages especially where no medical facilities are available.

## **SOCIAL SERVICES**

Caritas Nepal and a number of religious societies have initiated and are involved in a number of socially beneficial efforts targeting women, children, and indigenous people marginalized communities. Such efforts cover literacy, mother and child care, day care center, care of environment and nature, sanitation, relief and rehabilitation during the natural calamities. Caritas alone has extended its services in these areas to more than sixty of the country's seventy-five districts.

## **TECHICAL EDUCATION**

This is Church's latest effort in the country. The objective is to equip the young with skills which will enable them to be gainfully employed – especially as twelve hundred to fifteen hundred young people are found to be going abroad practically daily in search of jobs. The remittance our labourers abroad send has become the backbone of country's economy today. The Vicariate of Nepal has two technical and engineering institutions.

## **GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS PEOPLE'S VIEW OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE COUNTRY**

To date the Vicariate enjoys a good rapport with both the government (local and national) and the people in general. The Catholic community in the country is seen as a community at the service of the nation. Our services, described above, are highly esteemed. We are thought of as a community which lives the slogan/catchword "religion is service" seen on billboards across the

country. However, despite the fact that we are one of the two thousand and five hundred Christian communities extent in the country (perhaps, a third largest) and not involved in any form of aggressive evangelism, people is general do not make distinction between which is which and tend therefore to put us all in one basket, as it were. Moreover, because of our institutional presence, we have become an eyesore to the Hindu fundamentalist groups which see our institutions as camouflage for conversion or means used to proselytize or entice. This seems to be one of the reason behind the killing of a Salesian priest in East Nepal, blasting of the Cathedral Church of the Assumption in Kathmandu, Capital City, setting the newly constructed Church in Kohalpur, in West Nepal, and efforts to blow up our educational institution in East and South Nepal as well as occasional threats our Church personnel receive from such groups. However, we see all these as God's ways of making us known far and wide.

### **PROPOSED PASTORAL PLAN: THE NEW PATH**

We have begun to formulate how the mission, teaching and witness that we must give will be expressed strategically in the priorities, aims and objectives for our work as a mission in Nepal.

Integral to this work is recognizing the importance of being confident, faithful and courageous in our mission, teaching and witness. Following the wonderful example Pope Benedict has given us, in our mission we must be gentle but also confident in manifesting the 'beauty of holiness', a beauty which can lead the heart of every person to an intimate knowledge of Christ. In our teaching, we must be courteous but also faithful in proclaiming the 'splendour of truth' through "the witness of lives lived in integrity, fidelity and holiness". In our witness, we must be humble and open-hearted but also courageous in testifying to 'the joy and freedom born of a living relationship with Christ'.

In respect of our mission, our first priority area of work will be:

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

##### **1. NEW EVANGELIZATION:**

Church ceases to be Church if it does not proclaim the Gospel. Therefore, there can be no true evangelization without the explicit

proclamation of Jesus the Lord. Thus, there is a need for a renewed commitment to proclamation.

## **2. FAITH FORMATION:**

Our Faith is based on the self-revelation of God in the Old Testament and is rooted in Christ's Incarnation. Life and Preaching, Death and Resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We are drawn into these mysteries by the Word of God and through the celebrations of the Sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist. We inherit the Catholic faith that is handed down to us from the Apostles down to the present day through tradition, the Bible and the teaching of the Church.

## **3. NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH:**

Chapter One of the *Lineamenta* on the "New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith" calls for a re-evaluation of the Church-World relationship and invites us, among other things, to search for "new ways of being Church."

How would a new way of being Church in today's world look like?

- (i) Rooted in the immense diversity and plurality of Asia,
- (ii) Undergirded by a commitment and service to life,
- (iii) Oriented towards a threefold dialogue with Asian cultures, religions, and the poor as "active integral evangelization."
- (iv) Promotion of Small Christian Communities in every parish of the Vicariate.
- (v) Church in microcosm. This means that the community in the neighborhood is primarily missionary: reaching out, serving (Apostolic), Christ-centered (Holy), in communion with the parish and the whole Church (One) and excluding no one from its membership (Catholic).
- (vi) Establishment and strengthening of Participatory Church.

#### **4. LITURGY:**

“True worshippers worship the Father in Spirit and Truth”  
(Jn 4:23)

In Liturgical worship Christ’s paschal events [Incarnation, life, Passion, Death, Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost] are remembered and relived. These celebrations should not become merely ritualistic, mechanical and legalistic service. We need to celebrate them meaningfully and be open to the grace to bring about a transformation of life so as to make us authentic disciples and credible witnesses of Jesus.

#### **5. SERVICE:**

As “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve...” [Mk 10:45; Mt.20:28], the church in Nepal proclaims the Good News through the selfless service to one and all but preferably to the marginalized. Though the Catholic Church is appreciated for our service rendered to the needy and the suffering, we understand that our services do not sufficiently depict the compassionate love of Christ and do not do much to empower and enlighten the people.

