

Sr. Julie George from the Streevani Team familiarizes the Consultation with a brief summary of the Gender Policy book (originally presented in a power point) highlighting the milestone moments of the Policy in terms of content and structure. She also gives an update of the KCBC Gender policy workshop held in Kannur, Kerala.

The four panelists, each shedding light on *Gender Relations and Suggesting Alternatives* from different angles, present a comprehensive and balanced view of the whole issue of gender relations in the Church. They look at the problem from the point of view of *Ministries, From Lay Perspective, in Seminary Formation and in Women Religious Formation*.

A resumè of the guided group discussion takes us to yet deeper realities of the gender dynamics. The Consultation Statement prepared by a drafting team and commended on by all the participants, summarizes excellently well the central message of the Consultation. Sexual abuse of Women is rampant in the Church. We need to face this problem, analyze it accurately and respond adequately and press the hierarchy for appropriate structures and policies which will curb such abuses in the future.

This Issue of *Birthing a New Vision* also features a brief update of Streevani activities from May to September 2010.

We are very glad to announce to you the Editorial Team of *Birthing a New Vision*. Feel welcome to address your queries to any of the Team members in the email id given on page 2.

Dear Friends, it's our hope and dream that reading *Birthing a New Vision* will generate in us interest and commitment to promote a discipleship of equals in our ministry. Let's not merely peruse through *Birthing a New Vision* like indifferent and detached readers but work towards making gender relations in the Church more integral and just. Let us direct all our skills towards a humble, trusting, and searching relationship with all the People of God, empowering and affirming the gifts of the Spirit in every person, and, together with all the People of God, ministering with a passion to transform the degrading reality of the "little ones" of our world.

Good Reading.

Sr. Mary John SSPs and the Editorial Team

Sr. Mary John SSPs joined Streevani Team in June 2010

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**GENDER RELATIONS IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
A CALL TO INTEGRITY AND JUSTICE**

Introduction

I thank this group for coming together for this consultation to address our deep concerns for the wounds that are festering among the people of God destroying their faith because they identify Church authority with God. Our responsibility is to the Catholic Church which we claim as our own, to help in bringing healing and wholeness.

Let us therefore be faithful to Christ and ask ourselves, if Jesus were here with us, what would he be doing?

I bring before this group the victims/survivors and their stories so that we can be sensitized and come to an agreement on a course of action in India.

At the very outset I would like to say that I personally know many good priests and appreciate their commitment to live their vows despite the challenges. We do not want to turn this into a man versus woman issue, but look at it as an issue that is the product of history steeped in the patriarchal power and domination that was absorbed from the monarchical system in which the institution took its root. Unfortunately the Church evolved deviating from the challenging but freeing relationships taught by Jesus. Today we all suffer due to this deviation. *'Man' has broken the right order that should reign within 'himself' as well as between himself and others and all creatures.*” (*Gaudium et Spes Ch. I No.13*)

No one can deny that the Church has played an important role in human history. Through many of her faithful followers down the ages the Church has been a voice of the poor, marginalized, victims of conflicts, injustice and violence. I believe that the deep seated values of altruism and respect for human rights seen in the West come from their Christian roots. In our own country Christians are appreciated for their outreach honesty and integrity. Our institutions of education and health are greatly appreciated by people of all faiths. We should not loose this influence that the Church has wielded and continues to wield in the world. Therefore our concern is to restore to help the Church to move back to the challenging mission of Jesus, as well as to find ways to address the roots of the problems we encounter as we read the signs of the times today.

The Basis for gender relations

The first account of creation is for me, the basis for the relationship of men and women in the Church. *“But God did not create man as a solitary being. From the beginning “male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27) This partnership of man and woman constitutes the first form of communion between persons. For by his innermost nature man is a social being; and if he does not enter into relations with others he can neither live nor develop his gifts.”* (Gaudium et Spes Ch. 1 No.12)

I like to use the Chinese symbol of “ying-yang” to express the truth of Genesis 1:27. Man and woman are different, having characteristics of the other in various degrees (the little dots in the yin and yang), that facilitate the relationship between the two. Like “ying-yang” they sit together comfortably to form a circle, representing wholeness which is the image of God. This wholeness is needed in all areas of life to bring harmony and peace.

Therefore one of our big concerns is to help women come forward to make their contributions to restore the balance of the image of God. Perhaps we need to help men to look at the little dot of feminine within themselves and develop the qualities that will help them become more sensitive.

In hearing the stories of victims, I hope that we can recognize the patterns of patriarchal conditioning both for men and women that has destroyed the relationships that Christ intended for us.

Vision of Church in the Light of Vatican II and FABC documents:

Jesus *“established after his death and resurrection, a new ‘brotherly’(fraternal) communion among all who received him in faith and love; this is the communion of his own body, the Church, in which everyone as members would render mutual service in the measure of the different gifts bestowed on each.”* (Gaudium et Spes Ch 2 No.32)

Drawing from the documents of Vatican II the FABC articulated a vision for the Church in Asia at the 5th Plenary Assembly in Bandung, Indonesia which is -

“A Participatory and Co-responsible Church – living as a Communion of Communities. Where the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to all the faithful -- lay, Religious and cleric alike -- are recognized and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realized.”

The Problems that keep us from actualizing the Vision:

1. Not Community by Hierarchy.

Sr. Theresa Kane, former President of the LCWR in the US wrote an article in the NCR recently titled “Woman why are you crying” where she states “*One of the severe tensions we have in the church today is between the vision we have of community and governance that is monarchical.*” We know that monarchy which is synonymous with hierarchy in the Church, unfortunately does not respect cooperation, participation and inclusion of women. This is one of the reasons the SCC movement where women participate actively in the Church is still struggling to take off.

2. Impact of Image of God and Catholic Teachings on women:

The research done by Annie Imbens and Ineke Jonker and documented in the book “Christianity and Incest”, explains how the impact of Christian teaching and images of God/man/woman on woman has relegated her to the position of subservience and submission to the will of God and men in the Church. The resultant socialization of women to submission, to see themselves as lesser persons through the formation they are put through as well as the structures that govern us in the Church, is what makes them vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, violence and sexual abuse..

They sum up the victims' image of God as follows:

“The God of our fathers is God who allocates power to men to rule over women. The God of our mothers and their daughters who were rendered powerless had little opportunity to be heard and to be named.” (Annie Imbens & Ineke Jonker - Christianity and incest – Burns :& Oates, Great Britan 1992)

In Pope Benedict's Letter on the collaboration of men and women, the references used to depict the male are characterized as superior to the female.

God makes himself known as the Bridegroom who loves Israel his Bride.

If, in this relationship, God can be described as a “jealous God” (cf. Ex 20:5; Nah 1:2) and Israel denounced as an “adulterous” bride or “prostitute” (cf. Hos 2:4-15; Ez 16:15-34), ...

3. The Power of the Priest:

This inordinate superiority of men over women in the Church, where male priests are said to represent Jesus and act in the name of God, who are the 'mediators' of God's grace (through the administration of sacraments), automatically put women in a position of subservience and inferiority.

Compounding this situation is the fact that all decisions with regard to laws and rules in the Church are made by male priests, and women are compelled to abide by these laws or move out. They do not even dare to raise questions on the issues that affect them. As a result women's rights are short changed in the name of faith and obedience to the law of the Church. The message to women is that their intelligence is inadequate.

The root of inequality of gender relations in the Church comes from the construct and exercise of this priestly power. The patriarchal and hierarchal setup in the Church, has successfully kept women in a state of unquestioning dependence and obedience.

Mandatory celibacy for priests who cannot live up to this vow is also a major problem.

The aura that is built around the priesthood as a man set apart, the vows of celibacy poverty, and obedience convince people that indeed these men are dedicated to the service of God. Medieval historian Mayke de Jong writes, *"It was from sexual purity that the priesthood was believed to derive its power."*

The Church is seen to be lagging behind wider society in recognizing the changing role of women as one of the 'signs of the times' and affirming the equality of women.

Problems in Relationships Between Men And Women In The Family & Church:

1. Man as Head of the Family

Scripture is used to establish man as the head of the family and woman his obedient subordinate. Many conservative family movements which are very active in the Church promote this view of man-woman partnership. She is kept dependant and submissive to her husband. This relationship results in a lot of violence as dependency on a man means she has to keep asking him for permissions and allowing him to make decisions for her. Violence is used for domination and control of the wife if she decides to move out of the line of control.

