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A Tribute to ...

“ Today's women
Born yesterday
Dealing with tomorrow
Not yet where we're going
But not still where we were”.

-

Adrienne Rich

These lines echoes the sentiments of Streevani as we complete 10 years of the publication of “Birthing a New Vision”, Streevani news letter for the empowerment of women religious in India. It has been a long journey in to women's life discovering and rediscovering the identity, talents, potentials and uniqueness of each one. From our humble beginnings in 2001 till date, 18 editions have been brought out trying to create space for the voices of women from all walks of life to come alive, acknowledging that the road to empowerment is long, complex and uncharted and we need to walk together.

At this juncture Streevani fondly recall the contribution of every person who have put in their expertise to discover feminist vision from different perspectives, combining the power of knowledge and experience to drive home the message. We gratefully acknowledge and pay our tribute to our Benefactors, Directors, Editors and their teams, Advisory Committee, Net working partners, Well Wishers and our Dear Readers without whose help this news letter would not have been a reality.

Streevani carries a rich legacy left behind by our founders late Fr. Engelbert Zeitler SVD and late Dr. Frances Maria Yases whose vision and mission continues to motivate us. We pay tribute to these two great visionaries and dedicate this special issue in their loving memory.

Adv. Sr. Julie George SSpS,
Director, Streevani

Editorial

The present issue of *Birthing a New Vision* highlights the two recent National Consultations bearing the theme – Gender Relations in the Church: A Call to Wholeness and Equal Discipleship organized by Streevani, Satyashodhak, Indian Women's Theological Forum (IWTF) and Montfort Social Institute; and Building Integral Partnership for Prophetic Mission organized by Streevani and Ishvani Kendra, Pune.

Both of the above Consultations were meant to stir up once again the dormant spirit to increase awareness of gender issues, (by the direction given by the 'Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India'), so as to reclaim the woman power in creating a gender just society, and to move forward to a greater level of gender sensitivity, equality and partnership particularly in the Catholic Church. Forty-three participants - both women and men, religious and lay – who deeply care for and concerned about gender equality and partnership in the Church gathered at Holy Spirit Hospital campus, Mumbai from August 13-15, 2011 for the National Consultation on Gender Relations in the Church: A Call to Wholeness and Equal Discipleship, while around fifty-two participants from various walks of life, who hold responsible positions in different capacities from various parts of the country attended Building Integral Partnership for Prophetic Mission held at Ishvani Kendra, Pune from September 5-8, 2011.

In this issue of *Birthing a New Vision* Sr. Julie George SSpS, Directress of Streevani, in her report will present to you some of the highlights of the Consultation held in Mumbai. The Consultation held at Pune was specifically based on the CBCI document 'Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India' issued in 2010, to create a sense of urgency to promote its propagation and implementation to ensure liberation from the constraints of gender-based discrimination precisely for the empowerment of women in Church and in Society. The Final Statement of this Consultation states that "The objectives of the meeting were to deepen the understanding of the Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India, for a sincere and committed participation and contribution to make it a reality and thus to promote a discipleship of equals in the Church". Hence, as you unfold the pages

of this booklet, you will find in it some of the enlightening and thought provoking papers that were presented by eminent speakers, all dealing with different aspects of the same topic – Building Integral Partnership for Prophetic Mission - in their hope and endeavour to bring about a more gender just Church, Society and the world at large. Both of these National Consultations are in a way build on one another. The insights, discussions and deliberations will definitely bear abundant fruit in due time if many more share the same vision and pave a way forward through our concerted and persistent efforts. Through this issue of 'Birthing a New Vision' Streevani wishes to disseminate the objectives of these two Consultations for a deeper exploration of gender issues and identification of gender-biased attitudes and behaviour to help sharpen the readers' understanding of gender-biased thinking within, and all around them - and to awaken our collective consciousness in building a society that is just and fair to all inconsiderate of our gender differences.

Needless to say that sexism exists in all of us – women and men - and we all need to be liberated from its clutches in smaller or larger measure. In obvious as well as in very subtle ways, consciously or unconsciously it influences and even determines the outcomes of a myriad of life situations of the people the world over. The concept of gender sensitivity has been developed as a way to reduce “gender gap” created by sexism and sexual stereotyping and to help generate regard and respect, equity and equality for the individual person regardless of gender differences. It is the quality of being fair and reasonable in a way that gives equal treatment to everyone. As universally recognized at the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, countries will neither prosper nor thrive unless they are equally supportive of women and men in their quest for a fulfilling life. May such powerful voices coming from different corners of the world enable all of us to be committed to eradicate sexism and to promote respect for the equally valid roles that men and women play in family, community, nation, and so do in our Church!

Sr. Shalini Mathew SSps

National Consultation on “Gender Relations in the Church: A Call to Wholeness & Equal Discipleship”. Mumbai – August 13 – 15, 2011

This Consultation was a follow up of the consultation organized by Streevani exactly a year ago, prompted by two important contemporary events in the Church: 1) The publication of The Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India, by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (2010). 2) The unprecedented crisis in the universal Church triggered by revelations in the public domain of cases of pedophilia and sex abuse.

The Consultation jointly organized by Streevani, Satyashodak, Montfort Social Institute and Indian Women Theologians Forum was held at Anugraha, Holy Spirit Hospital Compound, Mahakali Caves Road, Mumbai, from 13 – 15 August 2011. The Theme was “Gender Relations in the Church: A call to wholeness and Equal Discipleship”.

The participants were of a fair representation of the different sectors of the Church. There were 42 in all, of whom 29 were women and 13 men. Among these participants there were persons who are in leadership positions in the Church such as Bishop Agnelo Gracias, Auxiliary Bishop of the Bombay Archdiocese, Bro. K.M. Joseph SG., the President of the National CRI, Sr. Helen Saldhana, Secretary, Women's Commission, Provincial Superiors, Theologians, Formators, and other professionals like Grass Roots Activists, Feminist thinkers, People involved in Education, Health care, Media, Psychologists, Lawyers and a host of other well-qualified experts.

Bro. Varghese Theckanath S.G, in the context of situating the Consultation and its Dynamics explained the four-fold purpose:

1. To understand sexual abuse from a legal perspective
2. To study sexual abuse in the church from a morality and psycho-sexual paradigm
3. To analyze the structural implications for the church in creating a more just gender relations
4. To formulate recommendations for the different sectors of the Church in negotiating wholeness and equal discipleship.

Inaugural messages were given by Rt. Rev. Agnelo Gracias and

Bro. Joseph. K.M, and Sr. Pauline Pereira, the Asst. Superior General of the Missionary Sisters of the Servants of the Holy Spirit, Rome.

Dr. Joseph M.T. SVD, while situating the theme of the consultation "Gender Relations in the Church: A call to wholeness and Equal Discipleship", explained that as committed members of the Catholic Church in India, as women and men disciples of Jesus, the onus is on us today to engage in the following:

- a) To familiarize with the new frontiers of Gender equality and justice carved out in the civic sphere.
- b) To look at the deeply entrenched ideas and practices in the church today.
- c) To have the courage to face with an outstanding sense of honesty and integrity the cases of abuses of power by men.
- d) To explore the ways in which the maximum of equal discipleship can become a reality, etc.

The consultation had excellent resource persons with creative and meaningful papers :

1. Dr. Tony Da Silva, SJ, dwelt on the topic "Understanding Sexuality, intimacy and Human relationship in Consecrated life."
2. Advocate Flavia Agnes, explained the Indian law and its implications.
3. Dr Shaji George Kochuthara CMI, presented a paper on: "Official response to the sexual abuse scandal in the Church: A critical appreciation and analysis".
4. Dr. Shalini Mulackal, PBVM, spoke on: "Understanding the Morality of Sexual Abuse".
5. Dr. Jacob Parappally MSFS, dealt with: "Theological basis of Hierarchical structures in the Church – Implications for Gender Relations".
6. Virginia Saldhana, presented her paper on: "Sexual abuses as a crime: Global perspectives".
7. Dr. Rosamma John ICM, spoke on: "Psychology of Hierarchical structures in the Church – Implications for Gender Relations".
8. Dr. Julian Saldanha SJ. Moderated the panel on: "Negotiating Partnership in the Church". The members of the Panel were:

1. Dr. Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, Scientist & Feminist Writer.
2. Sr. Jyoti Pinto BS, (Former Mother General of Bethany Sisters)
3. Dr. Paul Raj, S G, Provincial Superior.
4. Mr. Joseanthony Joseph, Married Theologian.

(The above papers would be published later.)

The participants came out with a Statement and Recommendations which is as follows.

Statement of the Consultation

1. Introduction:

1.1 As a follow-up of the commitment made at the 1st Consultation on Gender Relations in the Church “to wipe away every tear (Rev 21:4) and bring healing and wholeness”, forty-three women and men active in Church ministry gathered at the 2nd Consultation organised jointly by Streevani, Satyashodhak, Indian Women's Theological Forum and Montforte Social Institute, to reflect on “Gender Relations in the Church: A Call to Wholeness and Equal Discipleship”.

1.2 This Consultation sought to deepen the discussions begun at the 1st Consultation which focused on the Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India and the need for a policy to address sexual abuse in the Church in India. Thus it examined the structural implications for the church in promoting gender just relations, the moral and legal consequences of sexual abuse, and the psycho-sexual paradigm that supports clergy sexual misconduct.

2. Reflections on Structures in the Church for Equal Partnership:

2.1 We began by acknowledging that leadership in the Church is divinely instituted and vested with authority that is exercised as servant leadership in the community of brothers and sisters. However, we also realized that in keeping with the self-understanding of the Church that it is a continuation of the Old Testament community of faith, namely, Israel, the structure of the early Church was modeled after the prevalent patriarchal and hierarchical structure that privileged men over women, children, strangers, and slaves.

2.2 This was counter to Jesus' own practice that was a continuation of the prophetic tradition which stood against substituting cult or

power structures, whether religious or secular, for ordering right relationship with God and among human beings. "But it shall not be so among you" (Mk 10:43) is not an advice but a command equally valid as "love one another" and "go out to the whole world proclaiming the good news" (Mt 28:18). Not surprisingly, the word hierarchy is not found in the New Testament.

2.3 We further acknowledged that a proper theological understanding of the leadership structure in the Church dictates that it should be a re-affirmation of the equality of all humans because they are created in the image and likeness of God, the Absolute communion of equals in whom there is no higher or lower.

2.4 Given this context, the hierarchical structure of the Church can be justified only if it is understood in terms of self-emptying, servant-leadership of the people of God (Mt 20:25-28). Wrongly understood it becomes a social order of increasing access to, and exercise of power, giving priests legitimacy to dominate and control, especially women, who are excluded from its ranks. Discrimination and subjugation are constitutive of such a hierarchy, making it one of the major challenges to equal discipleship in the Church.

2.5 There is an urgent need for the Church to be self-critical and to reclaim the servant leadership model mandated by Jesus through the washing of the feet in the Eucharistic ritual. Such servant leadership is centrifugal in nature and recognizes only brothers and sisters or friends. It empowers everyone to be a leader, including women, who sadly are forbidden to have their feet washed on Maundy Thursday. It is not based on the worldly principles of higher or lower, autocracy or democracy, patriarchy or kyriarchy, exclusion or inclusion but on the divine principle of charism given to a person to offer kenotic or self-emptying service for the sake of the kingdom. All are called equally to such leadership (Acts 2:16-18), and to whom it should be given cannot be pre-determined by any social system without infringing on the right of God to be God. No one has the right to deny leadership in the Church to one who has the charism to be a leader simply because one is born a woman.

2.6 By depriving women of leadership positions the hierarchical structure of the Church creates in women's psyche the characteristics of subordination, passivity, servitude, dependency, unquestioning

obedience and vulnerability. This is compounded by the arrogation of power down the centuries which has created in the male psyche the belief in its innate superiority, wisdom and decision-making capability while engendering in the female psyche a belief in its inferiority, 'foolishness' and indecisiveness.

2.7 The starting point of a gender-sensitive approach is a questioning of the accepted beliefs and practices related to gender stereotyping, with a view to laying bare the ideology of male domination ingrained therein.

2.8 Also imperative is a sincere introspection on the concepts of power and hierarchy in the Church and secular society. Awareness of internal conditioning is a prerequisite to change. Education – both religious and secular – of women and men to overcome generations of power imbalance is crucial. The need to recognise that both women and men are victims of this imbalance and both need to change is crucial for true partnership to evolve.

2.9 Since equal partnership in a male-dominated, hierarchical structure is not possible, women have to negotiate partnership in the Church. Negotiation however, can only be from a position of strength which comes from theological knowledge, high self-esteem and independence from the Church. Thus there is an urgent need for the non-ordained, especially women religious, to empower themselves with theology so that they can critique, question and redefine their place in the Church. The need to break the myth that ordination makes one superior and advantaged is a vital aspect of this process.

2.10 As long as the Church remains fundamentally unequal, changes can be initiated by delinking ordination and governance and vesting the people of God, called together by Christ, with administrative and juridical powers by virtue of their baptism (1Cor 3-13). Additionally, the early tradition of women deacons in the Church can be restored. Since "Sacred Orders" includes diaconal ordination, women could then be included in decision-making.

3. Recommendations:

To work towards a Church that reflects more truthfully the mind of Christ, where women and men work together, without gender or ministry dictated hierarchies, towards the building of the Reign of

God, we propose:

1. A progressive deconstruction of existing hierarchical structures to form more inclusive and participative ones in keeping with the prophetic spirit of Jesus. This can be achieved by demythologising and demystifying concepts like the priesthood and hierarchy, encouraging the belief that 'we are the church', and formation at different levels for equal discipleship. Strategies for implementation could include:

- Modules on gender relations for seminarians and trainees at all levels in the Church.
- Broad-based theological formation of the faithful that covers human rights issues and social responsibility, by faculty that includes the non-ordained.
- Transforming/reforming existing theological formation by appointing and affirming faculty that is critical, liberative and prophetic.
- Promoting online formation programmes such as the Catherine of Siena Virtual College Courses.
- Continual and ongoing formation.
- Formation for priests and religious that is integrated with society to make it socially relevant and responsible.
- Fostering leadership in the Church and society at the grassroots levels through appropriate formation.

2. Formation of Advocacy or Task groups

- Think-tanks of different types (amorphous, parish based, religious, interest groups, etc.) to share ideas, spread awareness and network.
- Counter-movements through a federation of like-minded groups.

3. Using media and technology to create awareness and advocate for changes in existing structures.

4. Broadening the understanding of Church and mission by engaging in civic and social issues as part of our Christian calling to bring about the Reign of God.

4. Reflections on Sexual Abuse:

4.1 The starting point for our reflections on sexual abuse in the

Church was based on the understanding of human sexuality, intimacy and relationships within the context of consecrated and priestly life. A positive, developmental perspective of the human person formed the basis of our discussion, and the potential for danger to and difficulty in remaining true to our calling to fidelity, that is inherent in our sexual nature, was highlighted. Consequently it was stressed that within consecrated and priestly life proper boundary markers must be laid out in relationships to provide a helpful road map in navigating the inevitable emotional ups and downs.

4.2 The strong link between intimacy and identity was emphasised. Since intimacy is relational, we can only relate well to the other if we first know who we are. Within consecrated and priestly life this would entail recognising and owning multiple identities such as one's genital (male/female) identity, gender identity (masculinity/femininity) and religious sex role identity (Brother/Sister/Priest).

4.3 Culture and religion play important roles in shaping identity. Seminary/religious formation tends to give those being formed readymade identities which may not always be appropriate for the different stages of religious life or to the particular individual, resulting in internal conflict and distorted religious sex role identities. This coupled with the way authority is exercised in the Church leads to an imbalance of power that allows the possibility of sexual abuse.

4.4 Women in the Church are doubly vulnerable, when faced with an all-male hierarchy of power. There is potential for emotional and sexual exploitation with no efficient forum for redressal. Approaching civil courts is often resisted because of a sense of betrayal of the Church and difficulty in proving allegations.

4.5 Despite the Church's mandate to be prophetic, it is civil law that has led the way in recognising and creating mechanisms to redress the abuse of women. In doing so it has challenged the Church to fulfil its own call to "act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly before God" (Micah 6:8).

4.6 The media glare, on the horror of clerical paedophilia while it brought many issues to the fore, left the sexual abuse of women out of public consciousness. Often, such abuse is overlooked because it purportedly entails consensual sex between adults. This approach fails to consider the unequal power equation that renders the

woman's consent invalid. This sinister blend of sexuality and power traps women in a web woven by the imposed belief that the same religious structures that exploit them can resolve issues of violence against them. Predator priests have cleverly spiritualised abuse of their victims leaving them feeling confused, condemned, betrayed and in a crisis of faith.

4.7 Often the Church remains silent on issues concerning women and leaves women with no recourse but to bear the crime stoically or seek legal relief. While there has been recognition of the problem by the hierarchy, the response has been largely defensive, safeguarding the reputation and interests of the institution. There is little consciousness of the responsibility of abetting a crime and sin. The lack of accountability with regard to action for justice, the tendency to place the clergy outside the ethical and legal frameworks that govern professionals in society, the hiding of a crime with the cloak of sin that demands only forgiveness instead of lawful retribution, and the evasion of responsibility towards the victim has left the faithful disillusioned and angry with Church authorities.

4.8 Although the responsibility of those who are personally involved cannot be ignored, what has become increasingly clear is the failure of the system and structure of the Church to ensure ethical behaviour and response. Clericalism, the hierarchical structure and the assumption of 'divine' power are at the root of the problem and must be deconstructed.

4.9 The criminal nature of sexual abuse needs to be acknowledged and addressed in addition to its sinfulness. Women victims must be advised and helped to pursue criminal and civil remedies. Women and men must be formed into believing that they are not betraying the Church by doing so. They must be taught to believe that they actually have a Christian duty to do so and that failure to do so is a serious crime and will eventually harm the credibility of the church.

4.10 Informal interviews have shown that entrants to clerical and religious life can also be sexual abuse survivors, and studies in psychology have shown that these run the risk of becoming abusers themselves.

4.11 Victims of sexual abuse harbour anger, depression, shame and guilt that frequently last a lifetime and prevent normal human

relationships. This lasting impact points to the grave sin and crime of sexual abuse. If the perpetrator is a priest it amounts to a double betrayal, as a trusted religious leader becomes the predator, destroying the victim's God-given dignity and freedom as well as belief in God.

4.12 There is an urgent need to demythologise male privilege and power, especially in the priesthood, which leave women powerless. The absence of a language to name violence and abuse has silenced women. They are left with a sense of guilt to suffer the burden of the "sin".