##### **i. Education: Formation of knowledgeable, morally upright and responsible citizen**

The goal of education is to teach that students to live, to discover the deeper meaning of life and of transcendence, to learn to interact with others, love creation, think freely and critically, find fulfillment in work, plan their future, or in one word, to learn ‘to be’. It is in and through education that one can hope for a more human and humane future and a more harmonious society.

##### **Strategic Planning:**

- a. Admission for the Catholic Students.
- b. Admission for the Poor & Marginalized Students.
- c. Catechism and Value Education Classes in our Catholic School.
- d. Initiation of the students into social outreach programs.
- e. Engagement of Students into Social Analysis & survey.

**ii. Health Care: Promotion of holistic health Strategy Planning:**

- a. Health Awareness program in the parish involving the whole community.
- b. Upgrade the Health Facilities
- c. Availing of Government health Schemes.

**iii. Social Services: Promotion of human dignity (Social Apostolate through Caritas Nepal):**

- a. Education to Human Rights [Ref: Social Teachings of the Church.
- b. Participation in Justice and peace movements.

**iv. Pastoral Animators:**

- a. Spiritual Renewal of person, family and community
- b. Formation and sharing of resources personnel
- c. Pastoral care of the family.

**vi. Promotion of Priestly/Religious Vocation**

**vii. Formation of Christian Leadership**

**viii. Formation of Youth**

Confidently Catholic, we look forward then not anxiously or fearfully but with renewed hope and courage. We invoke God's blessing on our country and on our world

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[1] GS 4, 11, 46.



## **II. PAKISTAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (PCBC)**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Pakistan, officially the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, is a country in South Asia. It is the world's fifth-most populous country, with a population exceeding 220 million (approximately in 2021), and has the world's second-largest Muslim population. It is estimated that 96.5% of Pakistanis are Muslims: (75% Sunni, 20% Shia and 0.22-2.2% Ahmadi), (Ahmadi are considered non-Muslims), while the remaining less than 5% includes Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and Parsi.

Islamic Republic of Pakistan is the 34th-largest country spanning 881,913 square kilometers (340,509 square miles). There are about two million Catholics who are scattered all over Pakistan. At present, we have seven Ecclesiastical units (six dioceses and one Apostolic Vicariate: Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad-Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Multan, Hyderabad and Quetta.

### **THE CHRISTIANS IN PAKISTAN**

In Pakistan, the Christian community is a small flock living in the midst of a large Muslim majority. Though many of its members are poor and live in difficult circumstances, yet they are strong in faith and fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The constitution of 1973 provided to minorities laid great emphasis of Fundamental Rights. According to the constitution on 1973, all citizens are equal before law. No person should be deprived of life and liberty. There should be no discrimination on the ground of religion, caste, creed, sex or place of birth. This is mainly because Islam itself ensures religious freedom to the whole of humanity. (Though the article 40 of the same constitution says that no non-Muslim can become the head of state). Unfortunately, some Muslim clerics seem to be attempting to deny religious freedom to other faiths in Pakistan. Since Pakistan became an Islamic Republic in 1973 and especially since the Islamization program which started in 1977, the Christians have become the target of Islamic fundamentalists who consider them as Kafirs (infidel) and who want them to leave Christianity and embrace Islam.

The Christian community is oftentimes highly vulnerable to intimidation, oppression, sexual assault (including rape). Time and again certain people experience violence or even murder at the hands of their Muslim neighbors due to indifferent attitude or collusion of law enforcement agencies motivated by religious bias or discriminatory legislation.

The Christians along with other religious minorities in Pakistan continue to face daily reminders of their plight, including discriminatory laws, forced conversions and bomb blasts aimed at minorities. The country, with additional legislation of blasphemy statute is placed among the top five countries imposing restrictions on religion. Courts are strongly pressurized to pass death penalty or lifetime-imprisonment without fair trial if an accused of blasphemy happens to be from minorities. The blasphemy law hangs like the “sword of Damocles” over the heads of non-Muslims in Pakistan.

## **1. SITUATION**

### **1.1. SOCIAL STATUS**

Pakistan faces serious challenges like shortage of food & water, jobs infrastructure, public transportation, health, education and law & order. Moreover, the existence of Islamic culture affects the way of life of many other minorities who are living in Pakistan.

The majority of Christians is still living below poverty line. A greater number of Christian youth being illiterate and unskilled are compelled to do so meagre jobs which will not support their progeny for generations to get education, avail better job opportunity and rise up from their level of backwardness. Quite few of them are unluckily getting indulged in bad habits of heroin, liquor or other intoxicants and are killing themselves with these slow poisoning drugs and, are adding to the miseries of their families and children.

