

BIRTHING A NEW VISION



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Empowerment of Women Religious in India

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Contents

1. Introduction	5
2. Birthing Mercy the Liberative Way : - <i>Kochurani Abraham</i>	7
3. Understanding the God of Mercy: Biblical Perspective - <i>Jose Kollemkunnel SVD</i>	11
4. Merciful like our Heavenly Abba-Amma - <i>Francis Gonsalves, S.J.</i>	15
5. Mercy : The Divine in Us - <i>Suren Abreu</i>	20
6. Mercy to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) - <i>Virginia Saldanha</i>	24
7. Women witnesses of Mercy - <i>Reena D'Souza SSPS</i>	28
8. Women Religious Lawyers Forum	33
9. Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace Kottayam Declaration :	35
10. Statement of the Religious Lawyers Conference : In Pursuit of Justice: A Prophetic Response in India	38
11. Indian Christian Women's Movement (ICWM)	41

Introduction

Welcome to this edition of Birthing a New Vision !!!

By announcing the Jubilee Year of Mercy in 2016, Pope Francis has kindled in all people of good will, a choice to act Godlike. Has invited people of faith to journey into Mercy, to be witnesses of compassion and to give consolation to every woman and man of our time.

How do I become a merciful person? There is a great sense of strength in knowing that God's mercy has entered our hearts, as we live the year of Mercy. It calls us to experience what is good and healthy in every heart that beats and respond to the call to be 'Merciful like the Heavenly Father' (Mother), so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God (Misericordiae Vultus).

More than ever, it is an invitation to follow the example of the Compassionate God who asks us to be compassionate and forgiving without measure. We are called to be mercy to all those from various walks of life, faiths, traditions, backgrounds, cultures, communities, professions and orientations. Pope Francis in his book titled 'The Name of God is Mercy', states: "Jesus goes and heals and integrates the marginalized, the ones who are outside the city, the ones outside the encampment. In so doing, he shows us the way."

The Church encourages all Catholics to become "missionaries of God's mercy" and that the period be a time of renewal for all of us. We need to be merciful, especially to all who deal with discrimination, big and small, every day, and also those who struggle to claim the basic human dignity.

In *Misericordiae Vultus* Pope Francis elucidates the interconnectedness of justice and mercy, saying that exclusive emphasis and focus on justice has often watered down the aspect of mercy. Hope this will not lead the Church to grant mercy to persons who do not deserve it.

This is also a time to celebrate Pope Francis' decree '*In Missa In cena Domini*' (In the Mass of the Lords Supper) to change the Roman Missal, opening Holy Thursday foot washing to women and girls. With this decree, Pope Francis has signalled that change is possible. We sincerely hope that this initiative to include women in the Church will not stop at our feet, but will be one of many signs to include women fully in the institutional Church.

However, despite this act of goodwill, it is with great sadness that we are receiving news from different parts of India about the resistance from the hierarchy and clergy to implement the recommendation of Pope Francis to make the Church more inclusive by washing the feet of women on Holy Thursday. The hierarchy and the male clergy have missed a great opportunity to demonstrate adherence to Christ and his teaching through a meaningful gesture of inclusiveness in this year of Mercy. The faith that we follow is letting us women down again and again.

The papers in this edition reflect mercy from different perspectives, in order to make it more meaningful for all of us in our own given context.

I wish that all of us have the courage to cry over injustice, to cry over corruption, to cry over oppression and to learn the art of conversation and dialogue in order to be mercy.... it's a grace.

Sr. Julie George, SSps

Birthing Mercy the Liberative Way

Kochurani Abraham

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Often when we speak or read of 'mercy', we see the recipient of mercy positioned on the lower rungs of the socio / economic / political or the 'righteousness' ladder and the one who is being 'merciful' extending a compassionate hand. This explains the definition of mercy as 'compassion or forgiveness shown towards someone, whom it is within one's power to punish or harm' (Oxford dictionary). While the experience of compassion brings healing and enrichment to the beneficiary, a hierarchically elevated location of the giver of mercy, gives mercy a taste of condescension, which is not an appealing experience to the recipient. The much repeated religious chant "have mercy on me a sinner" projects God as the source of all goodness and perfection and sees humans as tainted by transgressions, whereas for many, this may be a comfortable experience in one's relationship with God. 'Mercy' loses its grandeur when humans tend to play God in the lives of others, taking a superior stand in being 'merciful' to those who are lesser in righteousness or being privileged as having sufficient resources for a dignified existence. All the same, mercy which is an expression of compassion or forbearance is a much needed ingredient for dealing with brokenness which is an inevitable constituent of human life, and so, it is imperative to safeguard its magnificence and integrity.

Certainly, human relationships are dotted with experiences that either give a taste of freeing as healing elements of mercy or point to the contrary. For this reason, it is important to check when or how mercy becomes liberative. There is no one answer to this query, but gleaning through experiences may give us

insights and I would like to share an experience that is significant in this regard. Recently I attended the funeral of a certain person named Kunchacko in Kerala, who was just 54 years, but who died in an extreme act of self-giving. His end came after a surgery during which 60 percent of his liver was donated to save the life of a poor man whom he came to know through a newspaper advertisement. Kunchacko was active in public life from his youth and later served people as the Block Panchayat President. Though he had good contacts with political higher-ups, he did not use these influences to amass wealth for himself, but spend himself serving the needs of his people. His commitment to the wellbeing of others forgetting himself was made visible by the fact that at the time of his death, his family still lived in a small rented house. A phrase that echoed at his funeral was: 'Kunchacko died as he lived', and people, irrespective of their political or religious affiliations acclaimed him 'an embodiment of mercy'.

I think unearthing certain significant elements of Kunchacko's story will help us understand better the liberative dimensions of mercy. This gesture of sharing a vital organ in Kunchacko's case is striking for the fact that the recipient of his liver was in no way related to him and he offered to do this without expecting any monetary gain. For Kunchacko, being merciful was not an 'add on' for any specific reward or to serve one's vested interest, but it was a question of being true to who he was as a human being. I don't think he made an extra noise about being merciful because he was a Christian, though he was a committed catholic who was active in his parish. All that he did was to stretch a helping hand to those in need as a true neighbour or brother.

The question here is: what is it that impels one to become a brother/sister to someone with whom there is no blood relationship? This is understandable in the case of a friend or a neighbour with whom one shares a deeper bonding. But in order to reach out to a stranger in a brotherly/sisterly concern, something more is needed. This 'something' becomes perceivable if we look at the deeper reality of our existence as relational beings. The word used for brother/sister in Malayalam is *Sahodaran /Sahodari*. This word *Sahodaran* or *Sahodari* is formed by the fusion of two words *Saha* which signifies 'togetherness' and *Udaram* which means the 'womb'. To me, the message Kunchacko leaves behind is that mercy

becomes truly liberative when you become a *saha-udaran* or *saha-udari*, which means a 'womb-sharer' with the one in need. Perhaps we can understand better the linkage between 'womb' and 'mercy' if we explore the Hebraic roots of these terms. Biblical scholars point out that while the Hebrew word *hesed* is commonly used for expressing God's mercy in a consistent manner, another word *rehem* though deployed less frequently in the Bible, communicates God's mercy at the level of feeling. The root *rh* (*raham* in Arabic and *rehem* in Hebrew) indicates mercy. In the Islamic tradition, God is called *Al Rahman*, the merciful/compassionate one, so also in the Hebraic tradition, *rehem* gives expression to God's mercy as tenderness of love and unconditional affection. Interestingly *rehem* is the same word in Hebrew for 'womb'. In being merciful, God loves as a mother, expressing the affection that a mother feels for the child in her womb. Thus *rh* becomes a striking expression for conveying the mercy of God in all its warmth and tenderness.