5. Recommendations:

To ensure a swifter mechanism of redress for victims of sexual abuse as well as to create awareness of the severity of the problem we advocate:

1. A Code of Conduct for Church personnel to be drawn up, circulated and implemented.
2. The institution of independent, woman-headed and women-centric investigating and grievance redressal commissions/committees similar to those mandated by the government (e.g. Vishakha guidelines), in all parishes/dioceses to enable victims to seek justice. A CBCI Commission to oversee these.
3. Youth to be made aware of the code of conduct for Church personnel and the measures to be taken to protect oneself from possible sexual abuse in the Church. Easy access to professional help to be provided to youth struggling with clergy sexual abuse.
4. Formation programmes for women and men in parishes, through the CBCI Commission for Women, Justice and Peace Commission, and Family Commission, to create awareness of the Code of Conduct and the need to guard against abuse.
5. Relevant formation and training programmes in formation houses of men and women that provide opportunities for healing and holistic development of the human person.
6. Networking of various Church-based and secular groups

involved with women's issues to provide fora for counselling, support to claim redress in the Church, advocacy and legal aid.

7. The setting up of fora comprising committed Christian activists who will follow-up cases of sexual abuse and, if all remedies fail, initiate civil suits and public protests.

6. Our Commitment:

In the light of our deliberations and recommendations, we felt an urgent need to:

1. Strengthen the prophetic spirit in ourselves.
2. Explore how the New Way of Being Church (FABC PAV, Bandung 1990) which the CBCI and most dioceses have adopted as their pastoral priority, can help facilitate partnership and change the hierarchical structures in the Church.
3. Use media and new technology to network and explore ways in which equal discipleship can become a reality.
4. Promote the education of the non-ordained including women religious, in theology and philosophy.
5. Create spaces and opportunities for critique of the ways in which power is exercised and misused in the Church, and priesthood and hierarchy in the Church are mythologised.
6. Build advocacy groups for renewal of victims, and redressal of grievances related to gender justice, violence against women and sexual abuse.
7. Make formation of seminarians and religious more holistic and grounded in "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the (women and) men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted" (Gaudium et Spes, 1).
8. Ongoing formation in gender sensitivity for those already ordained and professed, to address issues of gender justice and clergy sexual abuse.

7. Conclusion:

This Consultation was meant to be productive not just polemic. It brought together those who love the Church and wish to see it grow and prosper in the image of Jesus Christ in whom all are equal in dignity, respect and responsibility (Gal 3:28). It focused on the structures that need to be deconstructed for equal discipleship to become a reality in the church. At the same time it examined a serious problem in the Church today, one that has assumed critical dimensions: clergy sexual abuse. It looked at these issues with a critical mind but also with a warm heart, tracing their roots and suggesting alternatives for change.

We believe that the Spirit of God, that Spirit of wisdom and love, can animate all of us to rekindle in the Church the mission of Jesus who came that women and men, the ordained and non-ordained, the mighty and the lowly, all may have life, life in all its fullness (John 10:10).

Reported by : Adv. Sr. Julie George SSps

National Consultation on Building Integral Partnership for Prophetic Mission Streevani – Ishvani Kendra, Pune. September 5 - 8, 2011

Introduction

Around 52 gender - sensitive men and women from across the country gathered together responding to the invitation of Streevani and Ishvani Kendra Pune to study and appreciate one of the most progressive documents of our time "Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India."

The Consultation was organized for Lay Leaders, Provincials, Rectors, Superiors, Parish Priests and Formators on this relevant theme.

While situating the theme of the consultation Sr. Julie George explained the purpose of the consultation as follows:

1. To study, appreciate and propagate the gender Policy of the Catholic Church.
2. To the possible obstacles in its effective implementation.
3. To promote inclusive leadership in the life and Mission of the Church.
4. To find ways and means to concretely spread the ideas of Gender Equality among various levels of leadership and formation.
5. To identify the areas of implementation at different levels: formation houses, parishes and dioceses.
6. To draw some guidelines for further effective implementation.

The eminent resource persons helped us to achieve this, which was followed by clarifications, group discussions and sharing, recognizing our co-responsibility in the church. Following are the different papers presented during the Consultation and the details of the same are given in this bulletin.

1. Keynote Address "Motivation and Inspiration for Effective and Participative Leadership in the Church" - Ms. Ruth D'Souza,
2. "Exposition of and Reflection on the Document "Gender Policy of

the Catholic Church of India” - Sr.Helen Saldanha SSpS

3. “Formation of Men and Women for Participative and Prophetic Leadership in the Mission of the Church”
- Dr. Jacob Parappally MSFS
4. “Formation of Laity for Effective Christian Witness”
- Mrs. Virginia Saldanha
5. “Christ's Vision for a Gender-just Society: A Human Rights and Good Governance Perspective” - Bro. Varghese Theckanath SG
6. “Theological and Biblical Foundation of Gender Equality”
- Dr. Shalini Mulackal PBVM
7. "Formation of the Lay Faithful: for Mission or Maintenance"
- Mrs. Raynah Branganza
8. “Responding to Special Areas of Concern to Promote Integral and Inclusive Leadership”, - Mrs. Lida Jacob IAS

Hence, the gender policy spells out it's mission as “Gender equality within families, society and in the Church and specifies gender equality through gender equity. Gender equality means that the different behavior, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favored equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but our rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether we are born male or female. This was felt clearly in the following statement of the consultation.

Statement of Consultation

We, 52 participants from various parts of the country who are theologians, social workers, educationists and members/leaders of religious congregations, concerned about gender equality in Church and society responded to the invitation from Streevani and Ishvani Kendra, Pune, to the National Consultation on “Building Integral Partnership for Prophetic Mission”, at Pune, from 5th – 8th September, 2011. The objectives of the meeting were to deepen the understanding of the Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India, for a sincere and committed participation and contribution to make it a reality, and thus to promote a discipleship of equals in the Church.

The formulation of the gender policy issued in 2010 is a welcome

beginning initiated by the Bishops of India in their endeavour to bring about gender justice within the Church and society.

The inputs at the meeting made us realise that:

1. There is a huge gap between who we are as followers of Jesus and what we need to be to carry out the mission of the Church effectively.
2. Leadership needs to be participative, inclusive and dialogical, patterned on Jesus' teaching and example of leadership.
3. The Vatican II vision of the Church as the People of God has been effectively negated by the emphasis on the hierarchical structure which renders the majority of the Priestly People of God passive and uninvolved in the Mission of the Church.
4. The faithful do not feel comfortable with the term 'laity,' so the term 'Priestly People of God' was preferred to express their baptismal responsibility in Church's mission.

Despite the adoption of the gender policy almost two years ago, we find a lack of enthusiasm in its execution and implementation. The strategies, in this document needs to be matched with well defined goals and an Action Plan to be carried out within a specific time frame. Hence in our commitment to gender equality and justice we recommend the following:

1. For the study, dissemination and implementation of the Gender Policy within the next year:
 - a. Organize seminars across the country to explain the Policy in detail; for priests, religious, the priestly people of God, in houses of formation, educational institutions, etc.
 - b. Earnestly request bishops to include the Gender Policy in the Pastoral Plan of their diocese.
 - c. Create simplified modules that everyone can use; where necessary it may be translated into regional languages; with explanatory notes.
 - d. Promote the wider publication of the Gender Policy
 - e. Strengthen the Commissions for Women (Ritual bodies) and the CBCI Office for Women with adequate funds and staff to propagate and implement the Gender Policy. Collaborate

with them by forming teams to help in this task.

2. To focus on sensitization towards gender justice and education in Human Rights in seminaries, formation houses, marriage preparation courses, youth programmes, SCC formation, School curricula and Community development programmes with immediate effect we will:
 - a. Identify areas where gender justice is lacking and ensure its remedy through implementation of Gender Policy
 - b. Adopt inclusive language in our usage and liturgical celebrations. Promote the use of the new NRSV Bible which uses inclusive language.
 - c. Critically examine and change liturgical readings that appear derogatory to women.
3. Empower the priestly people of God to carry out their mission in the neighbourhood community through-
 - a. A renewed interpretation of the Word of God that is liberative.
 - b. Close collaboration between SCC and priests, women and men religious.
 - c. Relevant formation programmes.
4. Formulation and dissemination of a People's Charter which spells out the rights, responsibilities and concerns of the Christian Community and its dissemination.
5. Initiate faith based solidarity groups established on gender equality where like-minded people come together to share concerns on faith and extend support to women in situations of violence, to youth alienated, from their families, as well as to other vulnerable groups.
6. Advocate the formation of grievance redressal cells to address issues:
 - a. in relation to parish life.
 - b. in Church related institutions and organizations.
7. Urge Church leaders to take a stand on atrocities against women and girl children, human trafficking, etc., irrespective of religion, by:
 - a. acting in solidarity with secular groups

- b. a change of the double standards in morality
- c. avoiding the stereotyping of women.
- d. promoting positive images of the girl child through the inclusion of girls in liturgical services and as important and dynamic members of society.

WE, THE PARTICIPANTS OF THIS NATIONAL CONSULTATION, COMMIT OURSELVES TO TRAINING, FOR THE DISSEMINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GENDER POLICY BEGINNING WITH OURSELVES AND WITHIN OUR CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE. WE OFFER OUR SERVICE TO THE CBCI COMMISSION OF WOMEN, DIOCESAN BODIES, AND OTHER CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS TO HELP PROPAGATE AND IMPLEMENT THE GENDER POLICY FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY.

Having concluded this Consultation on the Feast of the Nativity of our Blessed Mother, which is dedicated to the girl-child in India, we are inspired by her courage to be prophetic change agents in our Church and wider Indian society to eradicate violence and bring fullness of life to all girls and women.

Reported by - Sr. Reena D'souza SSps
Assistant Director, Streevani

Inaugural Address Building Integral Partnership for Prophetic Mission

Joy Thomas SVD
Director, Ishvani Kendra, Pune

Introduction

Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil of happy memory said in the foreword he wrote for the book Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India that, "The Gender Policy aims to address the concerns of women, who are doubly marginalized and oppressed. As followers of Christ, we are challenged to create conditions for marginalized voices to be heard, to defend the defenceless, and to assess lifestyles, policies and social institutions in terms of their impact on women"(p.x). The theme of the recent Mumbai consultation from 13-15 August was Gender Relations in the Church: a Call to Wholeness and Equal Discipleship, where certain analysis of feminist scholarship, which has brought about some visible changes in the world today, was highlighted. For example, one of the pioneering ideas put forward by feminist scholars was the distinction they made between sex and gender, succinctly explained by Ann Oakley in her book, Sex, Gender and Society (1972). She and other scholars pointed out that while sex is a biological reality, gender is cultural and therefore a constructed reality. The dominance of men and the systems that they created justified the differences of gender (constructed differences) as based on biology (nature).

Another important theme developed by feminist scholarship is patriarchy. Generally, patriarchy can be taken to mean male domination, males are the authority figures, fathers are the sole head of the household and are in authority. It also means the power relationships by which men dominate women, and a system wherein women are kept subordinate in a number of ways. The advancement and development of India requires equal participation of both women and men. Hence this consultation is called to deliberate on a proactive theme; Building Integral Partnership for Prophetic Mission.

The clear-cut objectives of this consultation are:

1. To study, appreciate and propagate the Gender Policy of the Catholic Church
2. To identify the possible obstacles in its effective implementation
3. To promote inclusive leadership in the Life and Mission of the Church
4. To find ways and means to concretely spread the ideas of Gender Equality among various levels of leadership and formation
5. To identify the areas of implementation at different levels: formation houses, parishes and dioceses.
6. To draw some guidelines for further effective implementation.

Status of Women in the Society and in the Church

In the history of India, from ancient times to modern era, after independence, the status and position of women has been undergoing rather drastic changes. The Vedic era is known as the golden age of women in India; at that time women enjoyed equal rights with men. The role of the women in Mahabharata proves that no work whether social, economic, religious or cultural could be complete without the participation of women. Before India became independent there was an awakening among the educated women and they were making their voices heard. In recent years, feminism with related issues is a subject of study convincing that women have become significant.

Christianity, a movement initiated by Jesus of Nazareth, had a strong prophetic accent. Jesus had a very positive understanding of the status and role of woman in society. As Joan D. Chittister says, "Jesus, the feminist image of God, cures and loves, is vulnerable and receptive, laughs and dances at wedding feasts, cries tears and feels pain. This glimpse of God is the glimpse of otherness at its ultimate. It is in this model of otherness that the feminist puts hope for equality, for recognition, for respect, for the end of sexism..." (Heart of Flesh, Ottawa: St Paul University 1998:118)

From the beginning Christianity was not a movement made up of men alone, as feminist scholars have made us aware, the history of Christianity includes women who followed Jesus. In the early Church women enjoyed respectable status following the teachings of Jesus.

Women in all the four gospels reflect that Jesus is the one who shows concern for the well-being of women and gave them their true worth. A woman is unique in her own way as much as a man is unique in his own way. Both are humans created in the image of God. As committed women and men disciples of Jesus, this consultation is called to explore ways in which equal discipleship can become a reality. It is not equality for power but rather for recognition, dignity and respect for humanity in which both women and men are complementary partners.

Through its social teachings, the Church has revealed its commitment to the cause of empowerment of women and the need to promote dignity and equality for women in the Church and society. It has been emphasised that “Since in our times women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the church’s apostolate” (GS, 1965). The CRI National Assembly at Kochi in 2006 made a whole hearted commitment to “the spirit of Gender Justice and Collaborative Partnership at the service of the Kingdom” and wanted to see the “Church as a visible sign of Gender Justice Society.” Such an egalitarian agenda brings greater wholeness and meaning to human relationships, unleashing the feminine genius.

Gender Justice and Empowerment

Many commentators on gender observe with varying degree of seriousness that women have plenty of influence but not much authority. Women are the power behind the throne; the stage managers who make it all happen and then retreat to the wings, leaving the men to take the curtain calls. The situation is clear: Women become what men want them to be.

Whatever women, in the innocence and excitement of childhood, aspire to has been carefully culled across time. Women learn young to live down to the stunted expectation imposed on them by the society around them. They were taught that they could be cook but not chef, nurse but not doctor, teller but not manager of the bank. The patriarchal system told women they could not run marathons, and so women didn't run them. Patriarchal men told

women they were too weak to play basketball on the whole court, and women never tried the game. Patriarchal society told women that they could not do maths and science, and few women did. Patriarchal society told women that politics was a male preserve, and so women never ran for office. Patriarchal society told women that they were responsible for the sexual response of men, so mothers dutifully taught their daughters whose fault rape really was. No wonder it is women who say that women can't be president, can't be priests, can't be airline pilots, can't be the primary wage earner in the family. Or worse, no wonder it is women who reject women who are... Patriarchal women turn into oppressors of other women, true, but only because they have been victimized themselves (Chittister 1998:155).

During the ancient period, there were no definite roles for women and men. Women and men were indispensable partners in the daily struggle to survive and prosper. During the middle ages, reality began to dawn at least for the daughters of the middle and upper classes. Industrial revolution separated home and workplace. It became a status symbol for the man to provide for his family and with woman now limited to domestic roles in the home. In the late 19th century, some middle and upper class women joined together in voluntary associations such as missionary societies or women's clubs to show their concern for suffering humanity. In the early 20th century more and more women held paying jobs, but faced discrimination in employment. Margaret Mead observed that a woman had two choices: either she is a woman not an efficient worker or she is an efficient worker, not a woman. She cannot be both.

It was World War II that provided the catalyst for most of the changes that has occurred in both behaviour and cultural attitudes. In India we had the freedom movement which made middle class and affluent women to come out of the four walls. They were fully capable of running their own lives and playing a role in the work force as well as in the home. When women went out to work, it was not to prove her equality with man; rather women were taking jobs in order to help the family.

Carol Gilligan, in her studies of women wrote in her book, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*

(1982), captured the subtle complementary differences between women and men. Males are characteristically concerned with substantive moral matters of justice, rights, autonomy and individuation. Women by contrast, are more often concerned with substantive moral matters of care, personal relationships and avoiding hurt to others. They tend to avoid abstract principles and universalist pretensions and focus instead on contextual detail and interpersonal emotional responsiveness. Hence in our present patriarchal systems all over the world we have to unlearn our patriarchal habits and enrich our endeavour in humanity with the complementary habits of the heart both feminine and masculine that make us whole (spirit filled). We need to respond to the human context with care, mercy and with an inter-subjective ethos long forgotten.

Christianity and Feminism

Let me begin with the question, “Is it possible for a person to be a good feminist and a good Christian at the same time?” And let me answer it with a counter question, “How is it possible to be a good Christian without being a good feminist?” For us Christians, when the two become separated, they are both the worse of it. One requires the other and neither stands well alone. The Christian feminist knows that one of the principles of feminism is to step over boundaries, to reach out, to listen and to demand respect and dignity in the process. Feminism does not set out to create boundaries. Only a solid spiritual life provides the depth and the strength that stepping over traces and dealing with otherness demands. We need the faith to know that what God created in two sexes, in multiple colours and in various parts of the globe all own the moon.

Whatever the ideals, the struggles to achieve them for both women and men are at base deeply human. Feminist men report multiple reactions in the course of their own coming to consciousness. The fact is that in the process of working with the Streevani team, there were moments when I felt shame about being a man responding negatively to women and few times suffered embarrassment when I was with women groups. I felt some kind of self-loathing when I was with macho men. And there were moments

when I felt that just being a masculine ceased to be a good thing for me. It was a long journey of befriending and integrating the gentler side of life and the feminine in me.

I have heard from my good women friends that they too struggle with the same issues. Feminist women with little or no spiritual base (although 'good religious' in our eyes) can find themselves responding negatively to men in general. Many begin to see sexism everywhere, further accentuated by the deformed understanding of their vows, destroying relationships and fuelling deep and lasting shame, anger, doubt and distrust. This can affect and cripple both women and men, and their life can become more a battle of sexes than a stretching of their human horizons. What we must also realise is that a commitment to change the mindsets of people in the world, its values and its structures, from patriarchy to feminism is no small task, "Feminism calls for a world in process. Authoritarianism celebrates the static in life. But people, unique, creative, in process, are anything but static. They are the flow of God through time" (Chittister 1998:130).

Compared to the past, there are some positive changes in the situation of women. An increasing number of women have acquired education. Women in schools and colleges are performing much better. Women are visible in all spheres of society. They have started articulating their concerns and asserting their dignity both individually and collectively. Women are on the move. Making this positive note on women breaking silence, Prof. Rita Noronha observes that "it is heartening to note that there is some awakening at the global level. An increasing number of women and men are questioning injustices committed against women and especially against people of the marginalized groups. There is a growing realization that if there is inclusive/equitable sustainable development, then there will be justice, peace and good health for all. An immense amount of feminist work in all fields of human knowledge inclusive of history, literature, sociology, anthropology and psychology is beginning to be recognized" (Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society, Sedos, Vol.42, No.5/6, 2010, p.102).