Pakistan bears a male-dominant culture with added adversative effect of early marriages of girls, excessive childbearing, lack of control over their own bodies, and a high level of illiteracy adversely affect women and family life. The people are living in inferiority complex who do not raise voice for their own rights. Hence, there is a need to make them aware of their rights through pulpit of the Church and other social institutions. (New Paths).

The Christians who are already poor and belong to a marginalized community are striving hard under the Islamic dominance. However, the Churches in Pakistan always step forward to give a strong educational, moral, economic and social support. The Catholic Church in Pakistan is active in providing education through many leading schools in the country. Besides, the Catholic Church also provide health and social service in addition to its spiritual support and guidance to the people.

## **1.2. POLITICAL STATUS**

The Christians are politically very weak. There is lack of political leadership. There is also political victimization of non-Muslims in many ways as they have been deprived of their 5% share in the parliament. At the national level, the people of Pakistan elect a bicameral legislature, the Parliament of Pakistan. The parliament consists of a lower house called the National Assembly which has a multi-party system in effect, consisting of 342 seats, which is elected directly, and an upper house called the Senate, consisting of 100 seats whose members are chosen by elected provincial legislators. However, for the minorities there are reservations on the electoral system as well. Different political groups utilize people for their personal interest rather doing any sustainable work of growth for them.

Mostly Christian areas are located in far flung zones where there are lack of basic facilities and influential people just use them for votes through power and then forget. There is significant need to bring reforms in such society through education and development.

Education is the key to success in life. It unlocks many doors of growth and provides opportunities. Without it, there can be no progress and a bleak future for those deprived of it. Christians in Pakistan have lack of political notion, participation and knowledge. As a result, they lack awareness about education and many opportunities attached with education. At a time when youngsters all over the world are looking for political democratic solutions for their problems, Christians in Pakistan remain ignorant of their political stature. Its main reason is a low literacy rate. But the condition is bleaker when it comes to the literacy rate of religious minorities, especially the Christian community of Pakistan. Despite some of the most eminent educational institutions owing their origins to



Christian missionary organizations, the Christian community of Pakistan ranks lowest among the educated in the Pakistani population.

It requires a joint effort of the government and the Churches to uplift the level of education for the minorities in Pakistan, especially the Christian community. For this we need to build unity and coordination with different sectors of the government for their support to help our Christian community get timely and a proper education and also to work together as one nation for the development of the country (New Path).

### **1.3. FINANCIAL/ECONOMIC CONDITION**

The core economic issues with reference to Pakistan's economy are mounting debt, rising imports, declining exports, excessive taxation & regulations, lack of political consensus, low savings, lower investment, no inhabit of tax paying consumption-oriented society that is why we are under the heavy debt and borrow money from IMF and World Bank etc. All these factors lead to limitations both in development and in opportunities.

A great number of the Christians who are already experiencing endemic poverty makes it difficult for them to continue the education of their children. Along with this most of them do not have means of healthy entertainment, health resources and awareness. Mostly people are illiterate, poor and thus, there is no social development which can bring a positive social change in them. The Christians are marginalized in every field of life and have to live in their own country like strangers and deprived of all equal rights. There is a need to sustain the financial situation of these people. They are refused good jobs even though they are legible only because of their faith.

### **1.4. CULTURAL SITUATION**

Pakistan has an Islamic cultural influence. However, the liberty is there for the Church, Church leaders and faithful to live accordingly while following the cultural norms and values. With the promotion of interfaith harmony among the people of diverse faith, various religious festivals are celebrated together by religious leaders to promote religious harmony in the country.

## 2. PROBLEMS OF PAKISTAN

Pakistan is basically an agricultural country. About 60% of the overall population lives in rural areas with very little access to clean water and proper sanitation facilities. The environmental problems in Pakistan are getting worse due to the growing population, expansion of the economic sector and urbanization. Here are some of the major environmental concerns in Pakistan:

- Deforestation
- Air pollution / Water pollution / Land pollution
- Global Warming
- Overpopulation
- Ozone Layer weakening
- Climate Change

### 2.1. ANALYSIS

Pakistan is ranked in top ten worst country for minority rights. Christian underage girls and married women are victims of abduction, forced conversion of religion and forced marriage. About 166 cases of forced conversion marriages have been reported from 2013- 2019. (20-21) Women and girls belonging to minority groups, particularly Hindu and Christian communities, have faced gender and faith-based criminal manipulation. Now, a parliamentary Committee on Forced Conversions has been formed by the govt. to protect minority girls and young women from forced conversions who are involved in fake blasphemy cases, theft cases and other cases just because they belong to minority group. Moreover, the Christians are facing discrimination at their workplaces and they are forced to convert their religion. The recommendations of this committee have been rejected by the Islamic Ideology Council, Ministry of religious affairs and the Muslim members of the committee in October 2021.