This way of understanding mercy is spiritually liberative primarily because there is no hierarchical positioning between God and the human person. Mercy/compassion becomes the energy enveloping humans in the womb of God, creating and re-creating life while bringing forth healing and wholeness. Human beings sharing in this *rh* (womb)energy become free to relate to fellow humans and the earth in kindness and compassion. Being merciful in this sense is not from a positioning of moral superiority of the giver, but because the receivers who are in deprived or marginalized positions have a right to receive mercy in their growth to wholeness. Here mercy and justice are intrinsically linked as having access to a dignified life is a human right and a gospel imperative. This process of the 'other' becoming a brother or sister reflects the Christian vision of the Reign of God which Jesus came to initiate in this world, where God is the Mother/Father of all, and all are children of the same God irrespective of our racial, ethnic, class, religious or gender differences. This inclusive vision is not limited to fellow humans but to all forms of life in this cosmos.

Human relationality is generally conditioned by the restrictions of our particular socio-economic and cultural locations and their fixations. To break free of this socio-cultural constraints on our

growth as human persons, we need to re-enter the womb, this time the cosmic womb. No wonder Jesus told Nicodemus “Unless you are born again, you cannot enter the Kingdom of God”. The Gospel imperative that one needs to be born not just of the flesh, but of the Spirit has its meaning in the context of belonging to this cosmic family, where one engages in a relationship of brotherhood/sisterhood with all, being a crucial link in the web of life. It is in this consciousness of interrelatedness among humans and between human and the environment as pointed out also in the encyclical *Laudato Si* that the exercise of mercy becomes liberative.

Connecting to the energies of mercy as signified in the biblical womb imagery of *rhm*, we can break free of the gendered association of being 'merciful' with the feminine and its essentialistic association with the female body. Though the womb is a female reproductive organ, *rhm* invites us humans irrespective of our gender identity to experience and exercise the warmth and care of God's womb in our relationships with fellow human beings and the rest of creation. A recent write-up in the Kerala papers titled: “Un-imprisoned Mercy from the Prisons” spoke of the male prisoners of a Jail in Trichur (Kerala) reaching out to those affected by Endosulphan pesticide in the state, by sharing a good amount from the meager savings they make from their work in prison. Sharing is an essential component of being merciful, and this redefines mercy not merely as an act of goodwill of the one who is benevolent, but as a right of the other who shares the same cosmic womb, the *rhm* of God.

In conclusion, growing in the consciousness of brotherhood / sisterhood beyond the boundaries set by the class/caste/gender divide and in a sense of connectedness with nature becomes then a necessary pre-condition for exercising mercy in a liberative manner. It is in this sense of inter-relatedness that being merciful becomes natural to a person as in the case of Kunchacko, and we become freer in giving and receiving mercy. The celebration of the year of mercy would have a transformative impact on society when we learn the art of sharing in the *rhm* (cosmic womb) energy, which in turn transforms us to be *rahman/raham* like God.

Understanding the God of Mercy: Biblical Perspectives

Jose Kollemkunnel SVD

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The title of Pope Francis' Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee year of Mercy is *Misericordiae Vultus* (MV). One may freely translate the meaning of the title as; 'in the face of misery the human being needs the merciful and a compassionate heart of the other'.¹ The word 'mercy', has been defined as "God's loving care for all creatures, especially human beings, which invites us in turn to empathize with and alleviate the misery of others."² In other words, mercy is "the disposition to be kind and forgiving, founded on compassion or feeling of sympathy, in putting this feeling into practice with a readiness to assist."³ For Pope Francis, "the mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which God reveals his love as that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child" (MV 6). In the Bible, we meet a God of tenderness and mercy besides His other qualities. In this presentation, I shall reflect on some of the aspects of God's mercy as presented in the Bible and their implications for us humans.

The self-revelation of the God of Israel is that of a God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Ex 34:6). This definition of God's essential qualities has shaped the faith of Israel and it appears many times in the Hebrew Bible (Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah

¹See Arnoldus Nota- SVD Curia News Letter, December 2015, 1.

Gerald O'Collins and Edward G. Farrugia, A Concise Dictionary of Theology (New York: Paulist, 1991) 139.

³John A. Hardon, Pocket Catholic Dictionary (New York: Doubleday, 1979) 259.

4:2; Neh 9:17). According to this definition, God's very being is determined by *rahamim*, which is mercy, loving kindness, compassion; by *hanan* which signifies grace, gracefulness, beauty; *bye²rek 'aPPa²yim* which stands for patience, endurance and steadfastness; and by *rab-He²sed we'emet* which describes unending love, fidelity, honesty and truth.⁴ Each of these Hebrew words is rich in meaning and complex in different nuances. Originally the stem *rehem* denotes the womb, the place of ultimate safety, sustenance and nurture for the unborn child (Jer 1:5). By giving this attribute to God, a female or motherly notion is added to the understanding of YHWH. The mercy of God is like the womb, and God is like a mother who carries her unborn child, sharing her very life with it, making space within herself for the new being, nurturing new life with her own blood.⁵ The image it suggests is that of a God who is like a mother when she takes her child in her arms, wanting only to love, protect, help, ready to give everything. This motherly aspect of God gives depth to the perception of God, although love, goodness, fidelity and endurance are familiar attributes of God. "Motherly feelings of gentleness and affection are denoted by the noun *rahamim*, where a whole range of feelings, consisting of goodness and tenderness, patience and forgiveness are also included in this concept."⁶

The word *He²sed*, when used to refer to the work of God, is His act of redemption by fulfilling His promise with mercies, kindness or faithfulness (Is 55:3). The compassion and kindness of God to His people in times of need, especially in the context of the covenant, depicts His nature of *He²sed*. There is a mutual and reciprocal relationship between God and His people. When a human being is the subject of *He²sed*, the action reflects the kindness or loyalty of that person (2 Sam 9:7). Therefore *He²sed* has several nuances of meaning. It implies divine goodness, God's spontaneous compassion marked with forgiveness and positive action. The Hebrew word *hanan* is usually translated as 'grace'. It (*hnn*) also means 'to show favour, to show compassion, to be merciful and to express sympathy', usually to human persons who are in real need or distress.

⁴Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, "Turn to the God of Mercy: New Perspectives on Reconciliation and Forgiveness," *The Ecumenical Review* 50, (1998) 197.

⁵See Müller-Fahrenholz, "Turn to the God of Mercy", 197.