Incest and Wife beating

A man used to be able to beat his wife with impunity and to terrorize and sexually abuse his children as well without any outside interference of any kind. Brothers abused with impunity because they knew their parents would not believe the sister if she complained. This is changing now that civil society has made laws to protect women from violence.

When victims dared to question their male relatives about abuse they were told that all fathers did that, that it was good for them, or that they themselves had given cause because they were evil and seductive like Eve. They could not talk to Mother about it as she would not understand or she was too weak. (Annie Imbens & Ineke Jonker - Christianity and incest – Burns : & Oates, Great Britan 1992)

Although the Church has teachings against incest, it has never been talked about loudly in the Church in Asia/India. It has never been condemned as a sin. Men continue to claim their right and privilege to sexually abuse girls/women in their family. In her foreword to the book "Brave Little Women – A study of incest"¹, Mary John Mananzan quotes a father who righteously explained his conduct "She is mine. She is my product. I have the first right to her before others". She goes on to analyse his statement as coming from the legacy of the absolute right of the father in the Hebrew and Roman society, where the father owned not only the household but the slaves and women and children as well. The core idea in patriarchy.

Vulnerability of Women in an Unequal Power Relationship: I personally feel that incest in the family is also related to the sex abuse issue by priests. Both arise from the fact that the victims are in an unequal power relationship. In both instances, the abuser is someone who is looked up to and culturally respected. He is seen as someone you can turn to, the person who is in charge and in control. The ordained male priest is in control. He is the mediator of God's word and grace to women. This 'power' is often used to dominate and control women. In cases where a priest makes unjust demands, he manipulates this 'power' to get his wishes/desires. We have enough of complaints from sisters where a priest uses his power to celebrate the Eucharist as a tool for controlling and dominating them.

In the confessional women come as 'vulnerable sinners'. They trust the priest with their deepest secrets of weakness and human frailty. From stories of victims, it is evident that this has been used as another tool to manipulate women according to the desires of the priest.

Relationship between men and women in the Church

As in marriage, so also in the Church, women remain as decorative appendages to the male superior partner. She hands over all power and control to the man and humbly submits herself to him because she believes that she is being faithful to her religious beliefs.

¹Published by the Institute of Women's Studies, St. Scholastica's College, Manila.

History reveals that the Church has not carried into practice the challenging but liberative message of the Gospel: that all human beings, as children of God, share in the same dignity and esteem and enjoy the same rights. The Church that led its believers to accept martyrdom as a witness to their faith has failed to apply the Gospel message to abolish all discrimination based on sex within its own structures as well as in civil society where it exercises a decisive power.²

Sisters are treated as infants in the Church and not respected as mature and independent adults. The male Church leadership decides everything about the life of the sisters from their dress to their prayer/prayer times, and basically everything to do with their lives in the convent. This reality is completely in violation of the women's human rights as well as of the teachings of Jesus. As long as the sisters in the Church subject themselves to patriarchal authority and dominance they are upheld as paragons of virtue. The outspoken ones who question and oppose the domination of patriarchal authority are labeled as 'rebels'.

Women as Victims of Sexual Abuse:

Sexual abuse of women in the Church, especially of religious sisters is prevalent but well hidden. The same culture and socialization that subjects women to male authority, maintains the silence behind such abuse. Calcutta Jesuit Provincial Fr. George Pattery speaking to Union of Catholic Asian News at the February 2006 General Body meeting of the Conference of Religious of India (CRI), said “The tendency is to silence the victims whenever complaints of sexual abuse are made. From now on, we will work to formulate a policy that will ensure justice for all within the Church.” Montfort Brother Mani Mekunnel, Executive Secretary of CRI spoke of the need to chart a policy on sexual abuse of religious within the Church.

The lack of any action on this issue within the Church shows that the Church has failed to take steps to eliminate violence to women. The opposition of the Convention for Elimination of Discrimination and All form of Violence Against Women (CEDAW) expressed by the WUCWO (World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations) women's leadership to the Secretary General of the UN,³ came as a shock to women leaders in the Church. After receiving inputs from Monsignor Carlos Antonio Simon Vazquez, under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Family, who addressed the board about the *agendas in the United Nations that*

²Metti SCC, *Redefining Identity and Reweaving of Women Religious Life. Paper Presented at 2008 Meeting of Indian Women Theologians' Forum.*

³ *Zenith News*, Nov.24th 2009.

undermine God's laws, the group of women made a decision that implicates women in the Church across the world. It is an example of women abdicating their right to think for themselves. It is ironic that this was made public just a few days before the international day against violence to women on November 26th. The women accepted the ideas and thinking of the male leadership, opposing the whole document of CEDAW, even in an area as serious as violence to women.

Findings from a research done in Australia.

“The failure to address sexual scandals, harassment and sexual injustice in the Church was experienced as a serious barrier along with the Church's reluctance to reflect on the underlying causes of the problem. The gap between pastoral practice and official Church teaching, particularly in the area of sexual morality was noted. A submission from a married couple highlighted the issue of clergy sexual abuse involving exploitative relationships between priests and adult women. It was noted that the sexualizing of the relationship was normally at the instigation of the priest at a time of personal crisis or difficulty in the life of the woman.”⁴

Many cases of sexual abuse, I realize, take place during retreats, counseling and confession.

At least two victims, who have spoken to me in the last three months, confirm that they went to the priest for counseling during a retreat. One even related the stories of other victims who have been to the retreat because of personal problems and have been sexually abused. Since then, speaking to several people across the world, I have come across stories of a similar nature.

When a priest who has power and authority with the trappings of divine authority abuses a person (child, youth or woman of any age), it is abuse of the rights and dignity of the human person. It is a crime and a sin!!

Women in the Church are socialized to see the priest as someone who is above human frailty since he operates in the name of God. Being celibate, therefore, is equated to an angel beyond a sexual being. They tend to trust them fully with their own stories of sexual problems, boyfriends and marriage. The socialization of women renders them vulnerable to sexual abuse. Even religious formation of women prepares them to be victims; hence they are the most vulnerable to clerical abuse.

⁴*Woman and Man One in Christ Jesus – Report on the participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia. Ch 4 no. 4.7 Harper Collins, April 1999.*

It is said that up to date no religious congregation of women has had the courage to take up this issue officially..

One detects a great fear when it comes to women religious reporting abuse, as the survey done in the US university of St. Louis reports “they trade in their silence for what they have to lose” This is indicative of the oppressive power of the authority, which does not make for true mission of Christ.

The discrimination against women is evident even in the handling of women victims of abuse. We hear of guidelines to deal with pedophilia and young people below the age of 18 years, and recently added has been mentally handicapped persons, but no mention of dealing with women victims.

If religious congregations are dealing with women victims within the congregation, what happens to victims who are lay persons? And the priests are left free to continue with his sexual exploits? This is no solution to the problem.

When relationships between priests and women in their pastoral care turn into a sexual relationship, the woman again pays the price as a victim not only losing her standing and relationships in the faith community, but also her faith.

“We would submit that such sexual relationships between priests and women in their pastoral care represent a serious impediment to these women's participation in the Church. Frequently these are women who before the sexual involvement have shown a high level of commitment to the Church and have demonstrated some degree of leadership potential. The effects of their relationships are such as to render them incapable of contributing to the life of the Church, significantly marginalizing them and often causing a loss of faith.”⁵

Consensual Sex?

I disagree that there can be consensual sex between women and priests for the following reasons:

1. The inequality of power relationship of women and men in the Church.
2. The women who approach the priest for confession or counseling or with a personal problem are doing so from a position of vulnerability.
3. Women respect priests and trust them because they see him as a man of God dedicated to serve people through the vows he has taken.

⁵*Woman and Man One in Christ Jesus – Report on the participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia. Harper Collins, April 1999.*

From my interaction with victims, I realize that much confusion arises in the minds of the victim when she is faced with the sexual advances from a priest, especially if she is approaching the priest from a position of vulnerability. They are caught unawares and feel paralysed to make a suitable response. Therefore inaction on this account is misconstrued as consent! Consent has to be explicit, where the woman says a clear “yes” when asked if she wants to have sexual relations. Most often there has been surprise and straight forward seduction of the victim. I would compare it to the stories related by the former child victims of abuse, who look back and analyse the situation now as adults.