According to civil society and the independent media, there are continued violence and abuses committed by armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government, including Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and Tehreek-e Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) as well as abuses by individuals and groups such as ISIS designated as terrorist organizations by the United States and other governments. These groups continued to stage attacks targeting Christians and religious minorities.

There are two main sources of imparting such fundamental and radical Islamic teaching:

Madrassas or Islamic schools. There are an estimated over 100,000 madrassas in Pakistan. Many of these madrassas teach a radical, militant brand of Islam and are recruiting and training centers for terrorists.

The textbooks that are used from primary to PhD levels in Pakistan have hate based material. The curriculum glorify the Muslims and portrait non-Muslims as infidels, inferior and enemy to the Muslim nation. Such Textbooks not only confuse the minds of the students but damage the moderate concept of diversity, peaceful coexistence, human dignity, human values and human rights of Pakistan.

The Christians are socially, politically, economically and educationally victimized. Though various governments over last two decades have made earnest attempts to improve the situation for religious minorities in Pakistan, but they were forced to roll back the changes in face of conservative Islamic pressure, or they have been unable or unwilling to use their political mandate or finances necessary to implement meaningful change. The country is presently being pushed towards national peril by terrorist violence, economic crisis, political instability, high rate of corruption, food and fuel shortages, weak political institutions and the unending rise of Taliban influence across Pakistan.

## **2.2. CHURCH RESPONSE**

The present situation of the Pakistani Church calls the local Church leadership to fix a right orientation towards the future in the light of the following suggestions:

- 1) The Church in Pakistan must consider herself as a missionary Church who continue to spread the Good News both within (Missio inter) and outside the Christian community (Ad Gentes).
- 2) We are living in a country where majority is poor hence the church must identify herself with the poor as the "the Church of the poor".

3) Being the church of the marginalized, the life witness in our words and deeds and our prophetic role is a vital in our mission.

4) Skill development initiative for poor Christian girls have been taken in different rural and slum areas of the country.

5) Family life and social -spiritual modules have been described through organized major events for youth to strengthen their faith and moral values of the social life.

6) Awareness campaigns have been launched through electronic media to spread the word of God and positive messages for strengthening the faith of the faithful.

7) Minority rights awareness and education has been shared with the people at grass root level and literate sector under National Commission for Justice & Peace.

8) Career counselling seminars have been conducted to interact with youth for knowing their future plans and guiding them.

9) For spiritual bonding, Catechism school and groups are active in different parishes which will not only strengthen the faith but also build confidence of children to speak on religious matters.

10) The Catholic Church's institution like Caritas Pakistan, Catholic Board of Education, Justice and Peace Commission and other Commissions are contributing for the wellbeing of Christians in Pakistan for their social, economic and legal rights and can accelerate these endeavors at every level of the society as well clergy, catechists and religious are doing their level best to deepen the faith of their brethren.

### *Education*

The future of the developing countries is very much dependent on the education of their coming generation as it determines the roles they may play for the strength and progress of their country. Since the educational opportunities for our Christian community is foremost priority, for this reason the catholic board of education in each diocese are vigorously working for the uplift of the education level through large, medium and small scale schools (English & Urdu medium). These schools are known for their renowned reputation and also for providing educational facilities to poorest of the poor irrespective of cast, creed and religion.

### Inter-religious dialogue

Inter-religious dialogue constitutes essential feature of our pastoral mission as it has been promoted to bring harmony among the diverse communities. To eliminate the religious prejudice and to encourage the healthy relationship between Christians and Muslims in Pakistan, the Church with theological dialogue should focus on the dialogue of action and life between Christian -Muslim masses at a grassroots level. This dialogue should be action oriented in which the poor masses of both religions, living in dehumanizing situations join hands to transform their situation and struggle together for their rights. It has been noted that number of times this spirit of dialogue has helped to resolves disputes between Christians and Muslims. Occasional meetings are being held to promote peace and harmony and dynamics are being used to penetrate the doctrine of peace and harmony on grass root level in our society. In order to ensure that such initiatives bear more fruit, we are doing our best to have sufficient number of properly trained personnel equipped with a serious study of the religious beliefs, values and traditions of Islam.

### Ecumenism

The Catholic Church in Pakistan has to establish unity with other churches and to make common efforts against those Christian fundamentalists who are misinterpreting the Scripture, misleading the people, and in this way affecting the true Christian mission in the country.

Speedy growth of mushroom-churches and reckless multiplication of self-proclaimed pastors, self-made bishops and their foreign sponsored ministries are creating irreparable divide among the Christians. People of amateur faith are being easily induced by their charm of healing. They are leading some of the idle, jobless and unskilled youth astray by indoctrinating them and showing them rosy pictures. Consequently, lack of unity and discipline in the Christian community are seriously weakening its infrastructure. In this situation, we are trying to revisit our methodology of operating and trying to reflect and act to meeting these challenges, by reviewing our personal life style, renewing our commitments and examining our way of dealing with the faithful, so that our presence and interaction with them may become a source of strength for their lives.