⁶Pius James D'Souza, "Mercy of God in the Book of Psalms," *Joskiran: Journal of Religion & Thought* 12, no. 2 (2015)89.

Thus the understanding of YHWH in Ex 34, 'as compassionate and merciful', is not merely an observation about God's nature, but a confession of the God experience of the Israelites as their creator and liberator. The divine care (*rhm* the womb-like quality) is expressed in the actions of God that sustains all of creation. In God's mercy there is a subtle equilibrium between intimacy and distance, connectedness and space that governs all forms of life.⁷ It establishes the well-being and shalom of the created universe. In the Old Testament the mercy of God is expressed in consoling words, benevolent gestures and above all in the form of miraculous actions. In the words of the Psalmist, "He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children" (Ps 113:7-9). God's action of mercy and kindness is down to earth and he cannot be separated from these actions. God acts mercifully not only to those who are weak and unfortunate, but towards those who had been unfaithful to the covenant in the past and now turned again to God (cf. Neh 9:17). God acts compassionately towards the wretched sinner. This is the experience of the Psalmist as he proclaims it, "But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ps 86:15). Therefore, mercy is a quality intrinsic to the divine nature. YHWH is called a compassionate father (Ps 103:13) a compassionate mother (Is 49:1; Ps 131:2), and a compassionate husband (Hos 1-3).

In the New Testament three words connote the concept of mercy and compassion, namely, *splanchnon*, *eleos*, and *oiktirmos*. The word *splanchnon* refers to the inward parts of the body, especially the viscera. In the ancient world the inward parts of the body, especially the heart, served as the seat of emotions.⁸ *Eleos* means kindness or concern expressed for someone in need. It is mercy, compassion, pity or clemency of humans toward humans or of God toward humans. *Oiktirmos*, means the display of concern over another's misfortune, a heartfelt compassion. It is often used in the plural to express concrete forms of action taken. Mercy is the

⁷See Müller-Fahrenholz, "Turn to the God of Mercy", 198.

⁸See Frederick William Danker, ed. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 32000) 938.

essence of Jesus' experience of God as Abba. He is the manifestation of God's mercy through his words and deeds. The miracles of Jesus were the manifestation of God's compassion and love. His miracles proclaimed the good news that God's mercy reaches beyond the boundaries of human understanding and restores the persons to wholeness. "Jesus identifies Himself with the poor and the oppressed, in order to show them an active and effective concern."⁹ That is why he asks his followers to imitate his limitless mercy, "Be merciful just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). The culmination of God's mercy was shown in the death of Jesus on the cross. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Mary expressed the experience of God's mercy in her *magnificat* (Lk 1:50.54). Generations after generations are telling her story of obedience and cooperation in the mission of God who had the privilege to bring forth the embodiment of mercy, Jesus Christ, into the world. Zachariah too praises God, recounting His mercy (Lk 1:72). St. Paul experienced the abounding mercy of God in his call to apostleship. In 2Cor 1:3, he praises God as the Father of mercies who has given this divine attribute to His apostles in order to be shared with others. Faithfulness in mercy is the very being of God. As St. Paul says, "If you are not faithful to him, He will remain faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2Tim 2:13). This is the assurance of our faith.

Thus the mercy of God, as presented in the Bible, gives hope and confidence because of the boundless love of God for humans. It also places a responsibility on us and an invitation to every believer to become a channel of mercy in reaching out to others who are in need. The mercy of God is not an abstract concept, but a concrete experience of divine intervention in creation and liberation. Mercy calls for interrelatedness between God and humans, and between humans. Walter Kasper explains that personal connectedness with Jesus Christ means participation in his pro-existence. Consequently we can conclude that the Christian form of mercy is existence for others.¹⁰ May this extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy become an experience of sharing and receiving God's mercy.

⁹George M. Soares-prabhu, "Jesus and the Poor," in Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, ed. Francis X. D'Sa (JDV Theological Series, 2001) 176.

¹⁰John Nellikunnel, "'The Face of Mercy' and the Face of the Poor," Jeevadhara XLV, no. 270 (2015) 15.

Merciful like our Heavenly Abba-Amma

Francis Gonsalves, S.J.

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“Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy.... By his words, his actions, and his entire person, Jesus of Nazareth reveals the mercy of God.” With these opening words of his document *Misericordiae Vultus* meaning, 'The Face of Mercy' 'Pope Francis has inaugurated the great 'Jubilee of Mercy' that stretches from December 8, 2015, the Solemnity of Mary's Immaculate Conception, to November 20, 2016, the Solemnity of Christ, the King.

It's providential that Pope Francis has chosen a Marian and a Christic date to open and close the 'Jubilee of Mercy', respectively. By ensuring that this '*kairos*' (time of grace) coincides with the Solemnities of Mother Mary, our *Amma*, and Jesus, our King, the Holy Father desires that we contemplate the merciful faces of Mary and Jesus, so as to meaningfully mirror their mercy. So, in this article on mercy from the viewpoint of Jesus' 'least' sisters and brothers mainly migrants, slum-dwellers and prisoners I shall first mention a few lessons which the so-called 'poor' have taught me to enrich my life. Then, I shall look at the gospels and Pope Francis's vision and mission to seek guidelines for future action.

Besides short 'formation exposures' after I joined the Jesuits in 1981, my real 'formation' took place during longer exposures in slums, among south Gujarat's adivasis and Delhi's Tihar Jail. These experiences have taught me many things. Faced with

¹This so-called 'Papal Bull of Induction' can be downloaded from the Internet. It will help readers to reflect upon what 'mercy' actually means in theory and entails in praxis. This document will hereafter be abbreviated as MV.

numerous uncertainties, faith and trust are virtues that the poor have in large measure. In villages, farmers depend heavily on the monsoons; and, in cities, the poor are totally dependent on their employers who hire and fire them at will. So too, prisoners fully depend upon advocates, judges, police and courts to defend them. This being the case, one cannot but depend on the 'uncertain other' (be it the monsoons, landowners, government officials, employers, advocates or neighbours). This leads the poor to have deep faith in the 'Reliable Other'- God, who alone understands and protects them.

Trust in many 'uncertain others' and faith in a 'Faithful God' (*Ishwar, Istadevata, Allah, Jesus, etc.*) lead the dispossessed to develop an amazing sense of gratuitousness and gratitude. They have little or nothing at all; this makes them grateful for the little things of life: unexpected rains, a good meal, a village festival, an outing, a jeep ride, a visit from a loved one while in jail, etc. The sense of God's goodness and generosity for everything received through a few gracious givers engenders a chorus of thanksgiving manifest in various ways.

Another notable feature of slum-dwellers, villagers and migrants who have to go faraway in search of work is their capacity for backbreaking work often done amidst dangers and difficulties. They break their bodies, spill sweat and shed their own blood in order to sustain lives of loved ones. Ignoring their own health, conveniences and comforts, these labourers and migrants also support each other. I know women in slums who will feed children of their neighbours who have left their homes in search of work. Thus, besides hard work, the life of the poor is marked by mutual support, solidarity and interdependence.