The book written by a former victim relates this experience very explicitly. Many would summarily dismiss her case as one of consensual sex. But her struggle to prove the contrary, if one is open to see it, is very clear. When she generally questioned the provincial of the priest who abused her, without disclosing her case about his policy of sexual abuse he wrote back

“I would never take the view that the woman must have been the initiator. I accept that a priest, in a time of weakness may sin, but I could never condone his conduct or seek to blame it on others.”

It has to be noted that in cases of sexual abuse of a subordinate by a person in power within a strongly hierarchical structure, victims have the same vulnerabilities whether they are 8 or 18 or 48. So the question arises whether there can be consensual sex among persons who are unequal?

I am reminded of the cases of sexual abuse of domestic workers by the male in a household. Can we call such sex relationship as consensual?

It is clear the abuse continues because the knowledge that nothing will be done about it guarantees protection. This has to stop. Silence is what keeps this violence alive.

Victims losing faith in the system that does not give justice to them:

An Asian religious sister who experienced the sexual misbehaviour of an Indian priest in the UK, has been courageous enough to pursue this man to bring him to repentance and change by facing up to his sexual misbehaviour with women. I have been accompanying her in this challenging journey. I am sad to say that at the beginning she received minimum empathy from the hierarchy in India, and very shabby responses to her complaints. Later, after my article appeared she got letters of apology but the impression I got is that they were trying their best to tell her “we will take care of him; you just get on with your life.”

Her shock at her own congregation's leadership response, “Forgive and forget”, was something she found very hard to take. She made a long

distance call to me to share her hurt and anger.

The victims are not given the satisfaction of knowing that their 'abuser' is brought to repentance and true contrition for his sins against women in the Church. All victims say "we fear he is free to do the same to other women/children."

The book written by the former sister in Canada documents in detail her pursuit for justice within the system and her extreme frustration with the same. She finally left the congregation and the Church and wrote her book. She now works to help all victims of abuse.

Here is the testimony of a male:

I am a 45 year old man who was once a seminarian with a religious order. I was sexually assaulted by one of the priests in the seminary. I never spoke up at the time for many reasons that included my own shame; the fear of compromising the career I had chosen; and my own immaturity at the time. I left religious life after two years. I eventually spoke up to a former provincial ten years afterwards. I learned that the priest, who abused me, abused others and was even arrested and has a criminal record. Despite a 30 year career of abusing children, the Order shuffled him around from community to community and continent to continent where he continued to prey upon more victims. This man belonged in jail, not religious life!

I spoke up two years ago to the highest levels of the Church in Rome about this case. I was never responded to, despite confirmations from the Nuncio who assured me the many correspondences were delivered. My objective was to have him laicized. I achieved this through a constant presence in the media both in the United States and in Italy where he was lastly hiding out. The public "scandal" that was raised was too much for the Order. The priest was asked to voluntarily request his own dispensation. How sad it is that this Church ignored the crimes of this man for over thirty years. Complicity never protects children and other vulnerable people from sexual predators.

I would strongly urge anyone who was abused by a religious figure to contact civil authorities to investigate and prosecute. Sexual assault, rape and statutory rape are criminal acts, not just sins. They need to be prosecuted, so that others and the larger society can be safe. Anyone advocating for victims of crimes should be encouraging victims to contact the police, not their superiors. Religious institutions who instruct its membership to handle this "in house," and in a "family manner" are themselves acting criminally by not reporting crimes. This behavior is wrong and is no longer acceptable in the 21st century.

A Deepening Crisis

The Silence -

I reiterate, there are good priests. But there will also be some who betray their vocation by acting contrary to what they profess to be. This is not the crisis. *“A crisis explodes when there is no longer a large enough reserve of psychologically well balanced and observant (saintly) and honest bishops and priests to counter the influence and power of corrupt and hypocritical men in power.” (NCR article Beneath the Child abuse August, 2010)*

There is a clerical culture of secrecy. A culture that is aware of the existence of widespread sexual activity among clerics, but deny it, cover it up, silence victims, that willy nilly keeps the culture alive. People are becoming aware of this culture.

This is the age of communication. Educated young people do not take the Church seriously. This crisis has led many of them to dismiss the Church as inconsequential. This is not what we want to happen. If the Church has to regain any degree of its credibility it has to act in a way that proves that it is serious about doing justice. People are willing to forgive and forget, but they need to see a repentant hierarchy which is making amends. We need a dialogue with the hierarchy to facilitate this.

Broken Vow of Celibacy

If celibacy is a requirement for priestly life, then celibacy should be upheld without making any excuses for those that break the vow. If celibacy is broken more widely than kept, as is quite evident by the anecdotal evidence that is available, it is better to reconsider making it optional. The credibility of the priesthood is severely eroded when priests preach about sexual purity to the youth and married people while their indulgence in sex shows the contrary. *“It is time to examine this clerical culture and steps taken to seriously bring it back to be authentic to what Jesus wanted his followers to be.”(Who is a Priest by Joe Mattam sj)*

Women Religious demonstrate the Battered Wife Syndrome.

Women religious continue to pay obeisance to the male leadership in the Church that is bent on humiliating and demeaning them despite the fact that the same leadership cannot do without the contribution of religious women to Church mission. I think it is high time women religious begin to think for themselves and get out of this “battered wife syndrome”. Stay and take the abuse instead of thinking of working out ways they can create a working partnership and collaboration with men in mission.

In Conclusion

Steps that can work towards change:

1. Urgent need to conduct courses for women religious on sexuality. How to understand their own, as well as male sexuality. These courses have to be integrated into formation programmes as well.
2. Empowerment of women to stand as autonomous persons in their own right so that they can play their rightful role as equal partners with men in the mission of the Church.
3. Taking off from the gender policy, the CRI together with the Commission for women should sit with the Bishops and draw up guidelines to deal with the sex abuse and other burning issues of women in the Church.
4. Set up structures to address this issue, which will also help lay people. A desk to receive complaints, and a mechanism to help victims to heal.
5. Use the guidelines set down by the Supreme Court of India for the workplace to make a policy for priests conduct in the Church.
6. A credible team for investigation where even the victim has a voice.
7. I would suggest an adaptation of a programme for priest abusers designed by a psychotherapist in the US: Penance, Productivity, and Provisioning Program
8. A study and research on formation, psychology and sexuality that make women ready victims of abuse.

Only when the Church takes this issue seriously and begins to address it, will people be assured that the Church is serious about its mission. It will restore its credibility and demonstrate that even though it suffers from the human frailty of its members, it also has the power of her founder for reconciliation and healing of all concerned.

*Virginia Saldanha
Former Executive Secretary
FABC Commission for Laity*

Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India

The CBCI has brought out a book of eminence with regards to gender relations in the Church and society. The aim of the book is to sensitize women and men on gender relations and existence.

Gender implies power relationship between men and women. The Christian understanding of gender equality is based on the biblical account of creation. Man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God expressing a unity of the two in a common humanity which we share equally with the divine. But unfortunately both in history and in today's world there is gross discrimination against women. What we see in the church is an extension of what we see in the society.

Divided over three parts, the book deals with every aspect of gender relations such as a brief history of the steps leading up to the creation of the book, the guiding principles of Gender equality, the situation of women in India and in the Church, areas of concern, areas and mechanisms of implementation particularly within the church, to mention a few. The Policy presents concrete guidelines to attain the goals. The responsibility to internalize and implement the ideals of the book is a concern for all.

The Policy is a pastoral imperative and a social need. It has given expression to some of our most cherished dreams. A policy is a present decision for future action. If action does not follow, the policy remains a dead letter on book. It is our duty to prevent that happening.

Sr. Julie George SSpS

*Gender Relations in Ministries:**A Human Rights Perspective*

Search for alternative praxis in gender relations in the context of mission is a complex experience. It is determined by existing dominant power equations, psycho-social needs and exigencies of the people involved, personal and organizational ideological framework, and the expectations of the target group themselves. In the short time I have at my disposal, I would like to share with you some principles and strategies to address gender relations in the context of mission, especially in the context of sexual harassment in Church institutions.