Hence, I would like to present before you once again the

recommendations of the National Consultation on Gender Relations in the Church held in Pune by Streevani on 15th August last year:

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

Conclusion

Let me conclude with the hope that we will engage ourselves into a feminism based not on femaleness, not on human needs alone, but on a spirituality that is holistic. Eco-feminism sees the intrinsic value and, therefore, the equal worth of all creation. It draws us beyond ourselves into the preservation of the whole universe; a commitment to the entire web of life. A feminist spirituality bridges the isolation of both women and men and gives both of them a chance finally, to be whole (Chittister 1998:157). Our gender practices need to be inclusive of both the feminine and the masculine aspects of our being human in our enterprise of caring for each other, it is a relationship of increasing care and interdependence in the great humanization process. What men can learn from the feminist spirituality is to refuse to become less than fully human, embracing compassion and dialogue as the way to human unity.

Motivation and Inspiration for Effective and Participative Leadership in the Church

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It is my privilege and honour to be with you today to share my thoughts on Gender Policy of the Church issued by the CBCI. My hope is that these discussions will raise our collective consciousness, and promote a sense of urgency towards the implementation of the gender policy. The formulation of the Gender Policy is a welcome beginning in the endeavour to bring about gender justice within the Church and society. It is imperative that after being offered a policy, we study it and appreciate its strengths and areas of concern as well as define ways in which we can concretely specify implementation. We also need to consider the obstacles and challenges that we will encounter in its implementation. We need to ensure that the implementation becomes an integral partnership between men and women, clergy and laity. My aim will be to deal with some aspects of the theme and identify the key challenges so that this Consultation may be able to mainstream the gender justice issue and specify action plans for implementation. I am hopeful that through the deliberations, a concrete plan of action will emerge over the next 3 days so that we progress in our aim of 'Building Integral Partnership for Prophetic Mission.' It is indeed fitting that this Consultation is being held during the novenas and feast of the Nativity of Mary which is celebrated as the day of the Girl Child by the Catholic Church.

1. The 'signs of the times'

The 'Incredible India' growth story has taken the world by storm. During his November 2010 visit, President Obama declared that India is no longer an emerging economy but has already 'emerged'. India's growing clout on the global stage is quite evident—in the Group of Twenty (G-20) meetings, climate change talks and global

trade negotiations. The World Bank says India will become the third largest economy after China and the US by 2025. India doubled both the size of its economy and its per capita income in 5 short years. The average income of an Indian is estimated to be \$1664 (Rs 75,000) a year¹. Though in the last 10 years, India gained the reputation of being an IT superpower and an outsourcing hub, it is now known for a new kind of export – CEO's. Most of the major corporations and banks around the world are being led by Indians including Indira Nooyi, the woman who leads the global PepsiCo Corporation. India uniquely has 8 women who are in key leadership positions in politics today. The president of the country is a woman. The president of the ruling party is a woman. The leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha is a woman. The speaker of the Lok Sabha is a woman. The most powerful individuals in the states of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Delhi and Tamil Nadu are women.

Yet, for all these indicators, tragically, lags far behind on the issue of gender justice. India has one of the lowest girl child sex ratios in the world. Data from the 2011 Indian census show that there are now 914 girls aged 0-6 years old for every 1,000 boys of the same age. The lowest however is the ratio in Haryana - 830 girls for every 1000 boys. This disturbing statistic is a result of the deeply rooted cultural preference for sons which leads parents to decide against allowing a girl to live, even before her birth. The ramifications of such an imbalance will not only continue for decades, but will affect an enormous proportion of the population. While men of marriageable age will suddenly find a dramatic shortage of potential brides, it is girls and women of all ages who will truly feel the brunt of this dynamic. Increases have been forecasted in gender-based violence, trafficking, discrimination and general vulnerability of women and girls².

Violence affects the lives of millions of women in India, in all socio-economic and educational classes. It cuts across cultural and religious barriers, impeding the right of women to participate fully in society. It takes a dismaying variety of forms, from domestic abuse and discrimination within the household to rape and honour killings, from child marriages to dowry deaths. In India, the problem of violence against women is the result of a long standing power imbalance between men and women. Men have control over access

to property and resources leading to female exploitation – physically, mentally, and commercially. Stereotyping, lower literacy rates (65% for females vs 82 % for males), discrimination in the workplace and under representation in governance and decision making bodies have ensured the continuing denial of rights and entitlements to women.

While we see some women making waves in the corporate world, they are a few and far between and most women face the proverbial glass ceiling!

The situation of women within the Church

The scene is not so different within the Church. We live in a male dominated patriarchal system where Church structures, rituals, decision making powers and resources are controlled by the male. The local Church, the national Church and the global Church, do not have many women on the decision making bodies at each level. All the prime Church institutions are headed by males. Women are often relegated to roles that reinforce the stereotype of women needing to be in a supportive role. Most women are engaged in women's ministries or kids ministries and have poor representation on the decision making bodies of the Church.

Women religious form the largest work force within the Church and many of them are actively engaged in pastoral ministry. Yet discrimination against them takes varied forms. Low wages, stereotyping of roles, degrading conversation, lack of respect are some of the more obvious. Sins of omission are equally contributing factors.

Attitudes within the Church reflect the same cultural stereotypes of the larger Indian society. Men are also victims of the traditionally perceived roles in Church and society. Most of them may not even be aware that they are oppressors. Some women complain but quickly find that often it is their women counterparts who propagate the stereotypes and do not offer any hope for gender justice being achieved. Most women do not complain but accept their secondary roles. Certainly, there is an urgent need for the liberation of both women and men.

2. Church's mission is to respond to the 'signs of the times'

The Second Vatican Council on various occasions swept aside the many layers of patriarchal dominance in the Church to come face to face with the egalitarian message of Jesus, with the vision of a collaborative Church with Gender Justice. In its Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes* (No. 29), it condemns any form of discrimination on the basis of sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion. The Vatican II document of the Church in the Modern World: (No 1) states 'The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men (women) of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.'

The Church is called to respond to and share the suffering of all by advocacy and care for the poor, the needy and the marginalized. This entails critically analyzing and exposing unjust structures, and working for their transformation. The Church is called to proclaim the words of hope and comfort of the Gospel, by its works of compassion and mercy (cf. Lk.4:18-19). The Church is called to heal and reconcile broken human relationships and to be God's instrument in the reconciliation of human division and hatred (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-21). In short, the Church has the freedom to witness, the moral necessity of expressing its inner convictions, even when they run counter to existing power structures.

The Church has often shown the way for social transformation. The history of religious life may be seen as the Church responding to the crises of history. Benedict's rule "to pray and work" in settled communities was an answer to much of the turbulence and violence which followed on the dissolution of the Roman Empire in Western Europe. Francis's emphasis on evangelical poverty was contemporary with the rise of merchant capitalism in the latter middle ages. Ignatius Loyola encouraged mission at a time when Europeans were "discovering" new lands and new cultures. Don Bosco's apostolic work with urban youth arose out of the unrest caused by the industrial revolution and nationalism³. The role of Pope John Paul II in the fall of communism in Poland is legendary. Many lay initiatives have also begun as a response to the needs of the time.

So how should the Church respond to the challenge of gender injustice? The core challenge is the change from a patriarchal

mindset to a participatory, inclusive and collaborative one where women and men can work together for promoting justice and fraternity within the Church and society. As a Church we need a consciousness and sensitivity, developed within men and women, to realize that women - as a class, caste, race and sex - have been discriminated, suppressed and denied opportunities to life. It simultaneously demands a conscious pro-active effort to change the reality of gender discrimination and gender-inequality in all walks of life.

3. A call to re-read Scripture with a new perspective

If there is one book in the world that is the most read and the most used, it is the Bible. Yet it is the one book in the world that is the most misread and the most misused. The Bible has been used to justify slavery. It has been used by women to affirm their equality with men. But it has been used by men to silence women since she is the 'seductress, the temptress'. This misreading and misinterpretation is primarily because of the patriarchal mindset, either of the authors or of the readers.

The first person to witness the resurrection was a woman. All the gospel writers mention Mary Magdalene as the witness and the apostle to the apostles. Yet Paul states (cf. 1Cor 15:3-7) that the resurrection was witnessed by Cephas, the twelve, 500 brethren, James, all the apostles and also by Paul. Yet Mary Magdalene is ignored in this account.

A point for reflection is therefore the silence of women in the Bible. Were the women silent in the Bible or were they silenced? Was the patriarchal mindset of the writer a reason for the invisibility and the silence of women in the Bible? As we discuss the gender policy, we need to ask some fundamental questions concerning the socio-cultural projections of a patriarchal system in the Bible and contrast it with what Jesus stands for. We may need new eyes and a new perspective to re-read scripture and understand the role of women.

Old Testament

When we think of a prominent woman leader of the Old Testament, we may not think of Miriam. God sends Moses, Aaron and Miriam before the people of Israel and calls all creation as witness to the fact

(cf. Micah 6:1, 4). Miriam is referred to as a prophetess (cf. Exodus 15) even before Aaron, who led the people - both men and women- into a dance. She was the leader of ALL the people and not just the women's wing! Yet one wonders why only Miriam is punished with leprosy, when both Aaron and Miriam rebelled and questioned Moses' authority (cf. Num 12; 1-2)? It is also interesting to note that the people of Israel refused to journey on without her (cf. Num 12:15-16), thus establishing her leadership.

New Testament

Let us examine another event in the NT which brings out possible bias in interpreting events. We will recall the story of the woman who anointed Jesus. Most of us would recall it as the story of the sinful woman who came in while Jesus was at supper at the home of the Pharisee. If we examine 'what part of Jesus body did she anoint?' most of us will respond of course the feet!

For a woman to come in uninvited to someone's dinner party required a lot of courage. Interestingly, the woman anoints Jesus' HEAD! The gospel writer would not have recorded it as head if it was feet, because both have a very different significance. In the OT it is the job of a prophet to anoint the head. Thus the woman fulfils a prophetic task! The woman plays a prophetic role and Jesus affirms the act. A point to ponder is why then do we carry this predominant image of a woman, weeping over her sins, wiping the feet of Jesus with her hair?

The life of Jesus clearly spells out His justice mandate. In spite of being a male, a Jew and a Rabbi, He did not allow the social expectations of His time to define His relationship with women. He related freely to women as we can see in the Gospels and they were free to approach him and relate to Him. Jesus declares 'I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance' (cf. Jn 10:10). Jesus did not come to save only males, but for ALL people irrespective of race, religion, gender, caste or wealth.

We need to discover a Living God who wants to give life to ALL. We need to discover the spirituality of equality and justice in the Bible. We need to discover the God of Mary, the revolutionary who dared to dream dreams of change in the Magnificat!

Early Christian Church

Thanks to studies by women scholars, we can begin to learn a new way of understanding the position of women in the Early Christian Church.

Gal 3.28, now referred to as the Magna Carta of Christian feminism, is actually the focal point of Paul's teaching on women. 'For those baptized in Christ, there is no distinction of race, religion, class or gender; all are one in Christ.' Men and women in the Christian community are not defined by their procreative capacities or their religious, cultural or social gender roles, but by their discipleship and by the empowering of the Spirit.

Gal 3.28 advocates the abolition of religious cultural divisions and the domination and exploitation wrought by the institution of slavery as well as the domination based on sexual divisions.

In the early Church, the new self-understanding of the Christians did away with all religious, class, social and patriarchal relationships of dominance, and therefore made it possible not only for Gentiles and slaves, but also for women to assume leadership functions within the urban missionary movement. In this movement, women were not marginal figures but exercised leadership as missionaries, founders of Christian communities, apostles, prophets and leaders of churches.

In the Early Church we see mention of women leaders like:

- ☐ Junia, together with her husband Andronicus, was an influential missionary who was acknowledged as an apostle, even by Paul himself (Rom 16.7).
- ☐ In Acts 2.17-18, Peter recognizes that both men and women received the gift of prophecy and the call to proclaim.
- ☐ Apphia, 'our sister,' together with Philemon and Archippus, was a leader in the house Church in Colossae (Philem 2).
- ☐ Nympha was Paul's co-worker, most likely an official minister and teacher in the Church in Cenchrae, whose authority was respected even by Paul (Rom 16.1-3).
- ☐ Wife and husband Priscilla and Aquila were Paul's 'fellow workers who risked their necks for [his] life' (Rom 16.3-4).

These examples give us a glimpse of the egalitarian church that was alive in early Christianity but which fell victim to the progressive patriarchalization and institutionalization of the Church as it took over the patriarchal, institutional structure of Greco-Roman society

4. Moving towards a re-dedication and re-commitment to mission – The Gender Policy

I would like to propose a first glimpse at the Policy and suggest certain considerations for our forthcoming debate in these 3 days. It is important for us to critique the document before we appreciate and propagate it.

The official Church has responded to the signs of the times by issuing a statement in the form of "The Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India", published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India in 2010. The 50-page document is the result of two years of deliberations and study following the General Body Meeting of the Bishops' Conference of India which had for its theme 'Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society' in 2008 at Jamshedpur, Jharkhand. The policy reflects the sensitivity and concern of the Bishops of India towards the low status of women in the Church and society. Many other religions surrounding us do not even recognize the gender issue as a problem, much less do they make statements.

The Gender Policy is a 'statement of intent' or a commitment towards establishing gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Church and in society. The policy provides a philosophical framework, general guiding principles, values, and standards to attain while adopting a gender perspective in order to achieve gender equality. It outlines the guidelines and framework within which decisions will be made and resources should be allotted. The Gender policy, when implemented in all its intent will become a change agent for transforming the clergy and the lay faithful for future generations. It will give clear signals to all stakeholders that achieving gender equality is an objective integral to the Christian faith, in line with gospel values and the biblical mandate.

The Policy has three parts. Part I provides a Christian understanding of gender equality and draws attention to the situation of women in India, and spells out the efforts of the Catholic Bishops'

Conference of India (CBCI) to empower women. Part II elucidates the vision, mission, objectives and guiding principles of the policy, while Part III addresses areas of implementation which are presented as policy statements and strategies but which to me, appear to be mere suggested initiatives.

The section on women and family is detailed and advocates mutual respect and equal partnership in marriage, equal rights of daughters and sons, fosters a culture of sharing of household chores thus overcoming gender division of labour and promotes life at all stages by addressing the factors that lead to abortion, foeticide and suicide. The sections on education, health and social involvement focus on strengthening the existing Church initiatives and policies to critically challenge and reorient gender biased behaviours and practices.

The section on women and economic independence promotes just wages for women especially women religious and those employed in Church institutions. The policy also focuses on special areas of concern like the Rights of the Girl Child, rejecting all forms of discrimination within and outside the family and promoting a girl's right to life, education, nutrition, health and development. The section on violence against women advocates zero tolerance and calls for structures and mechanisms for effectively combat violence and sexual harassment against women in families, workplaces and Church institutions.

A separate section on women within the Church focuses on gender mainstreaming, gender auditing and gender budgeting as the way forward for all CBCI commissions and Diocesan social service societies. Women's representation and participation in church bodies is suggested with necessary training for leadership.

5. Drawbacks

While it is a good starting point, it is important to review the drawbacks of the Gender Policy. As a whole it is not outcome oriented, and is a mere guideline without specific checks and counter checks. Unless it is translated into specifics, ten years down the line, we will face the reality of not knowing how much we have really succeeded in engineering transformation within the Church and in

society.

5.1 The document loses credibility about seriousness of implementation as it does not specify a percentage of representation on Church commissions and bodies at local, regional and national levels. The phrase used is 'adequate representation' in spite of the strong recommendation of the CBCI plenary (2008) for at least a 35 % representation moving towards a 50% representation of women as office bearers and members on parish and diocesan pastoral councils, finance committees and in the ecclesial bodies at the local and national levels. This is disappointing to say the least because it does not allow for any audit of the success of the gender policy.

This is also a contradiction to the gender policy document which states that 'The desired transformation will take place only when women are at the forefront for the cause of dignity and a rightful place for themselves in the Church and society'.

If a reservation per cent is not specified, the structures of the Church will continue to be male dominated and patriarchal. Women will never be able to have the decision making power to bring about change and the concept of gender mainstreaming and equality will remain only a good subject for discussion at forums such as these.

As Fr. Babu Joseph puts it in a press interview⁴ 'We are encouraging participation up to 50 per cent, but in parishes where there aren't enough qualified women candidates, it shouldn't be that reservation is introduced as a rule where capable candidates get the miss.'

To assume that one would not get capable candidates contradicts the premise of the gender policy that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them." (cf. Genesis 1:27). Moreover, this could have been relevant 20 years ago, but in today's day and age it is definitely possible to identify qualified and capable women who can be a part of the decision making bodies in the Church.

5.2 While the document mentions strategies, what it lacks are clear cut goals with a specific time frame. One cannot have strategies without goals. Without goals, strategies are more like a list of

suggestions with no specific aim in sight. Therefore evaluation of the success or failure of implementation of the policy will be an impossible task.

True commitment to the implementation of the policy begins with a willingness to commit to specific goals in each area of the policy. Then these goals will have to be translated into plans with corresponding programs. For the success of any program one will need to budget and allocate resources including personnel, infrastructure and finance. Only then will one see any qualitative and quantitative transformation in the Church and in society.

5.3 The section on violence and sexual abuse of women and children should have been spelt out in greater detail. The Church today faces increasing loss of credibility in this area and this was a good opportunity to show seriousness on the part of the hierarchy to root out this evil. No mechanism has been provided for the redressal of women's grievances against Church personnel and structures. A sexual harassment policy has not been specified.

5.4 Specific indicators must be arrived at to track the degree of change. Some of the powerful indicators followed across the world are the percent share of women in decision-making instances, the prevalence of gender-based violence and sexual violence, the rising share and prevalence of HIV/AIDS among younger women, the unequal share of unpaid work, the share of caring obligations, the persistent income gap and lower returns to education for women.

6. Challenges to Implementation

We need to be also mindful of the challenges to the implementation of the Gender Policy.

6.1 Mindset

The predominant patriarchal mindset of men and the subservient mindset of women will be the primary challenge – in the home, at the work place and in Church institutions. The comfort zone and social structures will have to be addressed and man and woman encouraged to truly value each other in the image and likeness of God. Gender stereotyping by both men and women especially within

the Church will have to be challenged.

A focus on re-education at every level beginning with parents, children, youth, young adults, and extending to the formation of priests and religious will have to be a key driver of transformation.

6.2 Goals

Lack of goals and no system to measure results will be another reason for the gender policy failing to take off. An ancient management adage says 'WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS DONE!' Goals help us to be focused on our vision and our mission. Goal setting is planning ahead. It serves as a map for the future, guideposts along the way, and means for measuring success at the end. Without goals, we are not sure where we're going.