The virtues of trust, faith, gratitude, hard work, support and solidarity that I've learnt from the poor and the dispossessed have been guiding lights to read and interpret the gospel of Jesus. First and foremost, mercy is not really 'charity' as much as it is 'compassion'. Charity, according to many, is the capacity to give alms to the poor. Masked behind such benevolence is an attitude of superiority and patronage. By giving a few loaves of bread or parting with a few rupees in charity, the donor assumes that his/

her responsibility is over and feels that the poor should be eternally grateful to him / her for his / her largesse. Such an attitude is demeaning, dehumanizing and destructive of the family bonds that should be built as outcome of every act of giving-&-receiving. More than 'charity' true mercy overflows from 'compassion'. Mercy is compassion in action. The Greek word '*splanchitzomai*' from which 'compassion' is derived literally means 'from the bowels': a gut-level, visceral reaction to something or someone. Pope Francis expresses this succinctly in MV (n.6) in the following words :

The mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which he reveals his love as that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this is a “visceral” love. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy.

Indeed, every truly merciful act must overflow from a maternal-paternal gut-level, visceral feeling for those in need. This was Jesus' feeling when he saw the multitude and felt compassion on them since they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Mary, our *Amma*, is undoubtedly a merciful mother. Calling her 'Mother or Mercy' Pope Francis writes (MV24): “No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary. Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh. The Mother of the Crucified and Risen One has entered the sanctuary of divine mercy because she participated intimately in the mystery of His love.” From the womb to the tomb, this mother of the *Magnificat* and the *Pieta* would sing : “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour ... His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation” (Lk 1:50). Mary's mercy embraces the young wedded couple at Cana with the plea to Jesus: “They have no wine” (Jn 2:3).

Jesus, the Compassionate One, mirrors the merciful face of his mother, Mary, as well as mediates the mercy of his *Abba*-Father. Jesus preaches: “Be merciful just as your *Abba*-Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36). In the First Testament, God is portrayed as: “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and

faithfulness” (Ex 34:6). This “God of love” is not impartial; rather, like any parent who would take special care of weak and sick children, this God makes an option for the '*anawim*': widows, orphans and aliens who are spouseless, parentless and friendless (Ps 146:7-9). God fills their 'less'.

All the First Testament prophecies find flesh in Jesus. His teachings, his parables, his actions, his options, and, finally, his death, are all echoes and outcomes of his mercy and compassion on the poor and the needy. Remember, the only criterion that the Eternal King gives for our salvation (or condemnation) is our response to poor, suffering humanity. “Whatever you did (or, did not do) to the least of my sisters/brothers, you did (or, did not do) to me” (Mt 25:31ff).

While contemplating the faces of Jesus and Mary, let's be aware that I-You-We are the faces of one more mother, the Church. Our families are 'domestic churches' and Pope Francis explicitly says (MV 10): “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love.”

Apart from addressing the Church as Christ's Mystical Body, Pope Francis seeks to initiate individuals, too. He writes (MV 18): “I intend to send out Missionaries of Mercy.....” Am I ready? Are you ready? Pope Francis walks the talk. He wants himself, first and foremost, to be an epitome and envoy of mercy. His motto '*miserando atque eligendo*'- literally meaning, 'by having mercy, by choosing *him-amply* indicates that he identifies himself with Matthew (sinner turned saint) who, aware of Christ's mercy, becomes merciful too (see MV 8). So, let us follow Pope Francis who sets the tone and rhythm for the mission of mercy.

Our Pope's language is powerfully evocative. He wants the Church to be “an oasis of mercy” (MV 13) and each of us to apply the “balm of mercy” (MV 5) and “oil of consolation” (MV 15) to a broken, bruised, bloody world. He wants the Church to throw

open its doors (*MV* 3), and to be on perennial pilgrimage (*MV* 14) and to embrace 'special groups': "of those who have no voice because their cry is muffled and drowned out by the indifference of the rich" (*MV* 15).

Speaking of 'oil' and 'balm' and 'breath', Pope Francis brings to Christian consciousness symbols of the Holy Spirit. Jesus reiterates the words of Prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to set captives free and to proclaim the Year of the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19). It is this same Spirit given to us all as oil for energy, as balm to console, and as breath to revivify the world. Come, let us follow Him who proclaimed: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Mt 5:7).

Mercy : The Divine in Us

Suren Abreu

Suren Abreu, is a priest, in the Diocese of Bombay. He is a member of the feminist group Satyashodak and promotes gender sensitivity especially among the young people.

When John Paul II, then leader of the Roman Catholic Church, first promoted the devotion of the Divine Mercy in 1981 and then instituted the feast on the Second Sunday of Easter in 2000, the devotion received a boost that spread it worldwide. With little analysis or questioning, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy soon made its way into homes and Churches, gathering devotees who parroted the words without necessarily understanding the lack of logic or the severe ritualism they contained. For example, the belief that only 3.00 pm was the special hour of mercy because, supposedly, it was the hour of Jesus' death failed to consider that 3.00 pm in Palestine would be varied other times across the world, such as 6.30 pm in Mumbai. The words of the devotion constantly emphasise the mercy that comes from the Father for the sake of the “sorrowful passion” of the Son, words that drive home the belief that we need a “Father's” mercy, a “Son's” passion, for we, as human, are worthless and incapable.

This constant juxtaposition of the maleness of the Divine with the immensity (and near exclusivity) of “his” mercy creates the impression that mercy is beyond our human capacity and relegates it to a masculinised God and “his” benevolence.

Of course, we do know that God, the Divine, is neither Father nor Mother. God, to be truly God, is beyond human attributes or particular categories. But the language we use is limited and so the tradition of calling God Father has, in our minds, resulted in God being perceived as a super-male. The emotions connected

with the use of the word Father for God passed down through centuries go beyond the rational analysis of the true nature of God as transcending human categories.

Perhaps it is for this reason that the Year of Mercy announced by Francis, current leader of the Roman Catholic Church, comes as a breath of fresh air. While speaking of the mercy of God, he lays stress on the mercy we must show to others, to people facing social exclusion or rejection, a mercy that is at the root of social justice.

Mercy is a complex word. It is thought to stand in counter-position to justice and possesses attributes of compassion, forgiveness, and inclusion. An interesting anecdote on the concept of mercy is told of a woman who approached Napoleon Bonaparte to ask pardon for her son who had been condemned to death. When the emperor said that the young man had committed the offence twice and justice demanded death, she said, "I do not ask for justice. I plead for mercy." Napoleon replied, "But he doesn't deserve mercy; he deserves death!" And the woman said, "It would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is what I ask." The anecdote ends with the emperor granting mercy to her son.

It is interesting to note that it is a woman who, in a certain sense, teaches the great emperor of both the meaning and the application of mercy. When we relegate Divine Mercy to a Father God, we tend to give it a flavour of the regal. That mercy is almost imperial, showered like a loftily granted blessing on humble (or humiliated) serfs. The emperor in the anecdote does grant the mercy. After all, it is his prerogative to do so, isn't it? So, mercy is often seen as an act of elevated forgiveness, a morally superior act of generosity that leaves the recipient in near-absolute gratitude for the munificence shown.