The Report of the Commission constituted by the government of Ireland to investigate the child abuse is symptomatic of the approach of the Church to abuses. When the bishops and major superiors of those involved in the abuses were asked why no action was taken against the abusers, the stock answer was “those involved were repentant for their actions and in the true pastoral nature of the Church, they were forgiven”. What was shocking is that these leaders of the Church never considered it important to address the issue of the rights of those who were abused.

Today, human rights have evolved as the over arching principle of human relations. The fundamental parameters of human rights are dignity, equality and respect. These find their theological echoes in the belief that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1/26-27). This defines the nature of the human being. It provides the Christian religious foundation for the human rights paradigm.

The God in whose image and likeness human beings are created is not a monolithic entity, but a Trinitarian God: three equal persons, each with one's own identity. As one of the early Fathers of the Church defined it, “The God we believe in is a Trinitarian God, equal but different and are relational by nature”. This inner nature of God as being equal, different and relational, determines the essence of the nature and identity of the human person, and relationships in the

Church. The determinants of the human rights paradigm, dignity, equality and respect, takes on a new meaning in the context of our faith in a Trinitarian God.

In spite of such profound theological roots of human nature and relationship among them that align well with the language of human rights, it is our experience that the dominant ideological framework in the Church is not one that respects the dignity and equality of all. The experience of unequal and exploitative nature of gender relations in the church is one of the more serious examples of it. Sexual harassment and paedophilia that have caught the global attention in the recent past is an example. From human rights' perspective, these instances are violations of the equality, respect and dignity that is a right and entitlement of every person.

Standards have to be established in this area. Institutional mechanisms to ensure adherence to these standards need to be put in place. The Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India is a positive step in this direction. But that is only a beginning. The Policy need to be converted in to clear strategies that include rules that ensure fairness for all and justice for those whose rights have been violated. The secular world can provide us the necessary wherewithal for it. Let me place before you two examples of how the corporate world has ensured compliance to standards of the principles of equality, dignity and respect in their work milieu.

1. Enforcement of Zero-Tolerance harassment policy that prohibits sexual and other forms of harassment. Such a policy should include:
 - A statement that the diocese/congregation unequivocally follows a zero-tolerance policy
 - The terms and behaviours discussed in the statement should be clearly defined
 - A clear description of unacceptable behaviours
 - The consequences of unacceptable behaviour should be made clear
 - Specific procedures to be followed after a complaint is lodged

- Several avenues for bringing a complaint or concern to the attention of those responsible in authority should be provided
 - The identification by names of those with whom a complaint is to be registered should be made clear
 - A clear statement that all complaints and investigations will be treated in confidence
 - Prompt investigation and exemplary penalties for those who violate the policy
 - The policy should be written and easily available
2. A policy of equal opportunity is another important step towards more equitable gender relations in the church. Creating gender balance in terms of numbers and sharing of power is necessary if this is to be realized. An assumption in creating such a gender balance is that the contribution of both women and men in an equal measure is important for the mission of the Church. Women need to be seen more and more in positions of power within the structures of the Church. Given the historical discrimination that women in the Church has been subjected to over the centuries, positive discrimination that will help women occupy positions of responsibility that were denied to them need to be implemented.

It is realized that sexual harassment and pedophilia in the Church are too complex to be dealt with through proactive policies alone. Need for human intimacy in the context of vowed celibacy, the level of one's psychological maturity, high level of secularization and relativity of values, spiritual depth and the level of personal integrity are important factors. But what is necessary is that the problem need to be dealt with through a two-pronged approach of opportunities for growth in integrity at the personal and communitarian level on the one hand, and evolving clear policies and structures to obtain justice where there are violations.

*Varghese Theckanath s.g.
Director, MSI, Hyderabad*

Gender Relations : Suggesting Alternatives

[From a Lay Perspective]

“Many of us are restless and dissatisfied with the knowledge that no matter how much we are prepared to give to the Church – the Church is only prepared to take limited service from us. We know the Church needs all the help it can get ... but it seems that major potential providers of human resources available to the Church...- women - still aren't good enough to fully participate.”

This submission by a woman to the Australian Bishops, [for the Women in the Catholic Church in Australia Report 1997], epitomises the call of many Catholic women worldwide for a more meaningful role in the Church. Despite evidence to indicate that Jesus strongly promoted the dignity and equality of women and that early Christians gave leadership roles to women, the influence of prevailing cultural norms has historically caused the role of women in the Church to be diminished. Even today when cultural bias against women has to a large extent been overcome in secular society the Church maintains a male-dominated culture which excludes women from ordination and decision making within the church and lacks inclusive religious imagery and language.

When talking about women and the Church, the CBCI Gender Policy 2010 states, *“Aware of the “feminine genius” of women, every effort will be made to ensure that women regain full respect for their dignity and role.”*

How does this Translate into Reality?

When the issues of lay involvement, and in particular lay women's involvement in the Church comes up, one hears two kinds of responses:

- What can one do? These women are not coming... no one is stopping them from taking up the positions available in the Church... the qualified choose to work in the secular fields & the rest are unqualified.

Or

- Statistics are quoted about how many women play active roles in the Catholic Church. They serve their parishes in a variety of ways as sponsors at baptism and confirmation. Women can serve on the parish council and finance committees. They can be readers at Mass, *extraordinary or Eucharistic ministers*, and ushers. They can work in the parish office, give religious education in schools and Sunday school catechesis, be on liturgical committees and so on, just like their male counterparts.

Sounds Great!!! Why then are gender relations still a concern for the Church? Is it because there is something questionable in the way it is being implemented? Is it because the very same “feminine genius” [qualities of receptivity, sensitivity, generosity, maternity] is what prevents women from being permitted to enjoy “fullness” in their participation in the Church?

Let us reflect on the variety of relationships a lay woman is involved in within the Church:

With Priests / Seminarians :

- I often have occasion to address seminarians and priests in my involvement with catechesis. What astounds me is that 90% of the time when I face a new audience I am viewed with suspicion and disregard ... their body language says it loud and clear!!! I am after all – a woman – and a lay woman at that poaching on territory which is their prerogative.
- For many priests a woman as a co-worker / collaborator is fine in theory, in practice they would rather have 'helpers' or 'assistants'. They are more comfortable with women playing the role of 'Marthas' rather than 'Marys'.
- To reflect on priests / seminarians' relations with lay women and why/how they run into problems, let us consider who these lay women are!.
- By and large in a parish situation, it is the 'youth' - young girls on the threshold of womanhood who are dealing with their emerging femininity, paternal authority and / or problematic

relationships at home, who approach these 'father figures' with trust. These trusting and free attitudes of the young need to be handled with care and responsibility but unfortunately sometimes are the cause of 'crushes' which if not handled could lead to inappropriate relationships

- On the other hand, problems arise with the young – middle aged women, struggling with relationships with spouses, or the widowed / estranged, - both groups emotionally vulnerable and 'available'.
- Inappropriate language, jokes which demean the woman's dignity are also offensive besides sending the wrong signals

With Female Religious:

Here there are three kinds of relationships that occur.

- The patriarchal model of 'power over': The religious in power at times exhibit ruthlessness, heartlessness and sadly none of the sensitivity or generosity which is supposed to be characteristic of the 'feminine genius' in their relationships with lay women. Lay women experience this in schools and Sunday school programmes.
- Some religious who are themselves victims of an abuse of power within their own set ups, who are forced to decimate their own femininity, look with suspicion, mistrust and resentment at lay women who manage to enjoy 'fullness of being' in all spheres of their lives.
- Other religious, a very few, are able to rejoice with lay women who have developed an identity of their own and look up to them as models for their own growth.

With Other Lay Women:

Sadly, more often than not, power struggles and politics underlie the relationships of lay women involved in the Church as they strive for affirmation and recognition of their contribution and value in the involvements of Church life. Unfortunately, those in power adopt the patriarchal mode of relating with other women.

With Lay Men:

Here again the women are more often than not assigned roles reflective of their roles in society with teaching, decorating, looking after the vestments, writing minutes, organizing the snacks etc being their portfolio while the men retain the financial, planning etc. roles.