Along with this the inter-ecclesial unity will help the Pakistani Christians to make efforts against the discriminatory laws (e.g. blasphemy law) and to protect their rights in the country.

Different platforms have been organized at diocesan level with major concentration on Muslim clerics, Islamic Scholars, Sikh Leaders, Hindus, youth and women. We believe that young people with their enthusiasm and positive energy can change their surroundings for betterment.

### *Enculturation*

The Christian Community of Pakistan still needs to have a Pakistani face. This is evident from the fact that many people in the Muslim community tend to align the local Church with the West.

### *Lay participation*

At the present time when Christian and Muslim fundamentalists are trying their best to convert as many Catholics as possible to their sects and religion, the leaders of the Catholic Church must keep their members close to the Church by engaging them in different ecclesial activities.

For this purpose, it is necessary to promote and encourage side by side with the ordained ministry, those ministries which are capable of renewing and strengthening the spirit of evangelization in laity.

## **2.3. CHALLENGES**

The Catholic Church in Pakistan faces numerous major and minor challenges some of which are highlighted below:

### *a) Religious Fundamentalism*

In Pakistan the religious fundamentalism has become potent and has affected the lives of all people in general and especially in the Church. Today the Catholic Church in Pakistan is seriously challenged by the Muslims as well as by the Christian fundamentals.

Today's Pakistan has seen the horrendous effects of fundamentalism in all its different hues. It means the use of religious loyalties of the masses to secure political power, promote economic interests of the vested parties, and to maintain their influence, power, wealth and status. Hence the true human values like equality, fraternity, social justice, and social reform through the liberation of

the poor, and the marginalized have been marred by the emergence of the Islamic extremists who attempt to redefine Pakistan as a Muslim nation with false assumption that it has only one culture i.e. Islamic culture. This implies that the state should be anti-minority, employing a variety of techniques to target the religious minority, systematically pursuing a hate campaign against these minorities especially Christians.

It is unfortunate that the tendencies of fundamentalism are also found within the Christianity, especially through the activities of the certain Pentecostal groups.

Hence Christian fundamentalism is another serious challenge to the Catholic Church in Pakistan. These fundamentalists believe on a literalist interpretation and preaching of the Scripture, Such understanding of the Scripture has produced many denominations and numerous self-appointed clerics and street pastors in the country. Each offers his or her own exotic explanation and application of the Scriptural texts. As a consequence, religious rivalries and factionalism is increasing within Christian community. These fundamentalists are not only certain of their own salvation, but sure of eternal punishment of those who don't believe in their brand of Christianity.

### ***b) Other Challenges***

The following are the other continued challenges which greatly impacts the progress and development of the Catholic Church in Pakistan:

- Visas for missionaries
- Lack of awareness regarding sociopolitical, legal and constitutional rights which Christians in Pakistan possess. Illiteracy and unemployment remains the root causes of all the social evils. When the minor girls remain uneducated, they go out for work to support their families. As a result, they are trapped by Muslims for conversion of religion and marriage.
- Presently there are some restrictions on NGOs/Associations for implementing their projects and seeking foreign donations for projects. The restrictions were imposed due to some NGOs for terror financing to extremists. Now, every NGOs/Associations in the country will operate through a Memorandum of Understanding

(MOU) and Non-Objection Certificate from Economic Affairs Division (EAD). The bigger question is that if state services are lacking why the poor citizens should be deprived of support by service delivery NGOs/Associations. Catholic Church's institutions are also facing the same problem as the registration process and documentation is very lengthy and complicated which disturb the work for the community.

- The growing mentality of Islamic ideology is also a great hindrance for practicing faith and following Church rituals independently and peacefully. There is always a risk to the life of the religious leaders and other faithful.

- Financial constraints or foreign funding both for parishes and social institutes is a prominent challenge.

#### **2.4. STRENGTHS**

In spite of different challenges, the discipline, infrastructure and institutes are the strength of the Catholic Church.

- Reputed educational institutes in the diocese are presenting good image of the Church and strongly serving the citizens.

- Church leaders visit far flung areas to celebrate Holy Mass and other sacramental services to strengthen the faith of the community.

- The Church has great spiritual, disciplined, passionate, educated and multi-talented leaders which can do best for the community's development.

- Social institutes are valuable and serving the deprived communities through humanitarian aid and development.

- The Diocese has strong social network with government and local institutes that enhance its worth and is a great opportunity for the Church.

- Youth is the strength of the Church and are future leaders too. With their strength, enthusiasm and dedication we hope to change the situation of the nation.