But wait...! In the anecdote, is the mercy truly from Napoleon? A closer reading of the exchange reveals that the woman opens his mind to the concept, a concept that is hers by experience. Until fully conscious of the essence and the importance of mercy, the emperor kept insisting on justice, but the moment he was enlightened, he granted mercy. Vicariously then, it was the

woman's mercy that Napoleon extended to her son; the gift of mercy she brought to his consciousness that he then applied to the boy.

Now this is new. Is mercy, then, to be seen as a female attribute? Does it have a gender preference? Do men tend to see mercy more as a gratuitous attribute while women perceive it as a lived experience? Well, yes and no, really. The unfortunate stereotyping of the sexes from ancient times led to certain attributes being seen as feminine and others as masculine when, in actuality, they are human and exist in every human person differently. But the arrogation of power by men down the millennia allowed for two perceptions of mercy to develop: the one granted by a superior to an inferior, and the one lived in collaborative relationships where the family/community was considered more important than personal gratification. The first is less mercy and more pardon because it has the element of forgiveness but not necessarily the compassion and inclusion to complete it. The second recognises the need for a 'feeling with' the other (compassion) and a welcoming of the other into renewed healthy relationships (inclusion) to complete the process.

When we view the evolution of the human race and its growth till now, we cannot but acknowledge the depths of mercy that women lived, whether out of choice or not, but certainly for survival and out of great strength. Nor can we ignore the reality that men both shunned this perception of mercy and used the other selectively to gain them popularity instead of using it to build a more just and equitable world.

Women have endured battering, rape, humiliation, degradation and worse, but they have survived, and survived with less bitterness than should have resulted. The constant experience of oppression and rejection should have left deep scars of trauma and resentment, but women have rather chosen to fight for rights collectively, encouraging an equitable worldview rather than vengeance for the millennia of shame. They have opted for equality and role-sharing rather than dominance and role-reversal. This can only come from a combination of compassion, forgiveness, and inclusion is a combination that has the potential to change the world as we know it.

If men truly seek to be a part of a new world, a harmonious world, they would need to live this quality of mercy, for it is the mercy of the Divine, the Goddess of love and life, the Mother who includes all and empowers all. She doesn't grant us mercy as water to thirsting beggars; she lives mercy with us as collaborators in the great Life that breathes in us and unites us.

The Year of Mercy initiated by Francis is an opportunity for us to explore mercy as a lived experience of equitable and just relationships, to seek to rediscover gentleness and acceptance of the uniqueness and beauty of the other, to change our definition of power and strength to that of collaborative energy rather than competitive ambition. It is even more an opportunity for men to take the leap of faith into feminism as an ideology of equality and harmony that lives mercy in its very essence.

Mercy to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)

Virginia Saldanha

Ms. Virginia Saldanha is a women's rights activist and a theologian. She is a former Executive Secretary of Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) Office of Laity and Family, and of Women's Desk of the CBCI.

From the start of his Papacy Pope Francis has eschewed the pomp and grandeur of his office to come down to the level of the ordinary person. In reaching out to the least and the lost he has endeared himself to most people in the world. He has demonstrated that compassion comes before the law. With the opening of the Holy Door on December 8th, 2015, Pope Francis launched the Year of Mercy in the Church.

His famous response to a question on LGBT persons “Who am I to judge” illustrates his concern for people overrides the enforcement of law. Why would Pope Francis feel inadequate about judging LGBT persons? Even though he occupies the highest position in the Church where he can promulgate laws, he perhaps wants to convey to us that he refuses to take the place of God who alone will judge every person. It is a position of humility, acknowledging human inadequacy in passing judgment on people whom we are not fully equipped to understand because 'we are not in their shoes'. He probably also realises that a lot of the laws were formulated in times when science and research into human genetics and behaviour was minimal or absent. We are all aware that injustice was done to Galileo because of this same reason which was finally rectified only in the late 20th century.

The idea that homosexuality is a choice, is totally wrong. There is no scientific warrant for the claim that homosexuality is a choice or that they can make a decision to change or that medical procedures can change the body they are born into. In a comprehensive review

of the literature on the subject of sexual orientation David G. Myers, professor of psychology at Hope College, Michigan, USA, observed that based on all the available evidence, most psychologists “view sexual orientation as neither wilfully chosen nor wilfully changed.” In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association voted to no longer consider homosexuality a mental disorder, and the American Psychological Association took a similar step in 1975.

The American Anthropological Association, the world's largest organisation studying culture, released a statement in 2004. “Statement on Marriage and the Family”. It said “The results of more than a century of anthropological research on households, kinship relationships, and families, across cultures and through time, provide no support whatsoever for the view that either civilisation or viable social orders depend upon marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution. Rather, anthropological research supports the conclusion that a vast array of family types, including families built upon same sex partnerships can contribute to stable and humane societies.” The Association strongly opposed a constitutional amendment limiting marriage to heterosexual couples.

When applied to religious or clerical life, the virtue of chastity is viewed as a gift given to a relative few - those who enter religious communities or become priests. When applied to LGBT people, there is no talk about chastity as a “gift.” Rather, the Church teaches that all LGBT persons must refrain from all sexual intimacy. It is a demand, an obligation, across the board, for all.

The Gospels reveal Jesus had close relationships with men and women and taught nothing specifically about sexuality. Early Christian communities, influenced by Greek stoicism, infused the church with some of its earliest negative attitudes about sex. So negative were views on sex that concessions were made to sexual intercourse as a necessity to maintain human propagation.

Some of this negativity lifted from Catholic sexual ethics after Thomas Aquinas settled on understandings of nature and natural law theology as a moral guide in matters of sexuality. Insights

gathered from 20th-century natural and social sciences in terms of what it means to be fully human have struggled to gain a foothold in official Catholic teachings on moral theology, but with limited success.

The institutional church professes that all expressions of sexual intimacy must be limited to marriage and must always be open to procreation. These teachings eliminate gays and lesbians from having any licit intimate relations. The Catholic hierarchy has routinely rebuffed efforts by Catholic theologians to introduce a more pastoral moral theology.

However official church teachings call the faithful to tolerance and acceptance of LGBT persons. This can be a good starting point to our fuller understanding of LGBT persons as created in the image and likeness of God instead of calling them “intrinsically disordered” and homosexual relations as “acts of great depravity” (CCC 2357).

Mercy is synonymous with compassion, understanding and kindness. In this year of mercy, can each of us make an effort to be compassionate to LGBT persons to make every effort to understand their situation, instead of passing judgement and ridiculing them. In the 21st century there is much information available to help us understand LGBT persons. Can we see them as human persons created in the image and likeness of God; people for whom Jesus came to give life, life in abundance.

Cardinal Oswald Gracias of the Archdiocese of Bombay recently spoke to *The Hindu* about the public opposition to Section 377, which criminalises homosexuality. He explained.....

“For me it's a question of understanding that it's an orientation. I know there is still research being done whether it's a matter of choice or matter of orientation and there are two opinions on this matter. But I believe may be people have this orientation that God has given them and for this reason they should not be ostracised from society. The Church is concerned, and if you're Christian or catholic and if you're part of the Church you have to have compassion, sympathy and understanding towards them.”