People work better if they know WHAT they are supposed to do and HOW they will do it, and WHEN they will accomplish it. Setting clear standards is vital if the gender policy is to move in the right direction.

Each Church organization must decide for itself what specific, measurable and time bound goals it would like to pursue. Resources must then be allocated – both financial and personnel- to ensure that programs are implemented. Trying to implement a gender policy without goals will result in 'tokenism' and everyone will feel good that 'something' is being done, but how much and how effectively will never be assessed.

6.3 Accountability of leadership

Accountability is a key driver for change. Unless leaders in the Church (local, regional and national) feel accountable and allow themselves to be held accountable, there will be no consistent and sustainable focus on gender justice. It will be reduced to a few token events held around 'Women's Day' or the 'Day of the Girl Child' and will not create any sustainable impact.

It is therefore important to decide who is going to be accountable for the implementation of the directions in the Gender Policy at local, regional and national levels.

6.4 Measurement

Indicators of social change (both short term and long term) must be arrived at and consistently tracked. Benchmarking with corporates and other Churches may be a good method to measure progress and draw lessons for growth. Impact studies must be conducted – if possible annually so that changes on each indicator are tracked and course corrections in strategy are incorporated.

6.5 Fine tuning

As initiatives are implemented, we will need to fine tune programs. A constant review of progress by answering questions including, 'What are our successes? Where have we failed? What should be the priorities? Where are allocations directed actually? How to re-align budget allocations?' is called for.

7. A spirituality of partnership

Much research has been done in leading business schools on the differences of feminine and masculine leadership styles. Studies have examined male/female differences in three main types of leadership behaviour⁵

7.1 Task accomplishment style, which is how much the leader initiates, organizes, and defines work activities and processes studies conclude that women do not behave differently from men in the same or similar kind of leadership position.

7.2 Interpersonal style, which is how much the leader builds morale, relationships, satisfaction, and commitment in the organization the conclusion is that women tend to employ a more democratic, participative style while men tend to take a more autocratic, directive approach.

7.3 Decision-making style, which is how much the leader encourages a participative, democratic approach as opposed to an autocratic the approach findings are that woman's tendency to negotiate, mediate, facilitate, and communicate is the more effective leadership style than men's emphasis on power and control; and because this "feminine" style reduces hierarchy, satisfies subordinates, and achieves results, it should be the norm to which men are compared.

Most mainstream writers now urge leaders to adopt a caring, cooperative, collaborative, nurturing, connective, servant leadership style.

I believe that both men and women can function in a complementary manner, bringing their own unique natures to leadership in all walks of life. I believe we need to work on a model of mutual deference and shared leadership amply modelled for us by Jesus and the early Church - a model of shared partnership between men and women. This calls for a fundamental shift in how we view leadership. Traditional models of leadership are based on power and authority. Sadly, the hierarchal model of leadership that is dominant in the world systems has infiltrated the institutional Church, causing it in most cases to look no different from the world that it is seeking to influence. It is in this context that we need to look for new ways of leadership.

The famous icon of the Trinity painted by Andrei Rublev is an excellent basis for modelling our leadership in the Church.

- The Persons of the Trinity are mutually honouring, mutually submitted and function as an interdependent team who are co-equals.
- The Persons of the Trinity do not lord it over each other, or anyone involved in their community. Jesus asserted that being the boss or lording it over people is the world's system of modelling leadership (cf. Matthew 20:25).
- The Trinity are a community of persons in one being, thus they are one, yet not without their individuality. Their identity is both community and diversity of personal uniqueness
- They maintain their separate identity and dignity and at the same time work in harmony.
- The model of leadership in the Church should be based on the Trinity. We must seek to empower people rather than seek power or status. Our servant authority must be utilised to influence and build people up and together into God's people.

8. Considerations for implementation

The messages and practices of the church must demonstrate the equality of women and men as a model for society to follow. The underlying principle is that healthy gender relations based on partnership

(not power) are necessary for gender justice the world over.

I submit a few practical considerations for your deliberations during this National Consultation.

8.1 Translate the gender policy into an actionable goal oriented document. Set goals for awareness, planning of programs, implementation and assessment. Allocate budgets and personnel.

8.2 The church must lead by demonstration of its commitment to the implementation of the gender policy. If parliament is considering a 33% reservation for women, the church should lead the way and give at least 35 % of the seats on decision- making bodies to women. This would mean at all institutions local, regional or national.

8.3 Churches should promote "equivalence". Homilies should explain that some of the old patterns of male-female relationship are not biblical but cultural and constantly challenge gender stereotyping in the home, workplace and church institutions.

8.4 Women (both religious and lay) should be trained and empowered to take up positions in the church. Capability building and succession planning are key initiatives for successful implementation of the policy. What does not get budgeted does not happen. Allocate budgets towards this end and evaluate whether budgets have been spent as allocated or diverted to other activities.

8.5 Pay equal wages to men and women depending on the role and contribution and not on the gender.

8.6 Set up a grievance redressal cell with clear guidelines of whom to approach. Promote it aggressively. Address grievances seriously and speedily to ensure justice is meted out. Do not transfer problems but take action.

8.7 True collaboration should be practiced. Network with commissions working to promote gender equality, other churches and with secular groups engaged in similar programs. Share resources.

8.8 Set up an evaluation mechanism and conduct regular reviews to assess degree of implementation.

9. Conclusion

The Gender Policy of the Church could well remain on paper unless translated at the grassroots level and constantly reinforced by the leadership. It is already a year since the statement was issued. Yet how many are aware of what it propagates, how it plans to transform the gender discrimination in the Church and the specific initiatives that it recommends? How many clergy and religious have read the document? How many lay people are aware of it? Can we benchmark it with the RTI act which is known and used even in villages? Can we set goals in this area that within six months all the faithful in India will be aware of the aspects of the gender policy?

This National Consultation is an opportune time to break down the Gender Policy, to understand its implications and commit ourselves to a plan for implementation. It is an opportunity for the Church to move ahead and make a breakthrough thus fulfilling the prophetic role of the Church to implement the justice mandate. This opportunity should not be lost.

At the end of this Consultation, we should aim for a concrete plan to promote Gender Justice by the religious women and men of India at all levels: National, Regional and Local. It should become a policy of both individuals and communities, in our ecclesial commitments as well as in our mission.

The Empowered Woman

- Sonny Carroll

The Empowered Woman, she moves through the world
with a sense of confidence and grace.
Her once reckless spirit now tempered by wisdom.
Quietly, yet firmly, she speaks her truth without
doubt or hesitation
and the life she leads is of her own creation.
She now understands what it means to live and let live.
How much to ask for herself and how much to give.
She has a strong, yet generous heart
and the inner beauty she emanates truly sets her apart.
Like the mythical Phoenix,
she has risen from the ashes and soared to a

new plane of existence,
unfettered by the things that once posed such resistance.
Her senses now heightened, she sees everything so clearly.
She hears the wind rustling through the trees;
beckoning her to live the dreams she holds so dearly.
She feels the softness of her hands
and muses at the strength that they possess.
Her needs and desires she has learned to express.
She has tasted the bitter and savored the sweet fruits of life,
overcome adversity and pushed past heartache and strife.
And the one thing she never understood,
she now knows to be true,
it all begins and ends with YOU.

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WOMEN RELIGIOUS LAWYERS FORUM MEET
27 - 30 November,2011

The 4th Women Religious Lawyers Forum Meet, "Pursuit of Justice: A Prophetic Response of Women Religious in India" is being jointly organized by Streevani, Pune and Montfort Social Institute, Hyderabad for the Women Religious who are practicing in the court of law .

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Exposition of and Reflection on the Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India

Sr. Helen Saldanha SSpS
Secretary, CBCI Office for Women

1. Introduction

I salute Late Fr. Englebert Zeitler SVD, the founder of Streevani, (also Ishvani Kendra and NVSC) who envisioned the idea of birthing a new vision for gender equality through various national initiatives generally and through Streevani more specifically. The cause Streevani is committed to will always remain relevant in the Church and society as long as gender injustice continues to haunt us in different forms of discriminations and atrocities. As early as in 1984 Fr. Zeitler sought to build integral partnership in mission as he shared his dream with Late Dr. Frances Yasas (the Co-founder) and many other intellectuals, activists, academicians, artists across the country.

“...The last century lost the workers; this century is going to lose women until something is done about it...”¹ warned Fr. Zeitler as he looked at the position of women in the Church and society. This thought is reflected in the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of Pope John XXIII: “Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as mere material instruments, but demand rights befitting a human person both in domestic and in public life.”²

The very first aim of this Consultation is: 'To study, appreciate and propagate the Gender Policy of the Catholic Church' within the larger purpose of the consultation- namely “Building partnership for prophetic mission. 'Exposition of and Reflection on the Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India' deals with the first objective.

2. Gender and Gender Equality

The origins of Gender policy at international and national levels link us to the 4th world conference of women famously known as Beijing conference held in 1995, which set a roadmap to the formulation of gender policies and countless national initiatives across the world. The conference proposed gender mainstreaming as the key strategy to reduce inequalities between women and men. And to this end, gender equality policies achieved a breakthrough around the world in 1990s.³

The goal of Gender Policies is gender equality through gender equity measures. They provide guidelines and road maps for achieving gender equality. Clarification on some of the terms related to gender will be useful at this juncture.

Gender

Gender as a concept got evolved in 1970s as against earlier days when gender meant just two categories masculine and feminine that were seen synonymous to male and female. It was Ann Oakley who defined gender as a social construction. The research and reflective analysis developed over the years by feminist thought has given a solid foundation to the gender question both internationally and nationally. These have not only challenged the mindsets that have internalized culture and ideologies of subjugation/domination but also have impacted upon the progressive laws that uphold the dignity related issues of women.

Gender is socially learnt through a process of socialization right from the time we are born, is historically evolved, culturally constructed and varies according to time and space. It operates on the domination model with well defined hierarchical control. It implies power relations between and among the sexes which are strongly built on the pillars of caste, class, and patriarchal structures and perpetuated by these ideologies. Gender stipulates expected roles and expectations, characteristics, capacities which men and women can possess; behavior which men and women should display; legitimate goals which males and females should have; and resources which males and females can have access to and control over. When one glances at all systems and institutions of the society (Church included) one can see the well-defined boundaries of

patriarchal control. This understanding of gender leads to the analysis of structural inequalities that are upheld by cultural/religious./traditional norms and beliefs. Women's vulnerability increases depending on the Class, caste, ethnicity and social status in the society. Gender is also an analytic tool for assessing the gender division of labour, profiling of access and ownership of resources and benefits, and identification of differential needs of sexes.

Gender is an evolving term. While initially the debate included power relations between men and women, it now speaks for the persons of third gender as well. The understanding of gender in the light of equality demands the deconstruction of ideologies that have placed women in the secondary positions and excluding them from decision-making processes. It reiterates that sexual differences cannot and should not be justified and perpetrated by structural and social inequality.

Gender equality

Gender equality between sexes entails the understanding that all humans are equal, and are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without being controlled by the stereotypes, and rigid boundaries created by the society. 'Gender equality means an equal visibility, empowerment and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life.'⁴ It means that the different aspirations, behaviours and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same but that their rights, opportunities and responsibilities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. It aims at reducing that gap at all levels through change of mindset, change in culture, and change in the structures.

Gender equality presupposes that there has been age old discrimination against women and hence upholds the principle of gender equity. That is to say, the achievement of the goal of gender equality may include equal treatment or differential treatment for inclusion of women at different levels.

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution of

India. The Constitution also empowers the State to adopt measures of affirmative action in favour of women to redress for the age-old gender discrimination. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. More specifically India has ratified Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993 and has endorsed Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 and is bound by the international commitment to the achievement of gender equality by 2015. The enactment of various progressive laws such as Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, and Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace 2010 are a few steps towards this commitment.

As members of the Church our understanding of gender equality is deeply rooted in the biblical understanding of the creation of humankind as given in Genesis 1:26-27. We are created in the image and likeness of God and our goal is to realize the vision of God. St. Paul's Letter to Galatians (3:28) restates it "...nor male, nor female...for all are one in Jesus Christ. For this we have to restore the dignity of human beings that is thwarted by social, religious, economic and cultural subjugation.

Gender mainstreaming

This concept was coined in the 4th World conference of Women held in Beijing and was accepted by various governments across the globe. The process of mainstreaming situates gender equality issues at the centre of policy decisions, programme planning and implementation, restructuring of the institutions, resource allocations and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres. It necessitates the goal of gender equality through gender analysis that assesses gender division of labour, access to and ownership of resources, benefits and services; and differential needs of women and men based on their socio-economic and other categories that must be addressed in the planning for change. Gender mainstreaming requires a focus on men and women and not exclusively women. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality."

3. Background to the Gender Policy of the Church in India

It was in this very place, Ishvani Kendra where the General Assembly of the CBCI took up the theme women's situation for their deliberation in 1992. One of our fellow sisters Dr. Astird Lobo Gajiwala who at the initiative of Bishop Bosco Penha addressed the Bishops on "Breaking the Silence" surrounding the violence of women and though she was the lone female voice in the entire male hierarchical gathering, a new milestone was laid. At the close of that assembly the CBCI decided for the formation of Women's Desk with Sr. Cleopatra as the first secretary.

And yet again it was Astrid in her response to the Keynote Address by Prof. Rita Noronha called on the 28th Plenary Assembly held in Jemshedpur in February 2008 called on the Assembly in the company of 40 women participants requesting Bishops to put a gender policy in place. In her words: "In this spirit of listening I would like to add my voices to those, of my sisters across the country, who have requested their bishops to put a gender policy in place. Having such a policy will ensure that gender considerations will be integrated into all aspects of planning, policy, legislation, development, formation and transformation activities in the church's work and mission. It will include for instance, terms of employment of women religious and gender friendly recruitment, retention policies in church institutions. It will lay down norms for women's representation on Church bodies, especially in decision-making capacities. It will guarantee gender budgeting which ensures resource allocation for women centered expenditure as well as monitoring of the gender impact of other expenditure. It will help setting up of the grievance cells to address sexual abuse, breach of contractual agreements and other forms of conflicts. It will ensure that pastoral concerns regarding women in the family and the workplace, as well as the relations between the clergy and women are addressed. It will provide a framework for the implementation of gender based recommendations made by the CBCI at future meetings and will contribute to increasing the scope and ultimately the impact of various initiatives in favour of women. It will help to eradicate the sexist or gender discriminatory attitudes and practices within

structures and among personnel within the Church.”⁵

A great deal of effort has been put in by many. I place on record my sincere appreciation to the CBCI Commission for Women and heartfelt gratitude to Sr. Lilly Francis SMMI, the then Executive Secretary, CBCI Commission for Women who toiled tirelessly not counting the cost.

4. Milestones leading to Gender Policy

In 2007 CBCI Women's Commission under the leadership of Sr. Lilly Francis SMMI the former Executive Secretary suggested a theme on women for the 28th Plenary Assembly of the CBCI. The Chairperson of the Commission Bp. Thakur SJ presented the thematic paper at the Standing committee meeting held on 27th April 2007 and the theme was unanimously accepted. That marked a beginning for a step forward. To put it briefly the process involved three parts:

- Preparation to the 28th General Assembly of the CBCI

Preparatory Committee consisting of three Bishops including the Chairperson of CBCI Women's Commission as its coordinator was appointed. According to the road map laid by them a Concept paper was prepared and national consultation and 12 regional level consultations were held prior to the General Assembly 2008. Consolidated reports of the workshops were documented and published. There was active involvement of women in the process from the regions. Bishops, gender experts, Advisory committee members of the committee, women religious, priests were part of the process at different levels.

- 28th General Assembly of CBCI with the theme, “Empowerment of women in society and the church”.

It was held in XLRI Jemshedpur from 13-20 February 2008 in which 160 Bishops, 40 women, and 7 men participated. It was the first time that laity was present in the CBCI General Assembly. 6 women speakers addressed the Assembly. At the close the Statement of the Assembly was released paving way to the Gender Policy.

- Formulation of Gender Policy at national and regional level.

The process was extensive. The draft policy by experts was studied by the Bishops and finally approved and published in April 2010 in the General Assembly held in Guwahati.

Bishop Thakur SJ the then Chairperson of CBCI Commission for Women says in the foreword: "A Policy is a present decision for future action. If action does not follow a policy remains a dead letter, however well-worded. He goes on to say, that the responsibility to internalize and implement the policy is a concern for all, men and women, commissions and communities, institutions and organizations'.⁶

5. Arellook at the Gender Policy Document

Before going further, I like to put forward what I gathered from my conversation with few men and women: The willingness of the Church to commit to gender equality through this document is much laudable. The document is said to be a truly sensitive reflection of the state of women in Indian society though brief account of the situation of women in Church across regions is lacking. The inputs, deliberations and outcomes from the regional consultations, surveys and national consultations are included. It is well researched and forward looking. The language at times tends to be patronising, but then that is how it is with most Church documents. The issues concerning gender are not the prerogative of any one particular half, but equally of both men and women. The policy is seen to be women centric- rather than developing a perspective for mutual and healthy gender relations though references are made here and there which are optional. Hence it looks like it is the problem of women to deal with. There are two distinct areas that policy highlights. It challenges us, as members of the Church are challenged to take up the mission of Christ the Policy is committed to do, namely reaching out to the marginalized groups. At the same time it also asks of the Church Leadership own the policy and takes the lead in creating structures for its effective implementation. As long as the Leadership in the Church does not take note of the issue and implement the Policy in every parish with the same passion that is meant in its inception it will be another

document to be decorated in the archives. Well, I leave it to you to add your own inputs to this list.

I was surprised when a priest confronted me saying: “ The implementation of Gender Policy by you is only an eye-wash, a tokenism. When one party has all the power... injustice is bound to prevail. All the decisions in the Church are made by ordained men. Gender Policy speaks nothing about it. Ordination is Sacrament and power at the same time.” To a great extent it is true. However, it entirely depends on the clergy to exercise his authority through a shared priesthood to make his parish community participative and inclusive and Christ-centred. We need to give publicity to success stories through the initiatives of the clergy.

I see this document as a roadmap which can guide us. It includes gender relations within the Church and the entire fabric of societal structures and systems. The document covers rather extensively several areas in private and the public domain and envisages changes in decision making processes and structure to include women. The uncompromising prerequisite to achieve the envisaged results and goals of the policy is commitment to change.

First of all it demands a commitment from each of us as members of the Church and secondly, it calls forth for a renewed response from the Church leadership to make this policy workable starting from parish level. The implementation of the policy is not possible without such commitment. If at the parish level the priest and the members of the Church, religious congregations work together we can be assured of positive change.