#### **2.5. NEW PATHS**

The following are some points which can help to find the new ways:



- Social development is the main concern, if our institutes are strengthened the overall situation of the people can be changed.

- New institutes can be established to create job opportunities for the faithful or the closed institutes can be revived to serve again.

- Capacity building sessions can contribute well in the social development of the faithful.

- In the modern time of advanced technology , social media can be a best tool to promote gospel preaching. Catholic channels and other Catholic social media networks should be launched to increase knowledge and faith of the community.

- In spite of cultural and religious hindrances, the Catholic Church can contribute greatly for better Asia through bringing reforms and realizing its strengths once again. Social institutes and networks should be made strong and spiritual needs should be addressed so that people may not give up or convert to other denominations and religions. It is the only way through which faith can be preserved and can be transferred to next generations.

- The Church institutions needs to restructure themselves in order to meet the challenges of the dynamic economic, social and technological conditions. The Christians especially youth is not ready for the future employment and entrepreneurial challenges. However, this also presents an opportunity for Christian Institutions, leaders, clergymen, and families that they must focus on human resource development and thoroughly understand the trajectory and requirements of 21st century careers.

- Micro-finance initiatives, technical colleges, entrepreneurship skills, -tech-labs and other forms of support for businesses owned by Church institutions can substantially improve the living standards of the community.

- Recently, there have been some efforts towards integrating with Muslim political leaders and activists by many Christian leaders. Muslim leaders are seen celebrating Christmas and Easter while Christian leaders are seen celebrating Muslim Feasts. This harmonious activity needs to be translated into social and economic partnerships.

- In modern era of information technology and during corona pandemic, now it is imperative for Church and its institutions to be equipped with usage of modern devices for spiritual and social development and growth of the community.

- Lack of knowledge and participation in political activities among the Christians in Pakistan. At present where the youngsters all over Pakistan are looking for political democratic solutions for their problems, but Christians in Pakistan remain ignorant of their political stature. This also presents an opportunity for the Church and minority activists to play a critical role in raising awareness regarding political rights which Christians in Pakistan possess. Moreover, seminars and workshops on "legal rights of Christians in Pakistan" for Christian youth may prove pivotal in the survival of Christians in Pakistan.

- The nonexistence of government initiatives to uplift our Christians living in underprivileged class or in slums presents an extremely grim future. The government could provide financial assistance or project to Christian youth in different field such as micro-finance initiatives, technical colleges; business incubators, tech-labs and other forms of support for businesses owned by Christians can substantially improve the living standards of this persecuted community. Business activity is essential for the progress of any community. The delusional grandeur of the success, discipline and immaculate performance of Christian missionary Institutions in Pakistan is long forgotten and often unacknowledged. Missionary schools, colleges and hospitals have been replaced by efficient and effective schools, colleges and hospitals. Christian Institutions need to revamp and restructure themselves to meet the challenges of the dynamic economic, social and technological conditions.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Pakistan is an Islamic Country with a majority of (approximately) 97% Muslim Population. The Christians in Pakistan are a vibrant minority, and even though they are seen as second-class citizens, yet they have a strong faith, and they try to live it to the full.

The Church in Pakistan is providing its utmost support to the community and is trying its best to up lift the Christians. The Catholic

Church is rendering its valued and exceptional amenities in spiritual development, education, health and social services.

The Catholic Church is making every effort to change the situation of the community, especially the mindset of the youth encouraging them to avoid drugs and move towards progress through education. It is also promoting youth through different platforms, of which the most important and successful is the beginning of CSS classes which will lead them to a higher level of employment in Government sector.

The Church is also promoting interfaith dialogue and is working for harmony and peace in the country. The Catholic Church is fiercely promoting the importance of interfaith harmony involving the religious leaders from diverse faith to help people understand and respect each other's religious values and allow them to live peacefully in the country.

We hope that through the spiritual, educational, social services, and strengthening of the youth and promoting of interfaith harmony, we can build up a stronger community in Pakistan with successful goals for growth in future.

The Church has to meet the challenges that it faces and is to continue to discover the new paths of Evangelization and to strengthen the faith of our community. In this way, the Church can continue to play its evangelical role in the Church as well as in the society.

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### **III. CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF SRI LANKA (CBCSL)**

#### **GENERAL OVERVIEW OF SRI LANKA**

The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka was known in ancient times by various names such as Taprobane, Serendip and until 1972 as Ceylon. Sri Lanka, an island nation in the Indian Ocean, has a population of about 20 million people belonging to multiethnic, multi lingual and multi religious communities. According to the last survey conducted in Sri Lanka in 2012, among the ethnic groups, Sinhalese who form the majority of its population account for 74.9%, Tamils, who are mainly concentrated in the North and the East of the island, form the largest ethnic minority comprising of 15.4%, Muslims 9.2% and others 0.5% of the total population. Buddhism is the major religion with 70.2% and Hindus make up 12.6%, Islamists 9.7%, Christian 7.4 of which 6.4% Catholics, of the total population.