Let us, during this Year of Mercy, make an effort to stay silent rather than judge or make a negative comment. Let us make a sincere effort to learn more about LGBT persons as an act of mercy. Let us develop a “Culture of Encounter” suggested by Pope Francis earlier in his papacy. A genuine encounter with LGBT persons or their parents would require a lot of sensitivity, it will help us gain an insight into their reality, their struggles, their pain and their hopes. On December 8, Pope Francis said “We have to put mercy before judgement, and in every case God's judgement will always be in the light of his mercy. Let us abandon all fear and dread, for these do not befit men and women who are loved. Instead, let us live the joy of encounter with the grace that transforms all.” When we do all this we will be helping to bring to a section of persons the fullness of life that Christ came to give to every human person.

Women Witnesses of Mercy

Reena D'Souza SSpS

Reena D'Souza SSpS is the Assistant Director of Streevani. She has completed her master's in Social Work and is a Law graduate.

The stories have began long time ago with those women, their mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers..... Stories that have been repeated over the ages, over and over again. Stories of pain and suffering, of survival and hope, of tears and struggles. Yet there has been always time for reconciliation, forgiveness and mercy, time to forgive and time to forget.¹

These stories to be told and re-told, repeated and re-claimed, remembered and re-affirmed by us all.

She is beaten black and blue, her face is disfigured with bruises, she cannot open her eyes fully, she cannot close her lips properly as they are bleeding, she cannot lift her arms they are painful. But she is ready to go back to him.

She was a lovely child at her mother's side, she was a loving sister to her brother and she was an intelligent employee at the work place till she got married. Her beauty, joy, cheer everything is vanished in 6 months of her married life.

He comes in the night unable to balance himself. His movement says he is not in his senses, yet walks in as the boss of the house, creating a scene -he pulls her hair in anger, he beats the children when they cry, pushes the food served for him, nothing is according

¹World Court of Women against War, for Peace, November 16, 2015, Mount Carmel College, Bangalore.

to his taste... It is the same story every night... Yet she cannot think of walking away from him. Where will she go with her children? She loves him and wants to live with him.

Every woman who comes to us has a story; some bad, some worse. As we look around and see there are so many wounded women who pass through this type of agony silently. We try to analyse their problems with many questions in mind. Often unable to find neither a solution nor any answer. For the vast majority of women coping with domestic abuse, there is no option but to endure it mutely. They are truly women witnesses of mercy, they have a heart which is ready to forgive and forget for the sake of their children and family. Some of the women, who are beaten, broken, deserted, divorced and struggle in their daily life refuse to be victimized by forgiving and that's truly being mercy.

A woman who handles multiple roles as a mother, homemaker, and a working woman faces various challenges in her daily living. The stressful life events woman undergo reduces their effectiveness and they may experience physical disability, social withdrawal and depression. The traumatic experience a woman undergoes also results in disruption of social fabric such as family relations, peer and social relationships as well as association with cultural or religious groups, her entire life revolves around their daily routine, tying hard to find time for her different roles. Do we accompany her in mercy and compassion?

Woman at the grassroots, as opposed to the popular notion of man being the breadwinner of the family, is often the one who earns for the family, in towns they are mostly domestic workers. She is the driving force towards development of her family. May be her biggest achievement in life is being allowed to step out of her house to work, gaining self-confidence to speak to other women, learning skills such as stitching or housekeeping, earn respect of her in-laws or being a member of Self Help Group or a support group.

However, there are systems in our society which disqualify her image or such potentiality due to misogynistic concepts. A woman is either named or blamed to make her feel subordinate. Her body is unfortunately, assaulted and disfigured by those who should take care of her and are her life partners. The forms of

sexual slavery, of mutilation of the female body, require us to work to defeat these forms of degradation which reduce it to merely an object. There are so many poor women forced to live in dangerous conditions, exploited, relegated to the margins of society and rendered victims of a throwaway culture.

We live in a world that is increasingly indifferent, if not actually hostile to such values as mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation, and service to the poor and vulnerable, and finding happiness through self-denial. Many times ordinary women are the ones who practice, a yes which is a yes to dying-to-self, to radical emptiness, to humility, to deep listening, and to a life surrendered to love and compassion, devoid of judgement and thirsting for justice.

Mercy is a concept integral to an understanding of God's dealings with humankind. Being merciful is at that moment when you know what you have gone through is very painful, yet you choose to forgive and willing to commit yourself in the relationship, as many women do. It is not a one time task or attitude but every time and each time when the person is hurt. The attitude of mercy, therefore, very well seen in the lives of these ordinary women. It is this attitude that keeps them together, binds them in love and commitment and holds them together in the family. Often these women are witnesses of mercy and compassion, icons for letting go and forgiving. Amidst their difficulties and struggles they can smile. Who else can be real examples of merciful love than these women who practice this virtue every day and every moment of their life? We need to enter into the lives of these women in order to be mercy to others.

According to Pope Francis, *"We need to enter the darkness, the night in which so many of our brothers and sisters live. We need to be able to make contact with them and let them feel our closeness, without letting ourselves be wrapped up in that darkness and influenced by it."* He further says, *"Caring for outcasts and sinners does not mean letting the wolves attack the flock, it means trying to reach everyone by sharing the experience of mercy, which we ourselves have experienced, without ever caving in to the temptation of feeling that we are just or perfect".¹*

There is a constant struggle amongst these women to make their survival easier and better than yesterday. Their strength and energy goes in setting things right, maintaining peace be it in the house or work place. They can neither run away nor escape the reality because there is always a back log that demands them to face the situation. In each situation, they become channels of mercy to those who have lost hope in life.

It is their very struggle that enables us to understand the power and the necessity of mercy. By being merciful they witness the mercy and compassionate heart of God. Their life stories tell us that, the mercy we show to others is what assures us that we do not need to worry about being perfect ourselves. All we really need to do is to make the effort to be the best we can, knowing we will often fail. Then, the mercy of others, the mercy of God is certain for us, as well. St. Catherine of Siena said, "The only thing we can offer to God of value, is to give our love to people as unworthy of it as of God's love."

I would like to end with following lines:

Merciful are those women who have no roof above their head because it's been destroyed, yet they find a place to accommodate even the strangers without complaints.

Merciful are those women whose husbands only yell when they return home, yet they serve them the best food keeping the least for oneself.

Merciful are those women who forgive their children, even if they have become only a burden to the family.

Merciful are those women who wash the utensils and clean the homes of every other woman leaving aside their homes and their kitchen for the last.

¹<http://www.amazon.in/The-Name-God-Is-Mercy/dp/0399588639>
Accessed on 17/01/2016,

Merciful are those women who faithfully fetch the children of their employer and feed them on time, while there is none to pay attention for their children when they return from school.

Merciful are those women who go through abuse and violence every night yet will smile at the others during the day.