On reflecting from the perspective of the laity building genuine, healthy gender relations needs to be addressed at several levels:

Church in General: Any change to be significant and wide in its outreach must not take place in pockets. Thus it is imperative that the Church at her highest level brings about changes in her dealing of gender concerns to enable her pronouncements to bear visible fruit. She needs to match actions with words.

Diocese & Parish: Changes have to percolate down. Thus the mandate /example for change must continue to be initiated & fostered at the Diocesan level so that it may permeate right down to the parish level.

- **What is needed is:**

- **Comprehensive Education and Training of Laity, Religious and Priests.**

- Gender sensitization of lay and the religious [priests /nuns / brothers] to help relations between lay (particularly women) – religious (men & women), men-women, women-women
- Foster positive attitudes among the clergy and the laity towards women's participation and leadership
- In Church doctrine especially social teachings of the Church vis a vis women, scripture from a feminist perspective
- In understanding a non-patriarchal version of our mother. Mary is sadly projected as a model of obedience, humility and submission rather than as an assertive confident woman who participated in

salvation history by making choices after seeking clarifications. This will help increase awareness of the dignity and respect due to women as reiterated in the teachings of the Church and witnessed in the life of Mary and subsequently lead to healthier relations once lay women feel affirmed and valued

- **Economic Testimony** [put their money where their mouth is.]
 - *Establish Gender Resource Centres* for research, documentation, etc at national & regional levels. These centres can help in gender sensitization of priests, religious men and women and the laity towards healthier relationships
 - *Provide / subsidize educational opportunities* for laity in studies related to their ministries

Once women are enabled to see and develop the power within themselves they will be able to understand that the power of working with others is far healthier and more productive than situations wherein individuals or groups exert power over the other.

- **Empowering by Change**

To conclude I quote from Ruth Henderson's *Tradition & the Status of Women in the Catholic Church*: *"In Galatians, Paul proclaimed that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. Despite Paul's theology, all three dichotomies have existed within the history of the Church. The first was overcome in the first century, by Paul himself and others in the early Church. The second was overcome in the nineteenth century. It is time now for the Church to overcome the final dichotomy and to follow Jesus' example of treating women with dignity and equality by allowing women full participation in the Church and celebrating that their being is made in the likeness and image of God."*

Raynah Braganza
Diocesan Women's Commission, Poona

Formation in Seminaries for Right Gender Relations

Catholic seminaries which were once exclusive male bastions are now open to women students who are interested in philosophical and theological education. Though there are not many female students in these institutions, the fact that they are there among a large number of male students who are candidates for priesthood brought some positive changes in the attitude of seminarians to women. Some faculties have also women as professors of theology or allied subjects. It has been noted by the formators that the presence of female students and teachers in the philosophy and theology classes has positively influenced the human formation of the seminarians. However, the seminary formation of the future priests needs to go a long way to achieve the goal of bringing about positive attitudinal changes in the minds of the seminarians to recognize and acknowledge women as humans exactly like them and treat them with respect and appreciation for their otherness as women. The seminarians are to realize their priestly vocation is to render self-emptying service to the people of God of whom fifty percent are women.

It is not a lack of proper theological education that prevents many seminarians and priests to treat women as human persons and partners in mission of the Church. The Theological Anthropology based on biblical revelation systematically explains to them that both women and men are the images of God. The Theology of Trinity affirms that the God they believe in is an absolute communion of three equal persons and as images of the Trinity all humans are equal and distinct yet ordained to be and to live in

communion. It is also a Christian faith affirmation that in Christ there is no male or female and all the baptized form the Body of Christ, the Church. For many, such theological knowledge does not become a conviction that they are able to relate with women with maturity and freedom as they would with men. How does it happen? In all probability it is due to their upbringing in a patriarchal society which glorifies the dominant position of males in the family and society. Women as human persons and womanly qualities are devalued in order to show the supremacy of men in the families and in the society. This domination is further strengthened by ecclesiastical power bestowed at the time of ordination and their commitment to a celibate life. Therefore, it is imperative to deconstruct many of the false power positions claimed by the priestly class during the seminary formation itself to make the seminarians become aware of their need to have a right relationship with women as human persons who are to be recognized, accepted, respected, valued and treated as sisters as Jesus did.

Some of the ways to inculcate in the seminarians a right attitude to women and cultivate a right gender relationship are to let the use of the resources of women in the levels of human, intellectual and spiritual formation of the future priests. Besides providing opportunities for healthy interaction between seminarians and women, competent women could be appointed as teachers, spiritual directors, retreat and recollection guides etc. for seminarians. The seminarians need to be taught to use inclusive language in their prayers and other communications that they become aware that they do not exclude about 50% of humanity from their life and service.

*Dr. Jacob Parappally, MSFS
President, Indian Theological Association (ITA)*

**"We have done so much for so long with so little;
now we can do anything for nothing". - Bl. Mother Teresa**

The capacity to relate is at the very core of what it means to be human. We live in an age of conflicts and crisis. The tendency to divide everything into two sects of opposing pairs like good-evil, man-woman, east-west etc., is part of our mentality and this has in fact distorted and fragmented our vision of reality. To reframe this divided mentality we need a holistic vision, a vision that will hold both these polarities as one reality that compliment and not one that opposes. Mainstreaming a gender perspective is essential for our over masculine culture to embrace its feminine richness and to resist all forms of inequality and discrimination on the basis of gender that is contrary to divine intention for humanity. Certainly, women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity and are demanding their rights as equal partners with men in the mission of the Church. However, tangible results in this direction remain still a dream. We certainly have a long way to go before our vision for a gender just ecclesiology and equality of partnership in the Church becomes a reality.

Like the rest of Indian women, women religious also have internalized the cultural stereotypes and practices that discriminate women both in domestic and public life. And what is even worse is that women themselves are often transmitters of this system of gender discrimination, inequality and injustice. Women in general have to go through an attitudinal change if this situation has to change. They have to uphold that persons are superior or inferior to one another not on the basis of sex and that they should never allow their womanhood to be exploited for wrong ends. Women religious in particular must become conscious of the systemic and structural discriminatory practices in the Church that confine them roles that perpetuate their subordination and deny them equality of discipleship in the Church. They have to learn to think critically and speak up boldly about issues and concerns that affect their lives. The formation of women religious must, then, include programmes and courses that can help and empower them to do this.

The vowed lifestyle of religious women ought to symbolise for all people not only our intimate relationship with God but also the quality of our human relationship. We understand that human life cannot develop to maturity in isolation and that all growth takes place in mutual exchange and enrichment. The regular contact of Sisters with priests requires a clear understanding and recognition of each one's vocation and respect for each other in an atmosphere of freedom. It is good to ask ourselves: Does our religious formation help our young religious to be as mature and responsible as young women of the same age in the world? The activities of the modern apostolate, both urban and rural, often demand close collaboration between priests and religious women. Young women coming from sheltered families to religious houses must be encouraged and initiated to move freely, firmly asserting their freedom and dignity as women, never allowing their womanhood to be exploited for wrong ends. The cases of sexual abuse of women religious by priests in the name of 'friendship', spiritual/retreat guide, benefactor, and so on are not rare. Our instructed silence about it has helped the offender to easily get away with the crime or even when found guilty no action was taken by the concerned ecclesiastical authority to punish the offender, while the religious women concerned were pulled up to face the consequences. We need to have a structure within our Congregations that can address sex abuse issues more humanly. Courses on sexuality must be integrated into our formation programme so that our young religious are not only be warned of the dangers confronting chastity but trained to make celibate life consecrated to God part of the richness of their personality.

Our formation, both initial and on-going need to ensure that our commitment lends itself to the unfolding of our human personality, not to its oppression. The radical surrender of the entire life of a woman to God and the choice to live in a community is the undisputed core of the commitment of woman religious. Does our life in community domesticate and make us submissive and dependent, rather than empower and strengthen us to live our womanhood to the full? Similarly, the religious uniform that we wear, while helping to promote uniformity among us, is it not, in a way, in the name of religiosity, eventually blocking our capacity to be imaginative and creative and destroying our capacity

to be simply different? The type of “silence” we advocate and promote in our religious houses often makes us passive spectators and voiceless victims of unjust discrimination and inequality that we experience as women religious in the Church and society. While silence both external and interior is necessary for our spiritual well-being, we got to differentiate between silence and silence.