The commitment to the implementation of the gender policy needs to be reflected in the Pastoral Plan of the dioceses, regions, and CBCI which governs every member of the Church, every institution and structure, every unit of the Church. The initiatives at the parish and diocesan levels are most important.

Further the commitment to implementing gender policy is to be reflected in Programme planning, building infrastructure, collaboration and allocation of human and financial resources. This also needs to start from the bottom at the smallest unit. Earmarking

the budget for implementation of the policy along with other parish and diocesan level programmes will make it possible. Today, conducting programmes is much depended on support from external donors. Local resource mobilization is a way out in the wake of diminishing external support. For this political will is necessary.

Commitment to partnership: Partnership implies working as equals. In a culture where there are duality of values, roles, expectations and do's and don'ts the leadership must be a shared leadership as a form of developing good governance.

Commitment to draw up a time-bound action plan: The policy has to be personalized in terms of drawing up a workable action plan keeping the end results in mind at every level. It applies to all the Church run institutions and organizations. There are 13 ecclesial regions. In these regions there are several groups and institutions, associations, dioceses and parishes. To a certain extent we have failed to create a collective impact because of working in isolation. Collaboration and networking among us is imperative. As a result of the Policy there is increase in the membership of women in Parish pastoral councils according to what I have gathered from the regions. Other structures such as financial council, diocesan social service, financial committee, tribunals etc, need to include women within a given period. It is important to build leadership of women and tokenism is something that must be avoided. Committees such as grievance redress cells must be put in place. There must be boundary systems for minimum standards of achievement. The Church needs to learn from civic sphere.

Commitment to Change of mindset

Gender policy aims at making structures, mechanisms and processes gender inclusive and gender sensitive. It is true that change of mindset of those who have formal power is necessary. But we cannot wait for that. Hence it begins with self. There are several questions that are involved in changing one's mindset—questions about the identity, role and social standing of women and men in terms of how it is, how it should be and the gap that exists because of one's perception on the issue. It is not enough to change oneself. It is equally important to spread the message of change around us. It implies that we need to start from where we stand presently. Neither

the Church nor women in the Church are homogenous groups. There are regional imbalances, class and ethnic as well as geographic differences. All these affect the implementation and the understanding of the policy. Hence the discussions and reflections must begin from where we are. We cannot take the implementation uniformly. Likeminded groups and persons in places where leadership of women has been established long since need to take initiative in critiquing the policy and suggest it to Church leadership.

One of the changes that are required is in the use of language. Language can be a powerful means of exercising social control: If you belong to a particular group, we adapt to the linguistic conventions of that group. Language can give a strong sense of belonging or being excluded. Exclusive language in our liturgical prayers and expressions is part of a dominant culture. Language also can perpetuate a culture of domination or subjugation by the stereotyping of groups. A constant portrayal of women as secondary citizens has its impact on their self image and in the way others looks at them. Hence gender sensitization of all is imperative to change such mindset.

Gender division of labour set aside certain roles as women's roles and certain roles as men's. These are not watertight though. Even as the society is changing a girl is prepared to become an efficient career woman as well as an efficient home-maker, while men are expected to excel mainly in professional fields. Role sharing in private spaces is important aspect of the change of mindset.

Commitment to study of the Document: It is important to take up each of the document, prepare modules for various groups to get a comprehensive understanding of the Policy.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to say that --

- Gender Policy must be reflected in the pastoral plan of the Church. It requires the hierarchy of the Church to own it up, take in into the pastoral plan of the diocese to be reflected in the parish unit, as an effective tool in the education of its priests and religious and members of the Church. Each institution must work towards implementing the

Gender Policy based on what is relevant for the same

- Study of the policy at different levels from different perspectives
- Religious and priestly formation houses need to study the document, personalise it and draw up action plan
- There is a need for institutionalizing it the structures such as setting up of grievance cells
- Gender budgeting - every organization to set aside
- All parishes, institutions to make concerted effort for implementation of the Policy

However before ending I would like to invite you to test where you as an individual stand on the gender sensitive spectrum. What affirmative steps have you taken in the position you presently occupy to check insensitivity? Start with the simple case of what policy has your institution for the salaries of those who cook your food or water your garden or drive your vehicle that is so gender aware? Or the language that is used that portrays objectification of women, or What redressal/grievance mechanism have you in place in your organization that gives the weakest/ least paid member of your institution the opportunity to bring issues concerning abuse or gender discrimination to the notice of the authorities. Unless change happens at home and in the kitchen we could deliberate on the Church's Gender Policy till kingdom-come, with wonderful seminars and photo-opportunities, but nothing really would have changed where it is most required.

The danger with any good document is that we put it on the altar and leave it there to be worshipped. In doing so there is the danger of thinking that 'a good work begun' is a good work done'. The document requires picking out and interpreting in every possible local context, all around the country, for it to become really effective.

For effective realization of the Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India.' is to encourage the Church to engage its women members, in conversations and issues concerning them. Unless this fundamental concern is addressed with certain integrity, we will continue to be putting the 'new wine' of gender consciousness into the 'old wineskins' of 'an archaic patriarchy'.

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Theological and Biblical Foundation of Gender Equality

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Introduction

Raju is a young boy studying in class five. His parents are poor and they have migrated from Jodhpur in Rajasthan to Delhi and live in one of the slums. Raju has three sisters, two older and one younger. But none of them are sent to school in spite of the fact that their parents love them very much. Everyday his sisters are sent out for work while he attends the nearby government school. His sisters take a piece of cloth each in their hands and go to the nearby crossroads where the traffic stops. They dust the vehicles in a short time and ask the owners for money. When Raju comes back home in the evening he asks his mother for money to purchase the things he likes. Often Raju is seen eating ice cream or other sweets whereas the girls are never seen with ice cream in their hands.

Kamala is a young single parent with two children. Her husband deserted her just because she gave birth to a girl and not a boy. She works as a domestic help and looks after her children single handedly.

When Annie, a middle aged woman got a small employment in the nearby English medium school, she was overjoyed. She began to teach the young ones with great enthusiasm. But her husband objected saying that the salary is very little. But Annie was not worried about the salary but wanted to do something worthwhile. This job gave her an opportunity to feel that she too is capable of doing something for others. After three days of arguments between the two, one day she found herself locked out of the house. Eventually she had to give up her job since he threatened to put her out of the house.

On 22nd July when Church celebrates the feast of Mary Magdalene, in a certain parish, the priest was preaching the homily. He told the people that Mary Magdalene was the greatest sinner presented to us in the gospel. She was a prostitute, a sinner despised by others. He never mentioned that she was the first to whom the risen Lord appeared after his resurrection and given a mission. A theologically trained religious sister with a feminist consciousness, listening to this homily felt very much disturbed. She felt helpless to express her disagreement with what the priest was saying from the pulpit.

The four case studies described above are indicative of how gender inequality is practiced and expressed in our society and Church in multiple ways. It is an obvious fact that women and girls are not treated as full human beings, equal in worth and dignity to men and boys neither in the Church nor in society. Women are often denied justice, dignity, and equality at various levels. As a result, vast majority of Indian women continue to be victims of various atrocities perpetrated against them. The Census of India, 2011 shows that the female species of the human race is fast becoming an endangered one in this country with a sex ratio of 914 among children between 0-6 category.

Gender inequality is the result of various factors at work in our society. These include social, economic, political, and religio-cultural factors. Gender inequality is a byproduct of a patriarchal society where the male is considered as the norm of the human beings and the female as secondary.

With the rise of feminism, there is a great awareness in these post modern times about the need to reorganize our societies on the basis of gender equality. As Christians we need to inquire whether there is adequate scriptural and theological basis for such a venture. But before we take up the biblical and theological basis for gender equality, it is in order that we understand the term 'Gender,' and 'Gender Equality.'

1. What is Gender?

Today we come across this term almost everywhere, gender studies, gender roles, gender stereotyping, gender justice, gender equality, gender relations and so forth. Since questions of conceptualizations are questions of power and therefore political questions,¹ we need first of all to state what we mean by this term 'gender.' Feminist theorists argue that gender has multiple meanings. Sometimes gender is referred to as an ideology, or as a social process or as a social product.² Until the advent of post modern perspectives, gender was seen as a biologically based, universal, binary aspect of humanity, comprising male and female. Men had masculine parts, and women had feminine parts. Certain characteristics were automatically attributed to males (strength, decisiveness), while others were automatically attributed to females (vulnerability, sensitivity). In the past few decades, however, the notion that gender is biological, binary, and universal has come under close scrutiny. Mary Ann Tolbert offers a definition that takes into account the results of post-modern analysis:

Rather than describing innate natural traits, gender in the post-modernist perspectives is most often asserted to be a socially constructed set of behaviours with deep political roots, and rather than being universal, it is enacted in multiple and different ways in each historical and local setting... While gender is viewed by most post modernists as still profoundly implicated in determinations of sex, the binary biological givenness of sex itself is challenged by recognizing it too as a fluctuating social and cultural construction written on the body. The post-modernist perspective on gender is built upon many bases: the insights of the feminist movement...; cognizance of the pervasive influence of ethnocentrism...; the awareness of the perspectival biases of all scientific theory; and most importantly, an acknowledgement of the great diversity of gender-appropriate performance in many cultures over time.³

In postmodern thought, gender has become increasingly complex. Biological sex is differentiated from gender; though body parts play a role in determining gender expectations, biology is not the sole determiner of gender roles. Tolbert points out that there are several elements that must be taken into account when analysing gender: Historical and geographical location, socioeconomic status, and race, among others. This means that gender is neither universal

nor binary: every culture had its own norms for gender identity and performance; further, as proven by scholars who highlight multiple modes of sexuality, gender exists on a spectrum, with vast diversity.⁴

It is also to be noted that gender can be used in various ways. Gender can be used as analytical term or in an inclusive sense or even in a descriptive sense. As an analytical term it expresses “socio-cultural definitions of man and woman, the way societies distinguish men and women and assign them social role.”⁵ In other words, gender is a social construct as opposed to sex which used to be seen strictly as the biological difference between male and female. However modern feminist discourse questions this neat distinction between sex and gender on the grounds that such divisions come from a dualistic pattern of thinking. They argue that human sex and sexuality have never been crude biological factors, but human nature has always been social and historical. Even human physiology has been influenced and shaped by interaction with other human beings and with nature.⁶ Therefore sex is as much a cultural and historical category as gender is.⁷ In this scenario it is more appropriate to say that both sex and gender are products of socio-cultural processes and performances, without of course denying their biological roots.

The social construction of both sex and gender is inscribed on women and men through socialization process and through public discourse. There are many agents like family, education, media, and language that play a significant role in assigning stereotyped gender identities to both men and women. As an analytical term gender exposes the socially constructed power relationships between men and women where women are often subordinated to men.⁸

When gender is used in an inclusive sense, it represents both women and men forming part of the problem of inequality. Together they have created such a system of exploitation and oppression. Finally when gender is used in a descriptive sense, it expresses women's concerns and issues.

1.1 What is Gender Equality?

Gender equality has long been a subject of debate. Does it mean that both women and men are the same in every way? It has been generally known that women are by and large smaller physically,

milder temperamentally, nurturers emotionally and child bearers biologically.⁹ Apart from sexual differentiation, men and women are also different chromosomally, reproductively, anatomically, hormonally and in terms of weight, height and brain usage. On an average, men are 7 per cent taller and 20 per cent heavier than women.¹⁰ Moreover, studies in sociology, psychology and sociolinguistics have yielded surprising level of agreement on what constitutes the key difference in the way men and women function and relate. Men and women are said to demonstrate different ways of interacting, expressing emotions, playing games, having a conversation, handling authority, giving and receiving instructions, initiating friendships, reacting to problems, establishing connections, relating to hierarchies, appraising situations and taking control.¹¹ If men and women differ from each other considerably, then what do we understand by gender equality?

According to International Labour Organization,

Gender equality, equality between men and women, entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.¹²

Put it differently, “gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. It reflects a concern that women and men have equal opportunity to make choices and work in partnership to achieve a desired goal.”¹³ Millennium Goal 3 recognizes the importance of women's empowerment and gender equality in helping to effect social change. Gender equality may be measured by the following indicators: 1. representation in governance, 2. education, 3. Employment.¹⁴

We are aware of the fact that even though women have their legal,

political and social right equal to that of men, yet, in our society women are not able to enjoy such rights. The world economic profile shows that women represent 50 per cent of the population, make up 30 per cent of the official labour force and utilize 60 per cent of all working hours receive 10 per cent of world income and own less than one per cent of the world property.¹⁵

What is well pronounced all over the world is not women's equality but their inequality, be it in the civil arena or in the privacy of homes. Atrocities against women in terms of rapes, assaults and dowry-related murders are so much part of everyday life in India; these do not get the condemnation they deserve. Female infanticide and sex-selective abortions are additional forms of violence that reflect the devaluing of females in Indian society. A high degree of female child malnutrition is also due to the tradition that women eat last and least throughout their lives. Even when pregnant and lactating, women do not get the special attention they deserve by way of making available nutritional food.¹⁶

Men and women are different in many ways but different does not always mean superior or inferior. Many of the differences perceived as natural are in fact, cultural. Equality is possible only through mutuality between sexes when in any given sphere no one sex is always a giver and no one sex is always a receiver.¹⁷ "As Gender is constituted biologically, socially, economically, culturally and above all politically, formal and informal day-to-day interactions within the family, school and community largely shape an individual's perspective on gender and his/her orientation towards gender equality as a value."¹⁸

2. Biblical Foundation for Gender Equality

Bible, both the Old and the New Testament, is the foundational document of our Christian faith. This faith document unfortunately contains patriarchal elements since it was written in a patriarchal culture. Because of this, Bible has been used to legitimize certain discriminatory practices against women even to this day. The biblical myth of Eve, the woman considered responsible for the fall of humanity formed the theological basis for the denigration of women as expressed by Clement of Alexandria in his remark that "women should be covered with shame when she thinks of what nature she

is.¹⁹ The Pauline and Petrine injunctions on women's submission served to justify women's suppression, exclusion from leadership and domestication.²⁰ But this is not the whole truth about the Bible. In spite of its patriarchal elements, Bible does contain a critique of patriarchy and it reveals God's intention of gender equality of man and woman from the very moment of their creation in the first book of Genesis.

Christian faith affirms that God created humankind as men and women in His image likeness and entrusted to them stewardship over creation (Gen 1: 26-27). This is the protogospel of equal dignity of man and woman. It means both men and women are endowed with an inborn dignity and greatness. It affirms that men and women as human persons enjoy an intrinsic worth.²¹ Further the Gospel of Christ very clearly affirms the equal dignity of man and woman and therefore gender equality is part of Christian faith. The Church is a community of equal disciples where the vision of Paul expressed in Galatians takes concrete expressions: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ" (Gal 3: 28).

2.1 The First Creation Story

In the book of Genesis we read, "God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them" (Gen 1: 27). The creation story itself speaks of the equality given by God to both men and women. God created man and woman equal, equal to rule and equal to govern, equal to worship and equal to bring up children. This equality does not diminish in the oft quoted second chapter of Genesis. In fact in making the woman from the rib of man, it is not lessening the status of woman but makes the woman and man so together to rule and govern.²² In fact when Adam says to Eve in the second creation story, "Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh," he acknowledges that Eve is like himself, "someone made out of the same material, someone with the same substance, someone absolutely identical to himself, someone definitely not to be defined as inferior in any way."²³ A woman is therefore the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacity.

Human beings are male and female, which underlines that sexual bipolarity is an essential part of being human. Individual human beings

exists as man and woman equal in dignity, called to be in communion, created as such by God in accord with his design. In the Hebrew thought, it was the whole human person who was the image of God, the whole race, both male and female. This unique Israelite idea conveys that all persons occupy a pre-eminent place in the created world. Unlike myths that showed human persons as slaves of God, here they were representatives of and witnesses to God's power and love toward all creation. Both man and woman share this responsibility and greatness. Both bring God's touch to the world. Wherever this God given dignity, equality and co-responsibility are denied for women, there is a deliberate distortion of God's intentions for humanity.

2.1 The Second Creation Story

While the first creation story clearly expresses the equality of the sexes, the second creation story is open to varied interpretations. Often it is interpreted to legitimize the inferior position assigned to women in the Church and society. But it is interesting to note that some medieval exegesis of Gen 2:21-22 affirms gender equality and not women's inferiority. For instance, Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa theologiae* takes up "the production of woman" as one of his *quaestio*. Basing his arguments on Gen 2: 21-22, he gives reasons why it was fitting that woman be formed from Adam's rib. According to him, it symbolically indicates equality rather than domination or subjection. He stands within a tradition of medieval exegesis. By placing this motif first, Aquinas indicates that this is a teaching he himself holds. For if he is merely passing on a tradition which he himself does not hold he usually places it at the end of his treatment and not at first. By placing the making of woman from Adam's rib first, Aquinas indicates that for him this concept is something that is present in the divine mind in creating and not just a human interpretation *post factum*. The very choice by God of the rib shows, for Aquinas, that it is from the start God's purpose and intention to make woman as man's equal so that they can be companions. The implication is that this is a divine decision motivated by what it would signify.²⁴

For Aquinas the rib indicated that the purpose of the distinction of the sexes is so that they can provide for one another social companionship. Moreover the rib indicates the way this

companionship is lived out: neither is naturally to be the lord (*dominus* or *domina*) nor the servant (inclusive of *servus* and *serva/ancilla*)²⁵. Further, while interpreting Paul's instruction in 1Timothy, Aquinas is happy to take up Paul's point that woman should not dominate the man, but he also adds that likewise the man should not dominate the woman either.²⁶ On the contrary, Augustine in his long exegesis of the same verses never suggests that there could be any other purpose in the creation of woman than procreation, indeed he, "could not see any way in which a woman could be a helper for man if the reason of childbearing were taken away." Augustine's attitude became the dominant tradition in the centuries after him: sexual distinction existed only in view of procreation and all else related to sexuality was somehow connected with the fall.²⁷

Aquinas is not original in his thinking about the rib. Before him two others, Peter Lombard (+1160) and Hugh of St. Victor (+1142), held similar views. Both Aquinas and Lombard agree that God intends to communicate the equal dignity of man and woman by his choice of the rib/side. While Lombard makes this more explicit, by saying God wanted to communicate their equality to the man, for Aquinas it is something that can be learned by the human being.²⁸ Hugh of St. Victor too refers to this same text in his *De sacramentis* two times. He poses the question: "Why was woman made from man and why from his side?" He answers this question by saying, "The woman was made after the man from man himself as a helper in generation. For if she had been made from another there would not have been a single source for all human beings." The second time he refers to this exegesis is in his treatment of the sacrament of marriage. Where he holds that it is consent alone, that brings marriage into being. However, if this is the case, and it is also the case that consent must be mutual, then those making the consent must be equal. To prove this equality he returns to his exegesis of the rib. He says, "for since she was given as his associate, neither servant nor mistress, she was produced neither from his lower nor his higher parts but from his middle." Later he makes the most explicit statement of equality of the sexes: "Therefore she was made from the middle, that it might be proved that she was made for equality of society."²⁹

A similar exegesis of Adam's rib can be found in two anonymous

Irish works, one in Latin and other in vernacular. These are separated by several centuries. The vernacular text is an Irish "Adam book" known as the Prose Version of Saltair na Rann and dates from shortly after 980. It is an account describing the creation of the world. The account of Adam's rib is unique to the Prose Version and is found in none of its main sources. The text reads in MacCarthy's translation: "And from the eighth upper rib of the breast of the right side of Adam was made Eve, so that she should be equal to him."³⁰

2.3 Women in the Bible

In addition to the creation stories, there are a number of instances, where Bible critiques patriarchy which confines women just to wives' and mothers' roles. In spite of the marginal role assigned to women in the Jewish patriarchal society, we come across some powerful narratives in the Old Testament which call our attention to how God intervened on the side of the victimized women, in the case of Hagar (Gen 21: 8-21), Susannah (Daniel 13), Hannah (1 Sam 1); how women have played pivotal and dynamic roles in the case of Moses' birth;³¹ how they have been lawgivers and rulers in the case of Deborah, Judith and Esther, protectors of family and nation like Abigail and Esther and women with moral courage and conviction like queen Vashti. There are also women who played key roles in salvation history like Sarah or Ruth, women as prophets and leaders, industrious women, women missionaries, evangelists, social workers and supporters. And in the New Testament Mary, the simple Galilean woman plays a unique role in bringing about the historical presence of Jesus through her fiat.