Women Religious Lawyers Forum

Exactly 7 years ago around 30 women religious lawyers responded to the invitation of Streevani to gather in Pune to reflect on the theme” Pursuit of Justice : a Prophetic response of Women Religious in India”. Thus the Women Religious Lawyers Forum was initiated in 2008 to provide a platform for all of us to come together, reflect and build a support group under the theme Pursuit of Justice: A Prophetic Response of women religious in India. Since then, we have had sixth annual meetings of the Forum co-organized by Montfort Social Institute, Hyderabad.

The central mission of the Forum is to continue to develop thoughtful and comprehensive learning in jurisprudence, through our annual workshops and publications. Our yearly gatherings helps us to accomplish visible progress in the profession, including increases in the number of women religious lawyers who will take up law as profession and respond to the call of justice ministry in a radical manner.

MISSION STATEMENT

Empowered by the Spirit of God, we are committed to create a just society by promoting justice, equality and dignity of all, especially women.

1. To facilitate solidarity among Women Religious Lawyers
2. To equip and empower women religious lawyers through workshops and conferences on issues related to their profession

3. To network and collaborate with other organisations, peoples movements and
4. To engage in advocacy for change in laws to promote the rights, dignity and justice for all, especially women.
5. To be change agents in demystifying law & its delivery, making it user friendly, easily accessible and available to people.
6. To promote legal education at the grass roots level.

Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace Kottayam Declaration

We, 75 representatives of the National Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace (FORUM) deliberated on the theme, 'Reinventing Religious Life in the Context of India' during its XIV National Convention held at CASA MARIA, Kottayam from February 19 to 22, 2016. Study of the theme with the help of experts and activists, listening to the personal faith journeys of some of the members of the FORUM with the people on the fringes of the society, and the moments of common prayer helped us to understand the ways of the Spirit opening new paths for the religious life of the future. We came to :

- An increased awareness of the challenges to the current forms of religious life: crisis of identity, crisis of mission and crisis of spirituality;
- A better consciousness about the challenges to the mission of the religious in the Indian context: sexual violence, gender and caste discrimination, growing intolerance, hegemonic use of power both in the church and society, religious fundamentalism and the increasing accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few and the worsening conditions of the poor;
- A shocking realization about the injustice done to women in the Church, particularly women religious, and their exploitation and oppression under the garb of spirituality and obedience;
- A realization that de-institutionalizing and liberating Jesus of Nazareth from archaic structures, ritualism and legalism is the first step towards re-inventing religious life;
- A realization that if religious life is to be relevant in the Indian context, it has to be built on the pillars of a secular spirituality that embraces all, imbibing the gift of pluralism in its approach to the world, caring for the earth and its manifold gifts, and respect for the values of human rights;

- A realization that religious life is a call to a prophetic way of living, struggling for truth and justice on behalf of the dispossessed from which shall arise an authentic spirituality that liberates;
- A realization that a handful of individuals who are rooted in the values of the reign of God, and are convinced of their mission can withstand oppressive powers, however mighty, through their determination and unwavering faith in God and in the power in themselves;
- Realization that building and strengthening people's movements is the need of the hour to arrest the combined forces of market fundamentalism, religious fundamentalism and commercialization of religion;
- An understanding that the marginalized people have strengths and resources which are to be mobilized in the process of empowerment of people and their movements;
- An Understanding that solidarity with the disempowered and people on the margins and insertion into their life situation, following the path of Jesus can, re-birth religious life in its true authenticity.

In the above light we commit ourselves :

- To become partners in the struggles of the people both at the micro and macro levels to regain their human dignity and access their human rights;
- To live an authentic spirituality based on the values of Jesus, seeing God in every human person and the historical processes, and in the whole of creation as an antidote to empty religiosity, superstitions and meaningless rituals, and commercialization of God and religion;
- To adopt and promote a simple and sustainable life style that respects the earth and its resources, and the right of our future generations over it;
- To encourage individuals, organizations and institutions to adopt a sustainable environmental policy that protects the scarce resources of the earth and reduces human and animal conflict;
- To initiate a signature campaign against the construction of huge places of worship, particularly churches, squeezing the necessary resources from ordinary people, even while millions of our people are condemned to live in inhuman conditions without even the minimum basic necessities;

- To oppose ideologies that divide people on the basis of religion, caste, gender, rite and language, and work for the evolution of inclusive and egalitarian communities;
- To join struggles for gender equality both within the church and in society and to resist all forms of discrimination against women;
- To oppose the economic policies that lead to the further impoverishment of the poor and destruction of the environment;
- To initiate and to strengthen existing insertion communities, especially of inter-congregational and inter-religious nature, that are truly inclusive, participatory, transparent and continuously reflecting on the socio-political processes that builds solidarity and has transformative power;
- To oppose the growing clericalism and patriarchy both among men and women religious in their world view, spirituality, life style, relationships and structures;
- To resist forced migration and human trafficking, and to work as agents of liberation and empowerment of those who are victims;
- To resist commercialization of education, and to evolve educational methods that is holistic and integral in content, methodology and values;

We are happy to share with all women and men Religious in India and the followers of Jesus our learning during the convention and our commitment to make religious life more relevant in the context of India today.

Jacob Peenikaparambil CMI
National Convener

Manju Kulapuram SCSC
National Secretary

For Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace

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February 22, 2016

**STATEMENT OF
THE RELIGIOUS LAWYERS CONFERENCE
In Pursuit of Justice : A Prophetic response in India
12th - 14th February 2016**

53 members of the Religious Lawyers Forum, a platform of religious Sisters, brothers and priests gathered at Vidhya Deep College, Bangaluru, from 12-14, February 2016, for their Annual Assembly to deliberate on the theme, "Pursuit of Justice: A Prophetic Response in India". Jointly organized by Streevani (Pune), Montfort Social Institute (Hyderabad) and Indian Social Institute (Delhi), the Conference was inaugurated by Ms. Dona Fernandez, a well-known social activist and founder of Vimochana. Inaugural message was given by Dr. Jacob Arackal, Provincial Superior of the Claretians and a lawyer himself. Among the resource persons at the Conference were Bro. Varghese Theckanath s.g., Director, Montfort Social Institute, Hyderabad; Prof. V.S. Elizabeth and Prof. Babu Mathew of National Law School University, Bangaluru; and Sr. Julie George, Director, Streevani.

During the three days of study, reflection and deliberations aided by resource persons and legal activists who are at the forefront in protecting democratic values evolved from the freedom struggle and the Constitution of the country, we examined the factors that sustain us in our mission as lawyers; the obstacles and challenges that come on our way in fulfilling our task; and our way forward as prophetic people engaged in the ministry of ushering in justice for our people.

The sharing and dialogue among ourselves helped us recognize

the factors that sustain us in our ministry. Our personal encounters with the Divine in prayer help us to give ourselves generously to the poor and the dispossessed that knock at the doors of the courts of law for remedy. A deeply ingrained personal quest for justice, the fraternal support we receive from our fellow religious and communities, and the example of our peers and elders in the profession, who relentlessly seek justice on behalf of the poor, contribute immensely to our spiritual vitality that is crucial in our ministry.