Education is the way to empower women. I affirm with Joan Chittister OSB that intellectual commitment of the religious to reflection, culture, beauty and truth at this new moment in history will someday surely be seen as part of the process of “burying the coals, of saving the fire, of coming to flame in new ways for a new world to see”. Women Religious must dare to analyse and critique the reality from the women's perspective, to assert themselves and speak up with confidence their opinions, views and ideas. Specially designed educational interventions are required to facilitate change in mindset, behaviours and practices. To share a vision of a just and participatory system, to transform the unjust and discriminatory church structures into democratic and participatory one, to ensure that women are engaged in creating alternative systems, to become critical thinkers to identify what is oppressive to women and men in the present practice of theology and its interpretation and to bring out life-giving reflections leading to concrete actions, religious women need to go through thorough intellectual formation. Hence, it is important that women religious go through theological, biblical, canonical and psychological specializations and engage themselves in systematic and scientific research work.

Further, we desperately need women leaders with imagination, creativity, courage and commitment, who can facilitate the flow of knowledge, skill and talent of women religious for the benefit of both women and men. Our formation must address this pressing need and prepare and form leadership from among us, leaders who can articulate their vision and have the courage to give shape to their decisions. Such formation will enable us to think for ourselves and enable us to confidently assert our rightful place as women and disciples of Christ committed to the mission of the Church.

*Sr. Teresa Peter FS
Vice-president, CRI Women's Section*

"Only by examining carefully the many elements that gave rise to the present crisis (clerical sexual abuse) can a clear-sighted diagnosis of its causes be undertaken and effective remedies be found. Certainly, among the contributing factors we can include: inadequate procedures for determining the suitability of candidates for the priesthood and the religious life; insufficient human, moral, intellectual and spiritual formation in seminaries and novitiates; a tendency in society to favour the clergy and other authority figures; and a misplaced concern for the reputation of the Church and the avoidance of scandal, resulting in failure to apply existing canonical penalties and to safeguard the dignity of every person. Urgent action is needed to address these factors, which have had such tragic consequences in the lives of victims and their families, and have obscured the light of the Gospel to a degree that not even centuries of persecution succeeded in doing".

- Excerpt from the Pastoral Letter of The Holy Father
Pope Benedict XVI
to the Catholics of Ireland, March 2010

"How important it is to recognize and celebrate our heroes and she-roes!" Maya Angelou, Poet

National Consultation

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Group Discussions: A Summary

In three groups the Consultation discussed ways to address, prevent and report sexual abuse in the church. Given below are the findings of the group discussions.

1. The first query was with regard to the very definition of what constitutes sexual abuse. This difficulty assumes significance all the more because different social actors look at the issue differently, for instance a man, privileged as he is within the patriarchal structure of society would look at and interpret the issue differently from a woman.

A suggestion was made that one of the ways of mitigating this problem of definition is to take the definition of sexual harassment given in the Visakha Guidelines issued by the Supreme Court of India, or to take it from the legal frame of reference available in the civic domain.

The Recent draft Sexual Harassment at Workplace Bill 2006 defines sexual harassment in the following manner:

At the outset the Bill asserts that 'Sexual Harassment infringes the Fundamental Right of a woman to gender equality under Article 14 of the Constitution of India and her Right to life and live with dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution which includes a Right to a safe environment free from Sexual Harassment'. The definition from Visakha Guidelines repeated in the Bill is as follows:

- a. *“Sexual Harassment” is such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour such as physical contact, advances, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography or making sexual demands, whether verbal, textual, graphic or electronic or by any other actions, which may contain -*
 - (i) *Implied or overt promise of preferential treatment in that employee's employment or*
 - (ii) *An implied or overt threat of detrimental treatment in that employee's employment or an implied or overt threat about*

the present or future employment status of that employee and includes the creation of a hostile Working environment.

(iii) The conduct interferes with an employee's work or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment or

(iv) Such conduct can be humiliating and may constitute a health and safety problem

b. Explanation 1: Hostile Environment: A work environment is "hostile" when unwelcome verbal, non-verbal or physical behaviour focusing on sexuality is severe and pervasive enough to interfere with the victim's work performance or be intimidating or offensive to a reasonable person.

c. Explanation 2 : It is clarified that it is the reasonable perception of the woman that would be relevant in determining whether any conduct was sexually coloured and, if so, whether such conduct was unwelcome or not and that her objection would disadvantage her in connection with her employment, including recruitment or promotion, or when it creates a hostile working environment.

We may modify this definition adding the specificities of our context, preserving the basic tenor, namely the understanding of sexual abuse/harassment from the perspective of the victim.

2. In the context of gender relations in the Church, we need to clearly make a distinction between sin and crime. When it is taken purely considered as sin, the discourse of forgiveness takes centre stage and perpetrators of abuse and violence are let loose. Taking cognizance of the severity of the matter, we need to recognize sexual abuse as a crime as well. Therefore, mechanisms need to be put in place to address it as such. It is one thing to suggest that the victims seek redressal in civil courts. What we need is a mechanism to deal with these crimes within the Church structures first. Such a mechanism would enhance the human face of the Church. In this case, we may take the example of the way the civil law recognizes the problem. As per the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Bill 2006 all institutions are required to set up a Gender Development Cell which is responsible for promotion of gender-sensitive environment and redressal mechanisms. All complaints of harassment and abuse are to be

directed to such cells and they direct the victims to file cases in Courts when the instance is found to be of a nature which cannot be handled by them.

3. Therefore, we strongly recommend that the Catholic Church in India take cognizance of the magnitude of the problem at hand and take steps to address it. We suggest
 - a) That Grievance cells be set up at every forum in the Church for the specific purpose to addressing issues of sexual abuse. Such a cell needs to have counsellors, legal professionals, women, representatives of the clergy as its members. More importantly, such a cell needs to be headed by a woman.
 - b) That an independent body be set up in dioceses and on an all India level with statutory powers to deal with cases of sexual harassment and abuse in the Church, with a woman as the chairperson. A model for this body would be the way Human Rights Commission functions at the Central and State government levels in India.
4. Educating the faithful with regard to the implications of sexual abuse, mechanisms for its prevention and avenues of redressal is another important area. Church in India needs to actively design and promote sensitization programmes on issues related to sexual abuse in parishes, educational institutions and formation houses. A manual may be prepared as a resource book for the same which may contain basic etiquette and elements of precaution for a person to stay clear of the menace of sexual abuse.
5. The term 'consensus' is quite often used in the context of sexual violence and abuse. The Church needs to take into serious consideration the power differentials involved in gender relations while designating certain abuse as 'consensual'. The women in the Church are faced with weight of 'double patriarchy'; patriarchal relations in the wider society are accentuated and rendered more powerful by the patriarchal authority structures within the Church. In dealing with cases of harassment and sexual abuse, this predicament needs to be sufficiently addressed. Or else, all acts of sexual assault, harassment and abuse would be brushed under the carpet with the tag of 'consensual sex'.

6. In the Church circles, especially when it comes to women and women religious personnel, a premium is attached to 'docility' as a virtue. Such an emphasis on docility has turned the Church into an arena where victims of sexual harassment are instructed to suffer silently and be models of docility. This state of affairs needs to change drastically and the Church needs to give voice to the victims by emphasizing the aspect of assertion in the face of violence and abuse. Women in the Church need a paradigm shift from 'docility' to 'assertion', especially in situations of threat and violence.
7. There is an extremely urgent need for gender sensitization programmes to become integral parts of the formation programme across convents and seminaries. Intimacy and friendship need to be addressed as legitimate needs of the human person and we need to articulate a healthier understanding of celibacy which integrates these needs. The needs of the human body which are closely related to emotional health also need to be addressed. Celibacy needs to be defined in affirmative terms, not in terms of negation. Issues of gender needs greater discussion at all levels of the formation of religious personnel.

Appraisal of the Gender Policy of CBCI for a Gender-sensitive Church

1. We need to form groups at all levels of the Church to discuss and deliberate on this document – the Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India.
2. Awareness programmes need to be taken up in seminaries, formation houses and among the religious personnel of different congregations in the country.
3. Resource committees and Monitoring committees need to be set up in all dioceses for the implementation of this policy.
4. We need to form pressure groups to see that the gender-sensitive provisions of the policy are implemented in letter and spirit.