Moreover, the people of Israel celebrated their victories through the songs of their women who came out in joy with their dances and songs. It was like a liturgical celebration. We still remember and make use of Miriam's (Ex 15: 21) and Deborah's songs (Judges 5). There are other women like Hannah (1 Sam 2: 1-10) and Judith (Judith 16: 1-17) who praised God and interpreted God's action in history through their songs. Mary's Magnificat continues that same tradition (Lk 1: 46-55).

In the New Testament, Jesus gave great importance to women to the extent of going contrary to the usual Jewish traditions. He took

note of the poor widow (Mk 12: 41-44), reached out in compassion to the widow who lost her only son (Lk 7: 11-17), allowed an 'impure woman' to touch him by brushing aside the Mosaic law that declared women impure during menstruation and child birth (Mt 9: 20-22), entered into an intimate dialogue with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4), heard the plea of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7: 24-30), accepted the hospitality of Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38-42), allowed women to minister to him and to his disciples (Lk 8: 1-3), befriended Mary Magdalene (Jn 20: 1-18) and felt compassion for the women of Jerusalem (Lk 23:27-32). While most of the apostles 'forsook him and fled,' Mary and other women stood by him even at the cross (Jn 19: 25-27). Mary of Magdala was one of the first to meet the risen Christ, the first to carry the message of resurrection to the rest of the disciples.

After the ascension of Jesus the women including Mary, the mother of Jesus, were also found among the disciples of Jesus in the upper room who devoted themselves in constant prayers (Acts 1: 12-14). Further the Acts by citing the quotation from the prophet Joel establishes that on the Pentecost day the Holy Spirit descended on both men and women. Acts of the Apostles also names a woman from Joppa as a disciple who was raised to life by Peter (Acts 9: 36). The Greek word used here to mean "disciple" is "μ α θ η τ α" in its feminine form. Its masculine form is used in the gospels to refer to the 12 apostles. This is an evidence to prove the equality of men and women in the early Church.³²

The women were also doing the ministry of prophecy in the early Church. Acts reports 4 daughters of Philip doing such ministry (Acts 21: 9). This shows that like men there were also women disciples, women teachers, and women prophets who were very much active in the early Church. Further the Didache, that contains the teachings of the Apostles, speaks of the prophets being the usual leaders of Eucharistic celebrations, which were mostly held in the homes of prominent women.³³

The early Christian Community was sustained by the deep faith of women who shared in the apostolic ministry. We find women extremely active in the missionary effort for sharing the Good News,

as deacons (Rom 16:1; Tim 3:11), prophets (1 Cor 11: 5, 14:34-36; Lk 2: 36-38; Acts 21: 9), presiders, fellow workers (Rom 16:3; Phil 4: 3), preachers and evangelists (Rom 16: 6, 12). In Paul's long list of greetings, women feature prominently. He mentions, for example, Prisca, Mary, Junia, Typhosa, Typhaena, Persis, and Julia. Prisca risked her life for the Good News. Many worked hard. Junia served as an apostle. Typhaena, Typhosa, and Persis laboured without counting the cost. Phoebe carried the letter to the Romans.

Moreover, we come across many women as Paul's missionary partners. Evodia and Syntyche were two prominent female members of the community at Philippe. They "struggled side by side" with Paul and shared his missionary work (Phil: 1: 5; 4: 2-3). Priscilla and Aquila are called Paul's co-workers. Along with this "couple missionary," Andronicus and Junia were described by Paul as "outstanding among the apostles" (Rom 16: 17). Junia was the only woman who had the privilege of being called an apostle in the Christian Testament. Phoebe was another Christian woman who shared responsibility with Paul as a teacher and missionary. Women participated in the work of evangelization and proclamation of the Gospel along with the men in true spirit of community of disciples and partnership of love.

2.4 The teaching of Jesus in the New Testament

The central message of Jesus was about the Reign of God. Through his words and deeds he revealed that God desires freedom, justice, equality and fullness of humanity for all. The Church, the body of Christ is entrusted with the same mission of furthering the reign which Jesus inaugurated and lived it through his words and deeds. As followers of Jesus each Christian is invited to the same work of Jesus. It is to build a society where the values associated with the reign of God such as equality, fellowship, peace, love, forgiveness, freedom, etc. are given concrete expressions in all the structures and systems of society and the Church.

The Gospels as a whole present Jesus as a revolutionary. Jesus not only thought of women as being equal in rank with men, as daughters of Abraham (Lk. 13:10-17) but openly ministered to them as 'children of wisdom' (Lk 7:35-50, Jn 4:1-42) who deserve respect (Mt 5:28). Jesus also ignored all the scriptures of impurity and

healed a woman with a flow of blood (Mk 5: 21-43). He had many women in the inner circle of disciples (Lk 8:1-3). Since the proclamation of resurrection depended mainly on the testimony of the women at the tomb of Jesus we can rightly say that the call to discipleship is equal, both to men and women.

Situating the teachings and actions of Christ in the context of Palestinian Judaism, we see how the evangelists not only highlight Jesus' concern for women, but also his radical re-defining of their place and role in their society. In a culture where women were seen only in relation to men, Christ not only liberated them from their oppressive traditions but upheld their dignity. Moreover, Jesus used the life-experiences of women to explain the mystery of God's reign and God's forgiving love. For instance, Jesus compares the mystery of God's reign to a woman mixing the yeast with flour (Mt 13: 33) and a woman at birth pangs (Jn 16: 21). The woman who searches for the lost coin (Lk 15: 8-10), in fact symbolises God who is in search of sinners.

Further, Jesus' view on divorce was one important milestone in his mission to advocate gender equality. Jesus denounced the sole right of men to divorce their wives. His stand was to deny both husband and wife the right to divorce one another and thus he treated both husband and wife equally (Mk 10: 11-12).

2.5 Paul an Advocate of Gender Equality

The images of women we find in the writings of Paul are complex. On the one side, we meet a fearless disciple in Paul who is able to proclaim boldly that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free person, male or female, for all of us are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). On the other hand, we also meet an autocratic leader in him who instructed women to be silent in the churches and to cover their heads while they prayed, prohibited them from talking during the service and advised them to be subordinate to their husbands at home (1 Cor 14: 34-35).

Yet, letters of Paul are the earliest Christian documents available to us as proof of gender equality in the leadership of men and women in the early Church. Paul recognized and appreciated the leadership of women wherever he travelled (Rom 16: 1-16). He had a number of

women as his co-workers in his mission to Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece. Among the 29 names that are introduced in the 16th chapter of the letter to the Romans, Paul lists ten women and would individually thank them for their noble services in leading and guiding the Christians of their respective home churches. Phoebe, a deacon of the Church at Cenchreae and Prisca, the fellow worker of Paul in his mission at Achaia and Asia Minor, were prominent in the list. Phoebe is the only woman specifically named deacon in the New Testament. Paul refers also to Andronicus, a male, Junia, a female, as “prominent among the apostles” (Rom 16: 7). Another woman who plays an important role in the Church founded by Paul is Lydia, the first Christian convert from Europe (Acts 16: 11-15, 40).³⁴

2.5.1 Galatians 3: 27-28

Paul touched here not merely the question of the equal status of women in the Christian communities, but he dreamt of equality of men and women in the Greco-Roman society as well. Minor Asia during the time of Paul was the nerve centre of slave trade. But Paul boldly proclaimed that through the Baptism in Christ one would be able to throw away all forms of bondages, oppression or repression. According to Paul the faith in Christ dissolves the racial, social and gender discriminations.³⁵

2.5.2 1Corinthians 7: 10

Another Pauline passage which gives emphasis to gender equality is 1Cor 7: 10. Like Jesus (Mk 10: 11, 12), Paul here treats men and women equally regarding matters of marriage and divorce. In the Greco -Roman culture marriages were easily dissolved. In the gentile society to make or break the marriages was not at all difficult. The Jewish community too allowed divorce but the prerogative was only with the husband. According to Paul' understanding marriage is a permanent covenantal relationship between husband and wife based on the Genesis account of creation (Gen 2: 24; Rom 7: 2-3). No partner has the right to break such a covenant. It binds both equally. Based on the creation account Paul strongly objected to the husband divorcing the wife if she was proven unfaithful or indecent (Deut 24: 1; Mal 2: 16).³⁷

3. Theological Basis for Gender Equality

Christianity, from its beginning, included women equally with men in its rite of initiation of baptism. Women equally with men were redeemed. They too died to their sinful state of existence and rose with Christ as heirs of heaven. Moreover Christians took as axiomatic that in heaven there would be no marriage or giving in marriage. In the immortalized state of the risen body, death and hence procreation would no longer be necessary (Mark 12: 25; Matt. 22: 30; Luke 20: 35). The Early Christian community was egalitarian rather than hierarchical where they were of one heart and one mind (Acts 4: 32).

One of the most important dichotomies of today is the male/female duality. When we examine the Christian revelation, particularly those doctrines which were hammered out in the early councils of the Church, we immediately discover two things. First, the Church had from the beginning to contend with disputes which in one way or another involved the question of dualities and their relationships to one another. Second, the resolutions to these disputes reveal a very definite pattern.

The question of the Son's relationship to the Father, for example, leading to those Councils, beginning with Nicaea, which would ultimately define the doctrine of the Trinity, was fundamentally a question of the relationship of the one (the Godhead) to the many (the Father and the Son). Against modalist and Arian reductions of the many into one, on the one hand, and tritheist reductions of the one to many, on the other, the Church affirmed the complementarity of unity and diversity within God.

In a similar fashion, the question of the relationship between the human and the divine natures in Christ, leading to the Chalcedonian Definition of 451 AD, was fundamentally a question of the relationship of God and humanity. Once again, against monophysist reductions of human and divine to the divine alone, on the one hand, and Nestorian reductions of the duality of natures to a duality of persons on the other, the Church recognized Christ to be at once truly human and truly divine, two natures united in one person, in which the divine and human do not compete with, but rather complement, one another.³⁸

3.1 Discipleship of Equals

The biblical theological vision of the discipleship of equals as

developed by Elisabeth Fiorenza seeks to articulate a radical democratic vision of the Church and society which is rooted in biblical traditions. The word “disciple” is a translation of the Greek word “learner” and designates someone whose allegiance is to the vision and commitment of a teacher or a movement. It means not only the commitment to a message, leader and vision but also to “a way of life.” the modification of the word discipleship with that of “equals” must not be understood as advocating sameness under the guise or universality. Rather it seeks to underscore equality in diversity as the central ethos of discipleship. “In the discipleship of equals, wo/men³⁹ have equal status, dignity and rights as images of the divine and equal access to the multifarious gifts of the Spirit, Sophia.”⁴⁰

It is the community of equal disciples that give birth to the Church. The Greek word “ekklesia” is usually translated as “church,” although the English word “church” derives from the Greek word “kyriak.”⁴¹ Ekklesia is best rendered as “democratic assembly/congress of full citizens.” The translation process which transformed ekklesia/democratic assembly into kyriak/church indicates a historical development that has privileged the kyriarchal/hierarchical form of church over that of a democratic congress or discipleship of equals. Thus, the same word “church” in English entails two contradictory meanings: one derived from the patri-kyriarchal household in antiquity which was governed by the lord/master/husband/father of the house, to whom free born women, freeborn dependants, clients, workers and slaves, both men and women, were subordinated. The other meaning of church = ekklesia understands the equality of its members in terms of citizenship and friendship. This meaning of “church” evolves from the vision of democracy in antiquity and modernity.⁴²

“Like Israel’s prophets, Jesus promised God’s renewed society and world not to the rich, the pious or the learned, but to the poor, the destitute and the prostitutes. This inclusive ethos of the Jesus movements allowed women as well as men, poor as well as rich, culturally unclean as well as strict observers of the Torah to become disciples.”⁴³ Women such as Mary of Magdala were among the most prominent and faithful in this discipleship of equals.

3.2 Equality in the Spirit

In the messianic community all have equal access to the gifts of the Spirit. This equality in the spirit does not mean that all are the same. Rather, the gifts of the members vary and their individual functions are irreplaceable. Yet no one can claim to have a superior function, because all functions are necessary and must be equally honoured for the building up of the “corporation.”⁴⁴ In this community all socio-religious status inequalities are abolished, including those between priest and laity, between officials and ordinary members, as well as between especially holy or religious people dedicated to the sacred and the common people who are immersed in profane matters of everyday life. Equally, social status distinctions and privileges between Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, slave and free- both men and women- are no longer defining those who are in “in Christ” (Gal. 3: 28).

God's spirit was poured out upon all, sons and daughters, old and young, slaves and free, both women and men (cf. Acts 2: 17-18). Those who have been “baptised into Christ” live by the Spirit (Gal. 5: 25). They are pneumatics, i.e., spirit-filled people (Gal. 6: 1). They are a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5: 17). Their equality in the spirit is expressed in alternating leadership and partnership, in equal access to everyone, Greeks, Jews, barbarians, slaves, free, rich, poor- both women and men. They therefore call their assembly with the democratic name *ekklesia*.⁴⁵

3.3 Equivalent Images for God as Male and Female

Are there any Biblical examples of naming God/ess⁴⁶ in female as well as male metaphors that are truly equivalent images? Since male and female are created in the image of God, maleness and femaleness seems to be part of God. The synoptic gospels offer some examples of this in the parallel parables, which seem to have been shaped in the early Christian catechetical community. They reflect the innovation of the early Christian movement of including women equally in those called to study the Torah of Jesus. Jesus justifies this practice in the Mary-Martha story, where he defends Mary's right to study in the circle of disciples around Rabbi Jesus in the words “Mary has chosen the better part which shall not be taken from her” (Lk 10: 38-42).

See also the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven (Lk 13:

18-21; Matt. 13: 31-33). The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin portray God seeking the sinners despised by the “righteous” of Israel. God is compared to a shepherd who leaves his ninety-nine sheep to seek the one that is lost or to a woman with ten coins who loses one and sweeps her house diligently until she finds it. (Lk 15: 1-10). We need to make a note of the following. First, the images of male and female in these parables are equivalent. They both stand for the same things, as paired images. One is in no way inferior to the other. Second, the images are not drawn from the social roles of the mighty, but from the activities of the Galilean peasants. It might be objected that the roles of the women are stereo-typical and enforce the concept of women as housekeeper. But it is interesting that women are never described as related to or dependant on men. The small treasure of the old woman is her own. Presumably she is an independent householder. Finally, and most significantly, the parallel male and female images do not picture divine action in parental terms. The old woman seeking the lost coin and the woman leavening the flour, image God not as mother or father (Creator), but as seeker of the lost and transformer of history (Redeemer).⁴⁷

4. Church Teaching on Gender Equality

The Church too has made numerous declarations concerning the equality and relationship between women and men at different times. Pope John XXIII reflected the concern of the Church for women in his encyclical saying, “Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as mere material instruments, but demand rights befitting a human person both in domestic and in a public life.” And again “Man and woman are called to work in a relationship of equality towards the attainment of universal good.” The second Vatican Council on various occasions dared to wipe aside the many layers of patriarchal dominance in the Church in order to give concrete expression to the egalitarian message of Jesus. For example, Vatican II in its Pastoral Constitution, condemns any form of discrimination when it says, “Every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent.”⁴⁸ Moreover, it gives a few glimpses of models of a collaborative Church where Gender Justice can be put in place.

Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, on the dignity and vocation of women affirms that the “essential equality of men and women since both of them - the woman as much as man - are created in the image and likeness of God.” He further states, “Both of them (man and woman) are equally capable of receiving the outpouring of the divine truth and love in the Holy Spirit. Both receive His salvific and sanctifying 'visits'” and added that men and women are equal as witnesses and actors 'in regard to the mighty works of God.’⁵⁰ Further, Pope John Paul II in His appeal to Ecclesial communities, States and International Institutions, urged everyone to make every effort to ensure that women regain full respect for their dignity and role; to make effective and intelligent campaign for the promotion of women, concentrating on all areas of women's life; to examine the past with courage, to work in a convincing manner so that the widest possible space be opened to women in the economy, politics and in the life of the Church.⁵¹ In the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II affirms “the equal dignity and responsibility of women with men” (no. 19) instead of speaking of the subordination of women.

Conclusion

Absence of gender equality is evident in all most all walks of life both in the society at large and in the Church. Both sex and gender are influenced largely by the socio-cultural processes. Too often Religion legitimizes the practice of gender inequality at various levels forgetting its transformative role in changing mindsets and attitudes. Starting from the genesis stories of creation, the Bible is clear about the intention of the Creator God. Men and women created in the image and likeness of God shares equal dignity, value and worth. In spite of the patriarchal moorings of the bible it highlights women who broke away from gender stereotypes and contributed much to their respective societies. In a world where inequalities abound between men and women, the Church is called to become a convincing sign and a sacrament of equality for the rest of humanity and the entire creation. Then we shall truly witness that in Jesus Christ there is no longer the Jew or Greek, the free or the slave, the male and female (Gal 3:28).