In order to understand the present situation of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, it is of paramount importance, at least briefly, to look at the socio-cultural, political, economic and religious context in which we find ourselves today.

#### **POLITICAL & ECONOMIC SITUATION**

Sri Lanka is classified by the World Bank as a middle-income-group country (World Bank, 2020). Sri Lanka is a Democratic Republic and a Unitary State which is governed by a presidential system, with a mixture of a presidential system and a parliamentary system. The President of Sri Lanka is the head of state and head of government and is popularly elected for a five-year term. The Parliament of Sri Lanka is a unicameral 225-member legislature with 196 members elected in multi-seat constituencies and 29 elected by proportional representation. Members are elected by universal suffrage for a five-year term. Sri Lanka is divided into 9 provinces for easy and better administration. Each Province has a governor appointed by the President and a set of Ministers headed by a Chief Minister who are elected by the people.

The political situation in Sri Lanka has deteriorated since independence in 1948 to a great extent due to various factors, mainly three decades of civil war that has severely disrupted the cordial

relationship that existed for centuries among different ethnic groups. The Tamils, who were mainly concentrated in the North and the East of the country, wanted a wider devolution of power which unfortunately led to an ethnic conflict resulting in the loss of life of a great number of people. The effects of civil conflict on economic growth and development over the past 30 years have been enormous. The successive governments had failed to remedy the situation and give adequate solutions to the aspirations of the people.

The local Catholic Church has always maintained a positive rapport with government irrespective of the political party that come to power. The Catholic Church is highly respected and recognized in high esteem by the state. The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka does not get involved in party politics in any circumstances, but it has never been reluctant to raise its voice for the good of the country and welfare of its people. It has always upheld the importance of having genuine, sincere and committed leaders at the helm of authority for good governance. In this regard the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Sri Lanka (CBCSL) has been issuing strong statements on various occasions especially during election times urging the voters to elect wise, honest and selfless candidates who are genuinely interested in the development of the country and the promotion of unity and harmony among various ethnic and religious communities in Sri Lanka.

## **RELIGION AND CULTURE**

Religion plays a very significant part in the life and culture of Sri Lankan people. Buddhism has been given the foremost place in the constitution and it is to be protected and fostered by the State. There is a special ministry of Religious Affairs to look into the matters relating to all religions.

There are evidences of the presence of Christianity in Sri Lanka as early as 5<sup>th</sup> century. However large communities of Christians were founded only after the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505. According to the latest statistics, the percentage of Christians in Sri Lanka is about 7.6%. Roman Catholicism constitutes approximately 83.5% of the Christian population as of census in 2012. From the inception of Christianity in Sri Lanka, the Christians have been living in peaceful co-existence with the followers of other

religions. As a community the Christians rarely had any threats against them.

Ecclesiastically, Sri Lanka has one Archdiocese and eleven other dioceses. Most of the Catholics live in the western and north western parts of the country with pockets of Christians in the central highlands, around the east coast and in the northern peninsula. Non-Catholic Christians constitutes 1.2% of the Christians in Sri Lanka. Among the non-catholic Christians, the church of Ceylon (Anglicans), Methodists, Baptists, Dutch Reformed Church and Salvation Army form the major Denominations. Among them the Anglicans are the majority. The fundamentalist sects have taken away some of their followers. There is a National Christian Council comprising of members from all these religious groups and some of the fundamentalist sects.

Though a minority living among people of other faiths, the presence of the Catholics in the society is very visible and significant through their lives of witnessing and in the services, they render to the nation with utmost commitment in the spirit of service. The Catholic Church plays an important role in the Sri Lankan society by offering its services in various fields especially in the field of Education. The schools and higher education institutes run by the Catholic Church are in great demand even among the non-Catholics for the discipline and formation they provide. There are also technical and job oriented training institutes managed by the Church to equip the youth with necessary skills for various professions. The Catholic Church is also engaged in various charitable activities in the Dioceses through its social arm, the CARITAS

Though religious freedom is guaranteed in the constitution, there are subtle restrictions and discriminations especially against Catholics when it comes to erection of new churches and expansion of already existing Churches in some dioceses, and also in the appointment of Catholics to public sector jobs.