Dr. Joseph M.T. SVD
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STATEMENT NATIONAL CONSULTATION

Gender Relations in the Church: A Call to Integrity and Justice.

Pune, 15th August, 2010.

1. Introduction:

1.1 On the 15th August, 2010, feast of the Assumption of Mary and the anniversary of India's Independence, we, 24 women and men responded to the call of Streevani, Pune, to 'ponder' like Mary and discern the liberating voice of God's Spirit in recent events that have challenged the Catholic Church.

1.2 Mary's revolutionary song of freedom from oppression expressed in her *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55), was a fitting backdrop to this national consultation on “*Gender Relations in the Church: A Call to Integrity and Justice*” that focused on two important concerns: 1) “The Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India”, published by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, 2010, and 2) the need for a policy to address sexual abuse in the Church in India.

2. Our Reflections on the Gender Policy:

2.1 We recognize at the start that a Gender Policy brought out by the Bishops, while well meaning and a visible sign of the Bishops' sensitivity to the low status of women in the Church and society, cannot but have limitations given the patriarchal nature of the Church.

2.2 However, we express our appreciation for the sincere commitment of the Bishops of India for drawing up a blueprint for empowering women in the Church and society and to the allotment of financial resources and personnel for its implementation. This Gender Policy when critically interpreted will stand as a yardstick for transformation, both for the bishops and the faithful, for generations to come.

2.3 While we realize that the gender policy is not exhaustive, we experience hope in the progressive objectives that leave scope for creative interpretation, and the suggested strategies and mechanisms for creating awareness, networking and implementation.

2.4 Reflecting on the main themes of the Gender Policy we identify some lacunae which need to be addressed. Thus it is observed that:

1. Gen 1:27 could have been developed from the perspective of a Trinitarian God described as a community of equals who are same, different and relational.
2. The Supreme Court Order dated 13.08.1997 for “*Implementation of the Guidelines Contained in Supreme Court's Order in the Case of Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace and Other Institutions*” has not been adopted by the Gender policy. There is need to recognize the institutions of the Church as the workplace of priests and other Church personnel, and therefore subject to the relevant laws of the country.
3. The power structures that subordinate women in the Church have not been adequately dealt with. Primary among these is the hierarchical nature of the Church which effectively keeps women out of leadership, decision making and access to resources.
4. No mechanism has been provided for the redressal of women's grievances against Church personnel and structures.

3. Our recommendations:

To make the vision, mission and objectives of the Gender Policy a reality we realize that the Catholic Church of India needs:

1. To form groups at all levels of the Church to discuss and critically deliberate on the Gender Policy.
2. To conduct awareness programmes on the Gender Policy in seminaries, formation houses and among women and men in religious congregations.
3. To set up Resource Committees and Monitoring Committees in all dioceses for the implementation of the Gender Policy.
4. To form advocacy and task groups to ensure that the gender-sensitive provisions of the policy are implemented in letter and spirit.

4. Our Concern for the Victims of Sexual Abuse:

4.1 We place the recent episodes of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church within the larger context of widespread violence against women resulting from 'Man' having "broken the right order that should reign within himself as well as between himself and others and all creature" (*Gaudium et Spes, No. 13.*)

4.2 We proudly proclaim the Church's consistent stand on behalf of the poor, the marginalized, and victims of conflict, injustice and violence and recognize these Christian values as the roots of the altruism and respect for human rights that imbue our contemporary world.

4.3 We express deep concern for the victims of sexual abuse by Church personnel and identify some factors that have given rise to such situations. These include:

1. The patriarchal society which provides the milieu for a patriarchal Church with men exercising power as control and domination over women and children.
2. The disparity between our democratic society and our vision of an egalitarian community, and the governance in the Church which is hierarchical.
3. Christian teaching and images of God/man/woman that have promoted the image of the ruler and the ruled, and socialized women, especially women religious, to subservience, silence and inferiority, making them vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, violence and sexual abuse by men.
4. The deification of priests through the inordinate and disproportionate focus on the person of the priest alone as '*Alter Christus*,' entitling him to unquestioning obedience.
5. The vulnerability of women, who are dependent on priests for spiritual and/or emotional counseling particularly in times of personal crisis or difficulty.
6. The culture of silence borne out of women's fear of bringing shame to themselves, their family/congregation and the Christian community in India if they report instances of sexual abuse by Church personnel.
7. The clerical culture of secrecy that seeks to deny and cover up the cases of sexual abuse among clerics in an attempt to uphold celibacy of the ordained.

4.4 While searching for solutions to the problem of sexual abuse, we note with pain that whereas pedophilia has received the attention that it deserves, women's stories of abuse are frequently discounted. "Consensual" sex is often cited as a mitigating circumstance with little or no awareness of the defenselessness of the woman trapped under the weight of 'double patriarchy' - patriarchal relations in the wider society which are accentuated and rendered more powerful by the patriarchal authority structures within the Church.

4.5 We observe too, with a sense of shame that attempts to address cases of sexual abuse frequently focused more on preserving the good name of the Church rather than on our obligation to protect and obtain justice for the vulnerable amongst us in keeping with the mission and example of Jesus Christ, in whose name we serve.

4.6 We also draw attention to the distinction between sexual abuse as a sin and as a crime and the implications therein including the complicity of religious institutions in not reporting crimes.

5. Our recommendations:

5.1 Through this Statement we would like to initiate a dialogue with the Bishops of India so that together we can work towards providing a safe and secure environment for children and vulnerable individuals in all institutions of the Church, and a pastoral and just response to victims, their families, the accused, and the community.

5.2 Towards this end we recommend:

1. That every diocese, province and congregation have a formal policy to address sexual abuse from the perspective of the abused; the *Visakha* Guidelines issued by the Supreme Court of India must be used as a reference document while framing the policy.
2. That instances of sexual misconduct be treated as a crime and offenders prosecuted under existing laws regarding violence against women and children, and sexual harassment in the workplace.
3. That structures be set up in every diocese based on the recommendations of the Guidelines for Sexual Harassment at

Workplace that requires the formation of Gender Development Cells which are responsible for the promotion of a gender-sensitive environment and redressal mechanisms; such grievance cells must have counsellors, legal professionals, women and representatives of the clergy as its members, and, most importantly, must be headed by a woman.

4. That women in the Church be educated about 'double patriarchy' and its implications.
5. That information be disseminated on the implications of sexual abuse, mechanisms for its prevention and avenues of redressal; a manual may be prepared as a resource.
6. That a code of professional ethics be articulated for pastoral workers including priests.
7. That priests and people be educated on the vision of Church as a community of communities and a discipleship of equals where priests, women religious and laity work in partnership and are co-responsible for bringing about the Reign of God on earth.
8. That the servant priesthood of Jesus be emphasized and the “fatherhood” and “lordship” of priesthood be demythologized.
9. That formation programmes for priests and women religious:
 - De-construct notions of women's dependency on men that render women docile even in the face of sexual harassment
 - Address issues of intimacy, friendship and emotional health within the context of celibate life
 - Teach a celibacy that enriches consecrated/ priestly life
10. That women's congregations:
 - Encourage intellectual formation and research
 - Empower their members to become assertive and critical thinkers
 - Form leaders with imagination, creativity, courage and commitment

6. Our Commitment:

In the light of our reflections we commit ourselves:

1. To engage in an ongoing critical discussion on the Gender Policy from the perspective of women and promote all in the policy that empowers women;
2. To hold the bishops to their commitment to the implementation of the Gender Policy;
3. To advocate zero tolerance towards sexual abuse of women and children in the Church;
4. To campaign for a policy that views sexual abuse in the Church as a violation of Human Rights and therefore as a crime punishable under Indian law;
5. To work towards the putting in place of processes and structures for reporting sexual abuse, that are sensitive and confidential, and that include women.

7. Conclusion:

The Consultation is but a first step towards a sustained commitment and proactive participation in the Church's initiative towards gender justice. It is a “*call to integrity and justice*” through networking and collaboration with religious congregations, the lay faithful, and all Church bodies and institutions. As we strive to wipe away every tear (Rev 21:4) and bring healing and wholeness, we are inspired by Mary's *Magnificat* that rejoices in the “*greatness of our God*” who looks with compassion upon the hurting and proclaims their triumph over unjust systems.