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- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.
- ³⁰ Ocus do'n ochtmad asna uachtarach chleiba lethi deis Adaim doronta Eva, indus co m-bad cutruma do hi (MacCarthy, ed., *The Codex Palatino -Vaticanus* No. 840 (Dublin, 1892), 48-8 as cited by Thomas O'Loughlin, "Adam's Rib and the Equality of the Sexes," 48.
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FORMATION OF LAITY FOR EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN WITNESS

In the Context of the Gender Policy

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Introduction:

The Gender Policy of the CBCI was introduced to correct the tremendous gender imbalance in Church and Society. The reality of women's status and the statistics of violence done to women cried out for change. The Bishops recognized that working towards gender equality is an urgent need. The late Cardinal Varkey Vithyathil said, The Policy promotes the egalitarian message of Jesus, with the vision of a collaborative Church with Gender Justice.¹

Gender equality can only be achieved through equal partnership among and between women and men. Equal partnership goes beyond numbers. It involves women's equal right to articulate their needs and interests as well as their vision of society and the Church and to shape the decisions that affect their lives.

Church as People of God

By defining the Church as the People of God, Vatican II opened the door for lay participation in the mission of the Church. The People of God include women.

"The People of God believe that they are led by the Spirit of the Lord who fills the whole world. Moved by their faith, they try to discern, in the events, the needs and the longings, which they share with other peoples of our times, what may be the genuine signs of the presence or of the purpose of God. For faith throws a new light on all things and makes known the full ideal which God has sent for humans, thus guiding the mind towards solutions that are fully human".²

"At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the time and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel if it is to carry out its task." (The Church in the Modern World No.4)

Both men and women share in the responsibility of the mission of

the Church in the world. The Code (1983) of Canon Law presents many areas where women together with laymen can participate in the life of the Church. Women's perspective in the interpretation of the signs of the times is also important if their concerns and needs are to be addressed.

The new ecclesiastical understanding perceives women as equal in dignity with men, who have competence to take initiatives and responsibilities for social and ecclesiastical endeavors along with men.

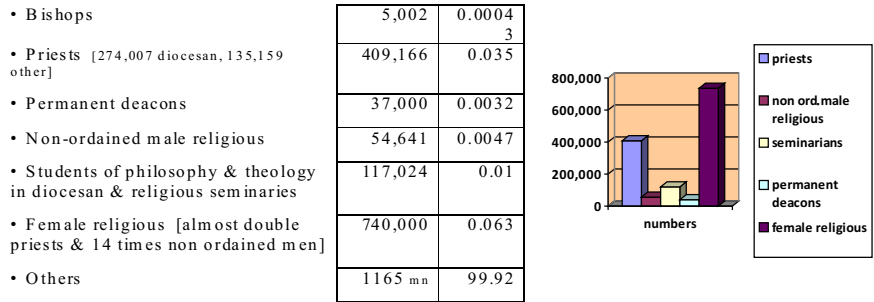
The integration of the voices of women is imperative to ensure the wholeness of the Church. Non-representation of women will result in the exclusion of the perspectives, experiences, strengths and needs of half of the Church.³

To be able to read the signs of the times in the context of our faith, both men and women are in need of formation. "Formation and spirituality are necessary for the inner transformation of the Church and for the Church to transform society."⁴ It is only then that the Church can be true leaven in society to make God's reign of justice and peace a reality in our midst.

Lay women face not just gender discrimination but also discrimination as lay people when it comes to formation and participation in Church ministry and decision making.

Present Reality:

- The Catholic presence in the world = 1,166 million ... [Survey Vatican Statistical Yearbook 2010... details of 2008]



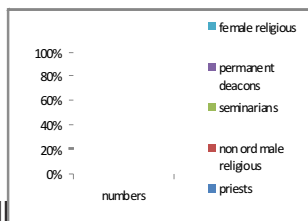
• the Catholic presence in the world = 1,166 million

• non-ordained = 1165.9 million = 99.98 %

• “formally formed” = 1,362,833 [1.3 mn] = 0.86%

• “non-formally formed” = 1,14,637,167 [114.6 mn] = 9.12%

The Church is made up of almost 1.4 million



and 1165 million recipients of their ministry. In reality we are a community of over a billion commissioned apostles who have been called through Baptism and endowed with the Spirit to participate together in carrying forward Jesus' Mission in our world.

Formation is not the privilege of a few, but a right and duty of all (Christifideles Laici, 63).

The Laity have been socialized in the Church to be 'law abiding' Catholics. The majority know the 10 commandments, the law of the Church and keep it. They are afraid that breaking the law will send them to hell. But there has been hardly any formation with regard to the living of their Christian vocation as spelt out in the documents of Vatican II and Christifideles Laici. So the majority are very comfortable with still following the old way of pray, pay and obey.

Due to the lack of proper formation, not all people accept the changing role of the laity in the practice of our faith so there appears to be confusion. They will often even criticize those who take up social issues. I had this experience when I took up the empowerment of domestic workers to stand for their rights. The greatest opposition came from my own Catholic community who unfortunately did not receive any guidance from the Parish Priest who told them that he could not stop me because it was my personal apostolate and told me privately to keep my apostolate away from the parish premises.

The digital revolution has made knowledge creation and sharing possible and people's awareness of problems have become very acute. The news of various initiatives to roll back of Vatican II is causing even more confusion. All the current formation has left out the gender component. Some lay movements even reinforce subordination and stereotyped roles for women.

Where are people receiving their formation:

Parents , the head of the domestic Church, are encouraged to be

the first teachers of the faith, but their own formation is sadly lacking. Marriage preparation courses focus on doctrine and teachings on birth regulation rather than the reality of the family in relation to the world around.

Outside the home, children get their faith formation from Sunday School, sacramental catechesis, and religious education in school. These sadly lack trained and effective teachers.

In a wired world, many Christians are being formed by EWTN and other TV evangelists who reinforce either a fundamentalist or a pre-Vatican II way of looking at the world and being Christian.

At present, only a tiny minority of lay Catholics receive preparation for their apostolate. Most of these fortunate lay women and men receive their formation outside their local parishes through lay movements, third orders, secular institutes or through certificate and degree programs offered by a diocese or theologate. The ministry of the various lay movements, influences and benefit a much larger number. But often their formation could be counter to the vision of the parish and could cause more problems. The only instrument of formation in the parish is the homily which often is not well prepared.

Present participation of Laity

There is significant lay participation in pastoral and liturgical ministries in the parish.

- ♦ In Liturgical Ministries as Lectors, Eucharist Ministries, Altar Servers, Ushers.
- ♦ Some of the traditional pastoral ministries like Legion of Mary, SVP have their own programmes with little formation.
- ♦ Catechists, who are mostly voluntary, have little or no formation.
- ♦ All the above training is for the job not from a Mission perspective.
- ♦ Sodalties/ Catholic Family Movement do have formation programmes mostly run by Jesuits.
- ♦ The Small Christian Community (SCC): Women form the majority of animators in the SCCs. They are enthusiastic and committed, but the lack of sufficient training is very evident, as most often activities of the SCC seem to be social activities, and the conduct of

rituals in the community, which blunts the dynamic and transformative nature of what a true SCC is supposed to be.

IMPORTANT INGREDIENTS OF FAITH FORMATION

In order to promote a deeper awareness among the faithful of their gifts and responsibility in the communion and mission of the Church, formation should focus on:

- ♦ Helping people discover their gifts & talents and how these can be used for Mission.
- ♦ Making Disciples – who experience the Lord in a community of disciples, in community worship, and in personal prayer. Disciples who have a desire to serve as the Lord served.
- ♦ Discerning the signs of God's presence and purpose in the events, needs and longings of our times.
- ♦ Gospel sharing has to be an integral part of SCC life. Where people listen to God's Word, connect it to the events of life seen as the signs of the time, and act on its message.
- ♦ Building Community – It is through following the teachings of Christ faithfully that the community grows in an intimate sense of belonging to each other as children of God (Jn 15: 9-11) This sense of belonging brings about a communion which becomes a way of life capable of sanctification and mission. (L.G 7)⁵
- ♦ Formation programmes should be experiential and rooted in life; working through the lived experience of people; less academic, focusing on transformation rather than just information. “We need to foster a faith rooted in our lives which means knowing how to read not only the written Bible, but also the Bible which is 'written' in our lives in the world”.⁶
- ♦ Include a Gender component in formation programmes, that creates gender sensitivity, focuses on changing attitudes and traditions that demean women, and the empowerment of women.

The Importance of Gender Component in Formation:

Formation for Marriage:

The Gender Policy has the drawback of reinforcing stereotyping of women. It says “acknowledgement and support given to the pivotal position of the mother as the heart of the family and her role in

the moulding of the future generations and the faith formation of the family.”

On the contrary, men should be given awareness and encouragement to partner his wife in playing a pivotal role in the family for nurturing and faith formation. Therefore the need to impart skills for effective parenting through family education programs and marriage preparation courses, keeping in mind the need to overcome the cultural bias against the girl child and sexual stereotypes is necessary for both man and woman.

The policy also suggests “to design faith-formation programs for catechists, children, & youth, those in marriage preparation, couples and families to reorient them towards gender equity and mutuality in relationships, in their prayers, language, attitudes and actions. Church teachings on interpersonal dynamics across gender should be grounded in the gospel values of truth, love and justice.”

Other areas for formation in the mission of justice for women are:

- ♦ Legal Education – awareness of various laws that protect women and how to use these laws.
- ♦ Enable women's social involvement through creating social awareness. To educate women and men regarding the need and relevance of social engagement of women.
- ♦ To facilitate women's social engagement we need to get families/husbands to be sensitized so as to ensure their cooperation in taking over household responsibilities to free women to go out and join in social activities.
- ♦ An environment has to be created through positive, economic and social awareness for the overall development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- ♦ Change societal attitudes and community practices by encouraging the active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- ♦ Advocate for motherhood-friendly structures in the workplace to enable working mothers to bear children and hold her job.
- ♦ Sensitize the clergy/religious and laity by commissioning a situational study and analysis of tribal/dalit women and their families.

- ♦ Enable women to participate in interfaith dialogue
- ♦ Encourage women's role as peace makers.

IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTING SCC AS A PARTICIPATORY STRUCTURE FOR LAY FORMATION & PARTICIPATION:

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences articulated a vision for the Church in Asia as “A Participatory and Co-responsible Church – living as a Communion of Communities.” in 1990, at the Vth Plenary Assembly of the FABC in Bandung.

When people begin participating in its (Church) life, they bring into its ambit of concern their own life concerns. This has the effect of both broadening and narrowing the Church's pastoral outlook: broadening it, that is, beyond its explicitly spiritual concerns; narrowing it to the specificities of the people's life as they see it and as they try to live it in a Christian way.... What eventually happens in a truly participatory and discerning Church, given the change of focus and the acceptance of social transformation and inculturation as legitimate tasks in the over-all mission of the Church, is a new way of being Church.⁷

Since the whole Church is missionary, the mission mandate must be seen as a community task. Our Baptism calls us to live in community and play our role in the mission of the Church. When a community feels responsible for its missionary mandate within the life situations in which it is placed, it will be able to identify ministries, train and commission its own ministers. Such a community reveals a strong sense of maturity in faith and Christian commitment. It will help every member to understand their role in the community, on behalf of the community and fulfill it. In the neighbourhood they can undertake mission like visiting their neighbours of other faiths, participating in the festive celebrations of their neighbours, inviting them to our own festivities, and working with them on civic and social concerns in the neighbourhood. Community members carry their responsibility for mission into their workplace as well, so if a person is a teacher in school, clerk in an office, politician or business person, they will all function as missionaries of the community.

Small Christian Communities (SCC) are a powerful instrument to

raise the awareness among the lay faithful, of their call to live intentionally and actively, within their neighbourhoods, in such a way that the reign of God is hastened.

The CBCI has adopted this vision of a New Way of Being Church and made it the pastoral priority. Most dioceses in India have done the same.

IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTING WOMEN'S FORMATION FOR MISSION OF THE CHURCH:

Women have moved from passivity to actively participate in the mission of Church in Asia through this new way of being Church.. They are aware that their participation in the mission of the Church is making their faith come alive and that they are responding to the call of God. They believe it is their vocation. One Japanese Bishop commented "If women go, we have to close the Church".

The participation of women in SCCs has helped us recover some of the qualities of women's participation in the church. It has meant that the daily actions of women in their homes & workplaces, the action of groups of women in bettering their personal lives, their families and neighbourhoods have received much greater recognition and attention and are accepted as being an integral part of the Mission of the Church. The mission to 'love your neighbour' takes on concrete form as men and women delve into the Gospel to understand God's will for them. Catholic women and men open themselves to the Spirit of God, and find the courage to make changes in their lives.

In a village community where drunkenness and wife beating were a regular feature, the women of the community got together to find a solution to the problem. If a man came home drunk and troubled his family and or beat his wife, she was to blow on a whistle. This brought all the women in the neighbourhood to her house. The women would then confront the man who would be ashamed to face the crowd of women so he was forced to stop beating his wife. They left only when he assured them he would go to bed quietly. In this way they were able to control a lot of domestic violence.

In yet another village, women confronted the owners of the local alcohol shop to stop selling alcohol to their men as it was causing a lot of family problems. They used the law and forced the shop to change its business with their collective action.

In my own community, women animators arrange help for anyone who is sick, housebound or in need of any kind of assistance.

With the rapid expansion of urban parishes and the decreasing number of priests available for pastoral work, women are the majority volunteers as extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. Every Sunday, after the Mass in the parish, women take the Eucharist to all the sick and aged in their communities. They pray and spend some time with them. They form the link between the housebound parishioners and the parish.

Women are also the majority of those volunteering as catechists, preparing parishioners for the various sacraments and running the Sunday school.

In countries like Indonesia, where a diocese can comprise several hundred small islands, it is impossible for a priest to reach every island for Mass even in a month. The leaders of the SCC are the ones who organize the Sunday liturgy, conduct baptisms, funerals, and give pastoral care to their communities. Many of these community leaders are women.

Even in Catholic Philippines, the parishes are so large, that the few priests in the parish are unable to go to all the sub-stations every Sunday of the month for the celebration of the Eucharist. So the women leaders travel to the main parish and bring back the Eucharist each Saturday to their community. They conduct the Sunday liturgy in the community whenever the priest is not present. They conduct catechesis for the children and prepare the children/parents for the sacraments. This is possible with the dedicated voluntary service of women.

Importance of promoting Women's Participation

Even though in civil society, women's role has undergone tremendous change, but in Church, there is not much change. Women work actively in the neighbourhood community, but beyond that it is often the men who dominate the Diocesan Pastoral Councils

and higher bodies of the Church structures for lay people. Only in some countries like Hong Kong and the Philippines, women are appointed to administrative positions in the Church. Women's participation is directly related to the empowerment of women in that society.

Ecclesia in Asia #34 states - "The contributions of women have all too often been undervalued or ignored, and this has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity. The Church in Asia would more visibly and effectively uphold women's dignity and freedom by encouraging their role in the Church's life, including her intellectual life, and by opening to them every greater opportunities to be present and active in the Church's mission of love and service."

The extreme controls exercised over women in Asia from early childhood robs them of their self confidence, makes them believe that they are weak and necessarily dependent on a man. Many women have suffered grievously because of these myths. Most women remain bound to tradition for fear of rocking the boat. It has taken a lot of strength and courage on the part of a few women to chart new courses despite the handicaps imposed by tradition and culture in a male dominated society. The influence and scope of women to enhance life at all levels of life has to be recognized and encouraged.

Women have their own unique experience of God and are able to make valid contributions to theological reflection as well. Women should be enabled to study theology and given openings to allow them to contribute to Church mission from their perspective as pastoral workers, researchers and teachers in theologates. At present there are only a few women teaching in seminaries and theologates in Asia. But these women are not free to express their views on feminism and feminist theology. Those who are bold to do so are marginalized.

We need more women to contribute their special gifts to all areas of life in order to make a marked difference. This is what Pope John Paul II called the 'feminine genius'. The feminine genius needs to be utilized much more in the Church in Asia.

Some Important Elements to Consider in Formation

“The clergy/laity and Church/secular sphere, are divisions which appear to be a hindrance to the development of ministries needed to make the Church fully alive and witnessing. If the clergy are in charge of Church affairs and laity of the secular affairs, how can the clergy lead the laity in their field?” The Church appears to accomplish her mission in compartments. This has resulted in wide experiences of arguments and fights between clergy and laity about each other's limits and powers, misunderstanding, frustration, loss of good will and mutual distrust. It is difficult to plan pastoral action in a convergent manner. The challenge is to think of collaborative formation which will lead to a primary experience of the clergy and laity being brothers and sisters in the Church.”

We need to constantly evaluate formation in the Church in terms of its power to conscientize and activate the whole community in her mission in the local context. Does the formation programmes make the parish an evangelizing community?

Build and support structures of a participatory Church viz. the SCC, the PPC, Finance Committees, APC, which provide an opportunity to absorb the talents of a wider number of people in the parish community and also have the ability to form people through their experience in these positions.

Challenges In Formation:

Parish Priests - are often consumed with the day to day running of the parish and its attendant problems; They consider the mission of the Church to the world only secondary to their ritual duties. Many parish priests also have the tendency to run the parish according to their own whims and fancies. They do not necessarily follow a common vision. This creates confusion in people. We often have priests who come and start a project, which runs well during their tenure, when they leave the next one does not take interest in previous projects and starts new ones. This is not only a waste of resources but also confuses people. If lay people are put in charge of projects in the parish, it will ensure that the projects will continue to thrive even after the priest who helped initiate it is long gone.

No Time: In today's rat race where most lay people are involved

in earning a living, it is difficult to get them to attend extended training programmes. Hence these should be tailored in consultation with them. Use of online training which can be undertaken at the participant's own pace can overcome this hurdle.

Lack of Trainers and Resources: Collaborative training programmes in the diocese, region or national levels will deal with lack of trainers and save resources. Quite a few national institutes of training have sprung up which need to be utilized.

Lack of Interest: People are not interested because they do not know better. It comes from an improper understanding of our faith. Therefore the Sunday homilies should be utilized optimally for this purpose. Often this is the only catechesis that some congregants receive. The other way is to give proper faith formation to children in school and in sacramental catechesis especially at confirmation.

Using ICT: The Church has to learn to use technology to train people. Using the internet, a large number of people can be trained. It is interactive as well. E.g. Catherine of Siena Virtual College.

Seminary Training: Should create priests who will exercise their ministry in collaboration with lay people. It is increasingly felt that today the young men coming out of the seminary are pompous and arrogant, trying to flaunt their power and status over the people. This only helps in driving people away from the Church and ministry.