## **EASTER SUNDAY BOMB ATTACKS**

Easter Sunday is the most important day for the Christians. Since it is the holiest day, the Church attendance in Sri Lanka is very high on that day. The tragic and heart rendering attack in Churches and other places on Easter Sunday in 2019 was really an unexpected

tragedy even in the wildest of our dreams. It has severely affected the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka and no doubt that it has left a lasting impact on the Catholic Church. 269 people including foreigners, most of whom were participating in the Easter Sunday services were brutally murdered and nearly 500 were injured by some suicide bombers belonging to an extremist group. His Eminence, Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, the Archbishop of Colombo and the other Bishops of the Local Catholic Church played a very decisive role from the day one onwards in containing the probable reactionary violence against the Muslims by appealing to all to stay calm and follow the true spirit of Christian forgiveness and peace.

With the help of local and foreign donors, the Archdiocese of Colombo immediately established a fund to cater to spiritual, psychological, social and economic needs of the affected families. Immediate attention was paid to a dignified burial of the deceased and to attend to the medical needs of the injured. The Catholic Church organized various Spiritual programmes under the leadership of the Faith Animation Team of the Archdiocese of Colombo to provide spiritual nourishment to the bereaved families. A team of psychologists, counselors and therapists have been working tirelessly to help the trauma victims. Programmes for adults, youth and children are being currently conducted to bring them back to normalcy. There are many families in which the bread winner of the family is killed or injured and not being able to attend to his occupation. The social arm of the church attends to their material needs and the education of their children by providing scholarships.

Two years have lapsed since this disaster occurred and even after two years still there are people who have not got over the traumatic experience they had on that fateful day and all are awaiting for an unbiased investigation and justice. His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, the Archbishop of Colombo, in whose Archdiocese most of the affected people lived, has been in the fore front with all the other Bishops asking the government and other responsible authorities to investigate into all the aspects of the attack and truth be revealed and justice be done. The Catholic Bishops' Conference has been urging again and again since that day for an impartial immediate inquiry into this dastardly terrorist attack. The CBCSL has been issuing strong statements and meeting political leaders, security and intelligence officials and urging all concerned to meet out justice

to the victims by implementing the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry appointed by the previous President and the perpetrators be brought before the law without any delay.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic**

The novel pandemic, COVID-19, which has spread globally within no time after its discovery one and half years ago, has not spared Sri Lanka and the country is facing its third wave. Due to the country's economy and social, cultural and religious life have been significantly affected.

In Sri Lanka almost all the Dioceses have been severely affected by this pandemic and our Churches have been closed time and again. The pandemic has greatly disrupted the liturgical activities in churches. We have been doing our utmost best to cater to the spiritual as well as material needs of our people through various means, of course observing all the health guidelines given by the health authorities. Liturgical celebrations are being broadcast and telecast on television channels and through social media. We have taken steps to support the poor who are affected by this calamity by distributing dry rations through the SEDEC, the social arm of the Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka. The Catholic Church has initiated various measures to support the government health sector by providing medical equipments and other facilities. Due to the closure of our Churches, Shrines and other institutes from where most of our income is generated, the Church economy is heavily affected.

### **THREAT OF EVANGELICAL SECTS**

The presence of various evangelical sects has disrupted the good rapport the Catholic Church had maintained for decades with other Religious leaders especially with the Buddhists. These sects have penetrated some distant rural villages and started an aggressive campaign of unethical conversions which has caused an uneasy tension between the Catholic Church and some Buddhist Prelates due to misunderstandings. In the recent past some extreme Buddhist elements also have come into the scene to make it worse.

We are very much aware that in our multi-religious context, the inter-religious dialogue plays a vital role. Therefore, various programmes are being organized by the Catholic National Commission for Inter-Religious Dialogue and Ecumenism to promote



understanding, unity and harmony among religions in Sri Lanka. At the national level a Congress of Religions has been formed comprising of high rank religious dignitaries who come together to discuss matters of importance particularly relating to religions and also vital issues relating to the country at large. The post Easter attack period witnessed the great concern and support of non-Christian religious leaders and their followers.

### **SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES (SCCS)**

In its pastoral approach in the present context, the Church in Sri Lanka is concentrating on building up of Small Christian Communities (SCC) and in this regard the CBCSL has declared this year for the local Church as the Year of Small Christian Communities to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> year of the introduction of the SCC to Sri Lanka. In keeping with the great example of St. Joseph Vaz, the Apostle of Sri Lanka, we are engaged in forming and strengthening of basic Christian communities centered around the Word of God and the Sacraments.

### **PRIESTLY FORMATION**

As a Priority, the CBCSL has taken up the responsibility of the formation of candidates for the priesthood who would be ready to take up the challenges in the priestly ministry in the local context. In this light a new concept namely “Accompaniment in Priestly Formation” has been introduced to the formation process and in this system a Formator will accompany and co-journey with a particular batch of seminarians during their formation in the Major Seminary.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Though a small minority living amidst many non-Catholics, the Catholics bear witness to Jesus, His way of life and teachings and render great services to the Sri Lankan Society which many non-Catholics admire. The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka is very much aware of its specific responsibility towards its followers and the nation.

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