It's a Girl!



The birth of a child - a miracle, a sign of God's creative power! Every birth is an extension of God's life in us- a precious gift. I then asked myself: if the creator has created and given each one his/her honor and dignity why the society / culture and all its institutions have systematically and systemically stripped the girl child of her due place in the society?

India is tragically representing the lowest sex ratio. The Census report indicates a highly skewed sex ratio that fell from 976 girls born every 1000 boys to 927 girls every 1000 boys in 2001. It might be encouraging for Christian community to note that the sex ratio among Christians is 1009/1000 men. At the same time the sex ratio below 6 years is 964/ 1000 boy children.

The 'missing girls' phenomenon is dangerous to the health of the society and the nation. Of the girls born in the country only 1/3 of those survive. Only a few numbers of girls are able to survive till their 15th birthday. A whole range of discriminatory practices including female feticide, female infanticide, female genital mutilation, son preference, inadequate nutrition leading to poor health, lack of education, early marriage, dowry, physical and sexual violence, rape, honor killings, trafficking of girls are matters of grave concerns for us citizens.

The root causes for discrimination include - traditions and cultural values influenced by son preference, patriarchal

norms and low status of women. My own experience of being a woman and also working with urban and rural communities has reiterated my understanding of the discrimination that is prevalent at the national level. The difference in treatment begins from the time of birth. Girls and boys are taught to be unequal beings through the socialization process beginning with the smallest unit of the society – the family.

We know the status of women is changing. There is heightened awareness both national and internal levels. Several policies and conventions such as CEDAW (Convention on the elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women- ratified by India in 1993), MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) give a special attention to improving the status of empowering women and girls. The Indian Constitution guarantees equality to all citizens and prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste, class, sex, ethnicity or any other differences. Awareness of discrimination at different levels in our schools and parishes, special attention to educate girl children, and gender sensitization to boys and girls are some of the practices we can adopt as a parish community. We have the human resource and infrastructure. We need to grow in awareness of the life giving and life crippling dimensions of our culture and change what is possible within our limits.

On September 14 the international community observes the Day of the Girl Child. Girl child is the future of every nation and India is no exception. A little amount of care, a handful of warmth and a heart full of love for a girl child can make a big difference. Let's prepare India to say "It's girl!" with joy and celebration.

Sr. Helen Saldanha SSpS

Kerala Catholic Bishop's Conference (KCBC) Gender Policy Workshop



■ **S**treevani and Women's Commission jointly organised a workshop on Gender Policy of the Kerala Catholic Bishop's Conference on 7th August, 2010 in Kannur.

The programme started with a welcome address by Fr. Clemants, Director, Women's commission, Kannur Diocese. The workshop was inaugurated by Rt.Rev.Bishop Varghese Chakalackal, Bishop of Kannur. In his inaugural speech the Bishop stressed that women should come to the forefront taking up responsible positions in the church to bring about equal partnership in the church. He said that poverty is one of the important reasons which keep women subjugated. Adv. Sr. Julie George representing Streevani introduced the gender policy, starting with a note of appreciation to our Bishops for evolving the policy. She highlighted the need for a change in the mind set of men and

women which will gradually lead to equality in the family, in the church and in the society.

Our resource person Dr. Neena Joseph, Professor Indian Institute of Management Kakanad, explained the gender policy in detail dwelling on the rights of women in the society and church. The difference between sex and gender and the characteristics of them were explained with relevant examples to show that gender differences are socially and culturally constructed. She called on women to recognize the innate power of human beings to transform unjust structures and practices. The group really appreciated the clarity that was given to them on women's rights and few of them expressed their apprehensions on the implementation of the policy.

It was really a collaborative event. Mrs. Annie Rodney, Secretary to CBCI Women's Commission and Sr. Servia, Secretary, Women's Commission, Kannur Diocese and her team along with the Diocese organized around 400 participants including religious and lay women to take part actively in the workshop.

Gender Training Workshop



- **A**lready a year had passed since the KCBC (Kerala Catholic Bishop Conference) had drawn up a gender policy. On February 6th 2010 'Streevani' Pune, initiated a humble attempt by bringing together some of the leading women of Kerala Church for a closer look at the Policy and

create an awareness among the religious and laity. At the end of the day a Core group was formed for the promotion of the gender policy. Thereafter Ms.Thresiamma Mathew OMMI, the Convener called for a meeting of the Core Group members on 28th February, 2010. In the said meeting a proposal came from the group to have a training of trainers with the topics such as women's rights, legal rights and laws in favor of women and insight into feminist theology.

As a follow up Streevani organized a two day workshop/ training from 3-4 May 2010 along with the Core Group members. It was held in *Ayushya Ithithanam* Changanassery for approximately 45 women participants. Speakers explained to the group the meaning of commonly used concepts like feminism, gender and sex, patriarchy etc. The clarity was well appreciated. The resource person for the morning session Ms.Sonia George, spoke about Liberal feminism which says all people are created equal by god and deserve equal rights. Socialist feminism speaks about the direct link between class structure and the oppression of women. Radical feminism promotes the basis for many of the ideas of feminism. She also spoke about the Eco feminism which explains that patriarchy and male domination is harmful to women as well as the environment. There is a link between a male's desire to dominate women and wilderness. Men feel as though they must tame and conquer both in order to gain full power. This desire destroys both women and earth.

There was also a session on Domestic Violence Act of 2005 presented by Sr. Mary Nalpathamkalam. She said that Domestic Violence Act is a comprehensive act under which a woman can claim different reliefs such as maintenance, protection from domestic violence, right to reside in the matrimonial home, compensation and custody of the children. She explained the sections on Rape and criminal offences against women and how to handle such situations.

Sr. Theramma MMS in her meditation highlighted the importance of reading the Bible from a feminist perspective. She gave examples of women in the bible who demanded their rights in their father's property. She said those days it was the rule that if there are no male heirs, then the property would go back to the tribe; But the women in the examples, stood their ground and demanded their rights. She spoke about the need to create conscious and concrete changes in the life of women.

The group also took up the Gender Policy of the CBCI ; being a training session for trainers, the group worked out a Trainers Module for study and discussion which would enable them to put into practice the learning they have gained.

Sr. Julie George SSpS

"Not knowing when the dawn will come
I open every door". - Emily Dickinson



STREEVANI UPDATES

May - September 2010

Event	Person/s	Place and Date
Trainers Training on Gender Policy	Sr. Julie George	Kerala, 3-4 May
Feminist Consciousness and Gender Studies	Sr. Helen Saldanha	Bhopal, 5-9 July
Feminist Consciousness and Gender Studies	Sr. Julie George	Indore ,10-13 July
Gender Policy and Girl- Child related work	Srs. Helen & Mary John	Pune , 16 th July
Gender Policy Development	Sr. Helen	Caritas Delhi ,19-21 July
Talk on Partnership in Mission	Sr. Julie George	Pune ,27 th July
Kerala Gender Policy Programme (with Regional Commission)	Sr. Julie George	Kerala, 7 th August
Advisory Team Meeting	Streevani Advisory Team	Pune, 14 th August
National Consultation on Gender Relations	Streevani Team	Pune, 15 th August
Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace	Srs Helen and Julie G.	Pune, 16 th August
People's Tribunal on Kandhamal	Srs. Julie G. & M. John	Delhi, 22-24

Event	Person/s	Place and Date
Feminism and Women's empowerment	Sr. Helen	Wardha, 30 Aug - 1 Sept.
Women's ecumenical group (Pune Core Group)	Srs. Helen & Julie G.	Pune, 3 rd Sept.
Recollection talk to priests/seminarians	Sr. Mary John	Pune, 3-4 Sept.
Meeting RLFK (Religious Lawyers Forum for Kandhamal)	Sr. Julie G.	Bhubaneswar, 10-12 Sept.
Meeting with the Bishop Poona Diocese Meet	Srs. Helen & Mary John	Pune, 13 th Sept.
Executive Meeting (Forum of Religious for Peace and Justice)	Sr. Julie G.	Hyderabad, 17-18 Sept.