There is no denying the fact that there are challenges and obstacles on our way. Among them are our dearth of talent and the patience necessary for continuous learning, financial constraints, and conflict of interests in terms of our responsibilities to our community routines and the demands of the legal practice, experience of loneliness in the profession, attacks from vested interests, and lack of a passionate love for our profession. The lengthy processes in the delivery of justice and institutional corruption are no less challenges.

In spite of the many impediments and pitfalls, we believe that we cannot turn back from our prophetic call to be legal professionals ushering in justice and peace, especially for those who have no access to it, and those without the means to obtain it.

Our way forward is no less arduous. On a personal level, we need to establish credibility about ourselves and our prophetic mission in the context of our religious communities, the local church and the society at large. We have to develop rapport with civil society organizations and individuals who share the same profession. We have to develop authentic relationships with the marginalized people. We have to establish networks with the local civil authorities. We have to work in solidarity with other religious and priests who are legal practitioners. We need to move towards local, regional and national networks among ourselves. We have to articulate the spirituality we share as legal professionals in the service of the reign of God. Equally important, we have to constantly learn to become competent, knowledgeable and confident lawyers.

We look forward to the creation of a forum of religious and priests in the legal practice at the district, state and national level. It shall be our commitment to promote legal knowledge among the masses through preparation and publication of material, and providing training. We have to encourage more and more of our brothers and sisters in our communities and the Church at large to take up the legal profession as mission. We also have to facilitate and inspire those already trained in the profession to take up practice.

It is our vocation to be committed God seekers who have imbibed qualities of prophetic critique of unjust structures and principalities; standing for truth and justice, even when no one else does. Following the example of our forefathers and mothers in religious life, we shall re-read our charisms through the 'optic of the poor' for today. We commit ourselves anew, to develop a critique of law and the legal system, so that the justice that is obtained also ushers in care, healing, and compassion; that the inherent structural injustice within our society and even within the legal system that militates against equality and rights of women, Dalits, Adivasis, the Backward Classes, LGBTQs, unorganized workers and other vulnerable people are addressed; and that our legal practice rises above the letter of the law, to be truly transformative both in principles and content. We realize that we are called to render our legal profession when there is an unprecedented rise of false nationalism based on exclusion, divisiveness and majoritarianism. The principles of democracy and the rule of law are faced with great challenges. We need to create new alliances everywhere based on the values and principles of democracy and the Constitution. We commit ourselves to it.

For further details
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Email : streevani@gmail.com
Website : www.streevani.org

Indian Christian Women's Movement (ICWM)

ICWM was born at the National Women's Conference which held on the theme “Paradigm Shifts in Vatican II and its Impact on Women” co-organized by Streevani Pune, NBCLC Bangalore, ISI Bangalore, Montfort Social Institute Hyderabad and CBCI Office for Women at the NBCLC, Bangalore from 8th to 11th January, 2014.

VISION :

A sisterhood of solidarity across boundaries to change unjust beliefs, practices and structures that perpetuate patriarchy and accentuate the exploitation of women at various levels.

A discipleship of equals as a gospel imperative, that will work towards solidarity and sisterhood to be a voice for Christian women at the National level.

We dream of being joined by men who believe that a discipleship of equals is important in the Church.

OBJECTIVES :

As a dynamic movement, we are committed to :

1. Be an advocacy group that can speak out with one united voice against violence, for the protection of the rights and dignity of women in civil and ecclesial structures.
2. Initiate campaigns of resistance against policies and power games that lead to the diminishment, humiliation and even death for women.

3. Promote capacity-building for women's social, cultural, political and ecclesial leadership and facilitate the mainstreaming of women's knowledge and knowledge building.
4. Partner with existing Christian women's organizations in order to create a joint perspective on gender justice and feminist theologizing, strategies for ecological restoration and social transformation.
5. Support justice issues of dalits, tribals and other subaltern, marginalized groups, even to the point to providing emergency services in terms of ideas, referrals, protests, solutions, finance, legal helps, shelter, etc. in times of need.
6. Establish a bridge between women's organizations and Church organizations as well as interfaith initiatives that address women's concerns.

ICWM Secretariat :

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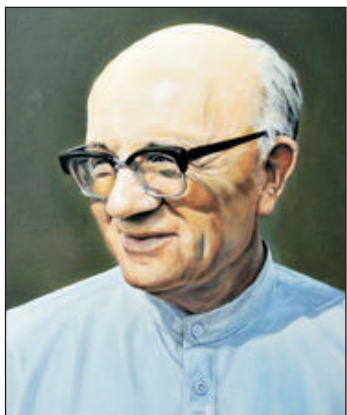
Website : www.icwmindia.org

Forth coming Event :

**National Consultation
Impact of Religion and Culture
on Women's Empowerment :
An Indian Perspective**

**9th - 12th September, 2016
at Montfort Social Institute(MSI), Hyderabad**

TRIBUTE TO OUR FOUNDERS



Dr. Fr. Engelbert Zeitler SVD



Dr. Frances Maria Yasas

“Last century the Church lost the workers. This century it is going to lose women, unless something is done soon. It was in this context I first started some sort of an Institute, from where I hoped a movement for women could originate. After a long period of trial, error and failure ultimately were able to establish what is today called Streevani in Pune”

Late Dr. Fr. Engelbert Zeitler SVD
10th February 1984

OUR PUBLICATION



Subhash Anand (b. 1943), retired as Professor of Indian Philosophy and Religion, from Jnanadeep Vidyapeeth, Pune, in 2008. Currently he is engaged in promoting inter-religious dialogue in

Udaipur. His publications include *The Local Church and Inculturation* (1985), *Major Hindu Festivals: A Christian Appreciation* (1991), *The Way of Love: The Bhagavata Doctrine of Bhakti* (1998), *Story as Theology: An Interpretative Study of Five Episodes from the Mahabharata* (1998), *Siva's Thousand Names: An Interpretative Study of Shivashtakamini* (1998), *Hinduism: A Christian Response* (2001), *Hindu Inspiration for Christian Reflection: Towards a Hindu-Christian Theology* (2004), *Major Hindu Contributions: A Christian Appreciation* (2006), *The Eternal Stranger: An Interpretative Study of Five Siva Episodes in the Mahabharata* (2009), *A Preface for an Indian Christianity* (2012), *May They All Be One: An Ecumenical Theology of the Church* (2013).

His articles and book-reviews have appeared in the following journals: *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, *Asian Christian Review*, *Asian Horizons*, *Brahmavidyā-Adyar Library Bulletin*, *Catechetical India*, *Concilium International Journal of Theology*, *Indian Journal of Spirituality*, *Indian Missiological Review*, *Indian Theological Studies*, *Ishvani Documentation and Mission Digest*, *Jeevachara: A Journal of Christian Interpretation*, *Jnanadeep: Pune Journal of Religious Studies*, *Journal of Dharma*, *Journal of Gandhian Studies*, *Journal of Indian Theology*, *Journal of Religious Studies*, *Mission Today*, *Parvati: Selections de l'Inde*, *Third Millennium*, *Vidyapeeth Journal of Theological Reflection*, *Word and Worship*.

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