Conclusion:

Prophetically, Pope Paul VI noted,. People today put more trust in witnesses than preachers, in experience than in teaching, in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission (*Redemptoris Missio*, 42).

Proper planning in consultation with knowledgeable Laity will help create programmes that are relevant and that will be utilized. It should be a bottom up effort rather than a top down one if it is to succeed.

The Bishops have committed "adequate personnel and finances at all levels of the Church to inspire, motivate, coordinate and monitor the process and results of execution of the gender policy."

They also "seek to join hands with the Central and State

governments, civil society organizations, and other religious groups to safeguard the rights and freedom of all, especially women, irrespective of caste, creed, and vocation." (Statement of the 28th CBCI Plenary Assembly 2008).

Let us hold them to their commitment.

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Formation for Participative and Prophetic Leadership in the Mission of the Church

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Formation in the Church is to become a leader like Jesus. It is to lead each one in formation, whether laity, religious or those preparing for official ecclesiastical ministry, to a unique type of leadership. This leadership is quite different from that of a leadership in the secular society. The formation is for the mission of the Church in building the society into the Kingdom of God. The goals of this formation, the methods involved, the attitude of those participating in the formation etc. would be very different from other ways of training for leadership in the society. It is to assist one to become a leader like Jesus, in order to continue his mission empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was a leader. His leadership was a unique one. None before him possessed such an authority that he had. None after him exercised such an authority as he did. He never asked his followers to surrender themselves to some ideals though he stood for certain ideals and died for the same. He asked them to follow him. Those who followed him recognized him as a leader par excellence. Indeed he was a charismatic leader. Jesus was a leader by his very nature and by his mission. He formed his disciples to take up leadership roles in a community of his vision to continue his mission. Christian leadership cannot but be for the realization of Jesus' vision of a new type of leadership befitting a new society he came to usher in. Therefore, it is imperative that those who are called to take up leadership roles in the society and in the Christian community follow Jesus' style of leadership in order to serve the community as effective leaders.

Jesus has not given us a blueprint for exercising proper leadership in the community of his vision. However, he categorically states what type of leadership it should not be. He calls the attention of his disciples to the abuse of power and misuse of leadership positions

among those who do not share the mission of the chosen people. "The gentiles lord it over them. This should not happen among you"(Mt 20:25). Jesus not only subverts the conventional understanding of leadership to rule and to dominate people but also radicalizes the exercise of power by showing that there is power in powerlessness. This, indeed, is the paradox of the Jesuan message of authentic leadership. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Mt 20:26b). He actualized his own teaching by washing the feet of his disciples. "You call me Lord and teacher... If I then your Lord and Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet"(Jn 13:14).

This praxis of Jesus is a wonderful ideal but how practical can this vision of leadership be, is another question! Can any organization or any society be run efficiently on such utopian ideals? Efficiency, order, managerial skills and planning etc. are some of the criteria to judge the strength and success of any organization. Wouldn't these be compromised when one follows the Jesuan praxis of leadership? Or does he intend to communicate a new understanding of leadership hitherto unknown to his predecessors and continues to remain in some way obscure to his followers? Did Jesus himself give an efficient leadership or an effective leadership? Was his training programme oriented towards forming a group of effective leaders to continue his mission? These are some of the issues we have to discuss to see clearly the relation between Jesus' style of leadership and formation for leadership to continue the mission of Jesus in the Church.

Here, an attempt is made to show how Jesus was a leader by his very nature and by his mission, and what was his method of educating his disciples to leadership roles to continue his mission. Christian leadership cannot but be for the realization of Jesus' vision of a new society where women and men have equal opportunities or possibilities to unfold themselves as authentic humans recognizing their vocation to continue the mission of Jesus with courage and conviction. Therefore, it is imperative that those who are called to be disciples of Jesus to take up leadership roles in the society and in the Christian community must receive adequate and proper formation to be effective leaders following the praxis of Jesus. Since Jesus as the leader par excellence to lead to people to live a counter-culture and a

contrast-community to be a leaven in the society slowly, steadily and decisively affect the society that it becomes a Kingdom-community where humans can unfold themselves as authentic humans, his method of formation for leadership is the model for us to assist in the formation for participative and prophetic leadership for the mission of the Church.

1. Jesus' Self-understanding as a Leader

It may appear to be presumptuous if we attempt to enter into the inner world of Jesus' own self-understanding as a leader. However, it is legitimate to seek to understand the possible ways he saw himself as the one who leads humanity to its ultimate destiny. If Jesus is the model for the full unfolding of the human persons and if the believers are called to "have the same mind of Jesus" (Phil 2:5) it is necessary to get an insight into the inner life of Jesus. The New Testament presents Jesus as the one who had the conviction that he had a vocation to lead. This is clear from the authority and courage with which he gathered people to share his vision and mission. There was no hesitation in his invitation to them. "Follow me" he says. Some times this call is presented in a very radical and absolute way. One has to leave parents, wife, children, brothers and sisters and even his own life and follow him (Mt 10:37-38; Lk 14:26). No one in the history of religions had ever demanded such a radical commitment from his followers. Nothing must stand on the way to the realization of the mission of leading others to the fullness of life. If the leaders fail, the cause of the Kingdom is at stake. Therefore, the all-encompassing concern must be the 'the fishing of the humans' that they may not lose their life in the ocean of meaninglessness and despair. The humans are called to become truly human with the unfolding of their God-given potentialities. This is possible only in a kingdom-situation of justice, forgiveness, fellowship and authentic communion where the sovereignty of God is recognized. This outline is to show that Jesus was clear about his vocation to lead others to become what they are. He empowered them to become leaders with a mission to serve others in order that they too can become leaders by unfolding themselves. Those who have opted to take up leadership roles in fulfilling the mission of the Church needs to have such an experience and conviction that they are called to share in this ministry of Jesus. Otherwise, even the best formation programme would not have its

desired effect on them.

What is unique about the leadership exercised by Jesus is that it neither gives security to the leader himself nor to the followers. Nowhere in the history can we find someone who offers only insecurity to his followers. They have to leave even what they think they have. This is a strange phenomenon. But there is something of utmost importance for the world and of absolute significance for the followers in this peculiar type of leadership. This leadership is not to rule or to dominate but for self-emptying service. While contrasting the way of leadership exercised by those who rule over the Gentiles and the type of leadership the disciples should exercise, Mark gives a clear expression of Jesus' own understanding leadership. "For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45).

Jesus' leadership style is a radical contrast to the socially accepted forms of leadership. It is not a centripetal leadership. It is not meant to strengthen the power of the leader but to liberate the followers to give up themselves for others. It is a leadership to promote leadership. Its ultimate aim is to create everyone a leader that they become selfless catalysts of social transformation. The values of the Kingdom must be the programme of his/her life. It must become the style of leadership in a contrast community.

Jesus had authority. The authority of Jesus was revolutionary in the sense that he repudiates the law-centred religion of the Pharisees and the Scribes which prevents humans from encountering the forgiving and life-giving God of Jesus. What is the source of Jesus' authority? This could have been a spontaneous question coming from anyone who has seen him in action. "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him"(Mk 1:27). Implied in such an exclamation is the authority of Jesus to destroy the worst powers that enslave human beings. What is obvious to us is that this charismatic authority arises from within him. The early Church recognized that the source of his authority was from 'above'. It originated from his intimate relationship with his Father whom he addressed in a familiar and unconventional way as Abba. It might have been the habitual way of expressing Jesus' intimate and unique relationship with his Father that the

evangelists could articulate such a relationship in terms of theophanies where the Father addresses him as his beloved Son (Mk 1:11) and John in particular expresses it very succinctly, "I and the Father are oneness" (Jn 10:30). John emphasizes that Jesus' authority is derived from his relation with his Father (Jn 5:30; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10). What we want to highlight here, is that his authority springs up from his deep relationship with his Father and therefore, from his interiority. His words, deeds and life-style are stamped with this authority. Therefore, with courage and conviction he confronts and overcomes the forces that would try to hinder the establishment of the Kingdom. His authority, in its final analysis, has a functionality in terms of his mission to proclaim the Kingdom. The human society must be transformed into God's Kingdom where humans can truly become humans by recognizing God's sovereign leadership. In Jesus' vision it is in such a Kingdom the leadership of every human emerges. In this vision everyone will have the authority that comes from within even if they are powerless. That is the power in powerlessness!

2. Jesus' Praxis of Formation for Leadership

Jesus wanted all his disciples to play leadership roles to unfold himself/herself and to promote the full flowering of every human being. Jesus was not proposing a universal theory of leadership in abstract concepts for the consideration of those who might like to opt for a particular way of leadership of their preference or inclination. But he called a few "to be with him" (Mk 3:14) that they learn from him what it means to be a leader like him who can bring out the best in other persons without exercising even the least form of domination or control. The purpose of this leadership is to fulfill a mission.

The mission determines the type of leadership. It is exercised through self-emptying participation in the struggles of human beings to create a new society in which they can become what they are called to become. Jesus' approach to education to leadership is, dialogical, participatory, liberative, mystical and prophetic. The disciples were chosen to continue his mission in relation to him. Therefore, more than learning the techniques of exercising their leadership role in the communities they must realize that their leadership is a delegated leadership and its source is their intimate relationship with Jesus who

is the source of their leadership.

1. Leadership in View of Building the Kingdom Community

The counter-culture which originated from Jesus' preaching and teaching was a radically new culture based on his vision of the kingdom-community. In this community there cannot be any discrimination and division based on the logic of haves and have-nots, male and female, Jew and Gentile, old or young, so called just and so called sinners. Any division or discrimination based on any ideology negates the very foundation of the Kingdom community. "The discipleship community is defined as a 'contrast society,' i.e., as a community that is fundamentally different from all other social organizations. This community's life, as well as the life of the individuals, is not defined by 'above' and 'below,' but by helping one another."¹ This kingdom has no boundaries. Nobody is excluded. It is not an organization. It is not an institution. Its foundation is the God of unconditional love. Its law is love. Its territory is the inner space of human beings that embraces everything and everyone as God does. Jesus praxis reveals the logic of this kingdom. It is the same praxis he wanted his disciples to continue. Hugo Echegaray says, "Jesus did not set up a rigid model for action but, rather, inspired his disciples to prolong the logic of his own action in a creative way amid the new and different historical circumstances in which the community would have to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom in word and deed".² According to him Jesus' praxis in view of his commitment to the vision of the kingdom found expression at three levels: first at the level of economics, second at the level of politics and the third at the level of ethico-social behaviour.

At the first level, the logic of the Kingdom does not allow the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few condemning the majority to abject poverty. At the same time it does not propose an utopian equality. It stands against the unjust accumulation of wealth which not only creates division of humans into classes and categories but also prevents true communion among humans as brothers and sisters. It creates a class of people who are always in debt and who can be manipulated by the economically powerful for furthering their own selfish interests.

Religion further makes the plight of the poor still miserable by

considering them as sinners and excludes them from the so called 'holy' people and even canonizes the accumulation of wealth as a sign of blessing from God. Jesus subverts this wrong understanding of wealth and dehumanizing attitude that follows from this understanding. For him wealth is for sharing with the needy. Wealth accumulated is bad if it prevents communion and discriminates human beings on the basis of what they possess or what they do not possess. Jesus enters into table-fellowship with those who are discriminated in this way. "The practice of Jesus would thus leave to the community the responsibility of building itself up without at the same time yielding to the system of accumulation of goods and wealth that was the characteristic of the empire."³

At the second level, the political power exercised by the rulers is in contrast to the praxis of Jesus which reveals the logic of the Kingdom in exercising power. In the Kingdom the exercise of power is based on justice and equality of humans as they are the children of the same loving Father. It excludes all forms of domination, manipulation, cover-ups, lies and abuse of power by those who wield power. In the Kingdom community there is no other justification for the use of power except for service.⁴ Leadership, in Jesuan praxis, is the empowerment of others to be leaders in self-emptying service (Lk 22: 24-27; Mt 20: 20-25; Mk 10:45).

At the third level the Jesuan praxis reveals that the Kingdom community must promote ethico-social behaviour based on the logic of freedom and love. There is no triumphalism or arrogance that contradicts and hinders right relationship among the humans. In fact, the practice of right relationship might involve more hardships and suffering as it may subvert the type of relationship promoted by the systems and structures opposed to the kingdom-community. In this context one can understand the warning Jesus gave to his disciples, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves"(Mt 10:16). Echegaray, commenting on the praxis of Jesus at the level of ethico-social behaviour says, "The disciple must overcome a spirit of diffidence; collaboration in the kingdom calls for decisiveness, tenacity, and fruitfulness (cf. the parable of the talents). The disciple must work as the Lord worked and not afraid of the kingdoms of this world."⁵

It is God's dream that the whole human race becomes the kingdom-community where all can experience the unconditional love of God through the self-emptying love of humans for one another. It is in such a community one experiences true freedom to become authentically human. To build up such a kingdom community Jesus appoints a small community of leaders whom he called apostles. He educates them to take up leadership of the communities in which all are leaders in decision-making though decision-taking may be left to the one appointed by the community with utmost docility to the Spirit of God.

2. Jesus' Training for Leadership for the Mission is Dialogical

The New Testament witnesses to Jesus' profound love for humans and their world, his deep awareness of what humans are and what they can become. No formation for mission of the Church can effect changes in those who seek formation if they are not loved and trusted. No programme or policy would have its desired effect if those who implement it do not take those in formation into confidence. Jesus trusted humans and believed in their goodness. He believed in their God-given talent to create a world in which they could unfold themselves. Such a power within them was waiting to be unleashed. He was deeply aware that he was the unique agent to fulfill this mission. He was not proclaiming a Kingdom which was a distant reality. It was a Kingdom already present in every human being ("Kingdom is within you" Lk 17:21) and realized its fullness in his own very person. Therefore, with prophetic courage he denounced the systems and powers whether social, economic or religious that prevented the unfolding of the Kingdom both in the minority that dominate and exploit and the majority that suffer subjugation and dehumanization. He announced the Good news that it is possible for everyone to experience wholeness by their openness to God's forgiving and liberating love. His approach to the proclamation of this truth was dialogical.

Jesus' approach to formation is to lead his disciples to this discovery. It is not by providing them with a technique or some information but by means of a dialogue leading to an insight into the mystery of being. This is what the disciples have to proclaim to other humans that they can discover themselves in encountering Jesus

Christ.

Jesus' teaching in parables further confirms his dialogical method of formation for leadership.. George Soares Prabhu says, "The parables of Jesus are dialogical. They do not convey information, offer prescriptions, or give lessons to a passive and receptive listener. Instead by telling a 'shocking' story, they provoke and tease the listener into a radically new insight into his own situation, which the parable has put before him in a story form."⁶

Jesus' pedagogy flows from his faith in the mystery of humans and from his consciousness of his mission to bring humans to the realization of what they truly are. Even knowledge becomes a power to oppress and manipulate others if it is possessed by the unscrupulous. For Jesus, his knowledge of his Father as Abba and his deep awareness of the destiny of humans were not means of control and manipulation of others from a position of power and superiority. He shared this saving knowledge of the unconditional and forgiving love of the Father through his dialogue with his disciples and all who were ready to listen to him especially, the poor and the marginalized. His dialogue presupposes his intense and deep love for other humans, faith in their goodness and capacity to become authentically human, hope in their ability to struggle in spite of the hopelessness of their situation and his prophetic critique of the oppressive and dehumanizing situation in which humans are.

Dialogue is the heart of Jesus' approach to forming his disciples to leadership. Paulo Freire affirms that dialogical method of education is possible only if there is love, humility, faith, hope and critical thinking. He says, "Founding itself upon love, humility and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the participants is the logical consequence."⁷ He further says that dialogue cannot exist without hope which is the force that refuses to accept dehumanization and finally, dialogue involves critical thinking which is important for the continuing transformation of reality for the continuing humanization of humans. So dialogue is the heart of education. Paulo Freire affirms, "Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education."⁸ Jesus' dialogue through life, words and deeds communicated to the disciples that they were loved and trusted and

so they were entrusted with a leadership unlike that of the world. Jesus is the role model for this new concept of leadership. His power is in his powerlessness. His strength is in his weakness. The humility of this educator par excellence is revealed in his praxis oriented pedagogy of washing the feet of his disciples (Jn 13:12-16). Leadership in the kingdom community should have no other purpose than self-emptying service as Jesus did (Mt 20:25-28; Mk 10:42-45; Jn 13:12-16).

3. Jesus' Education to Leadership: Participative, Liberative and Empowering

A dialogical approach to formation for leadership cannot but be participative. Its aim is liberation of human beings to become themselves. It cannot be by 'depositing' the knowledge of the teacher in the students but by challenging them to discover themselves as having an inalienable vocation to transcend themselves and transform the world they encounter. According to Paulo Freire, "Authentic liberation – the process of humanization – is not another 'deposit' to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it."⁹

Jesus' pedagogical approach was essentially participative and liberative. Jesus' formation of the disciples for leadership and his preaching and teaching reveal that he took his listeners seriously as active participants in the process discovering the truth of their being. If Jesus understood his mission as the Good News of liberation (Lk 4:18f.) with accompanying praxis, it involved the full participation of the addressees in the process of this liberation. Jesus' mission was to lead humans to realize true freedom by their becoming authentic humans. This could not have been accomplished without the total participation and cooperation of those to whom he was sent. His teaching in parables, as we have mentioned earlier, involves the listener and engages him/her to make a commitment to the kingdom in freedom. Soares Prabhu, commenting on Jesus' method of teaching in parables says, "...I suggest that all the teachings of Jesus, his words as well as his deeds, are, like the parables, dialogical and critical: they involve the listener in creative response, and they put into question the accepted values of his 'world'".¹⁰ Jesus

uses evocative language, symbols and his own person to communicate his message and invites the disciples to enter into his vision of the new community which they have to build with their creativity and commitment.¹¹

If formation is for freedom and humanization, Jesus' formation of his disciples implies true liberation and authentic humanization in their all possible dimensions. However, the expression 'Jesus sets us free' can be misunderstood if we consider Jesus as an outside force capable of liberating humans from all types of bondage and if we consider ourselves as passive recipients of that freedom he bestows. Such an understanding negates the supreme meaning of God-becoming-human. Incarnation reveals that humanity is fully involved in God's drama of human liberation. Jesus' proclamation of liberation too involves "on the one hand liberation of man from alienation, i.e., from everything that renders him other than he ought to be, and on the other, the full flowering of human on our planet. In other words, it is not only freedom from but also freedom for – freedom for creativity, community and love."¹² Jesus empowered his listeners to discover themselves and their God-given destiny without the fear of being judged or constrained by the oppressive dehumanizing structures of religion and society. The new community Jesus inaugurated to continue his mission must have leaders who promote true participation and involvement of all without any discrimination leading to the experience of true liberation in and through him.

4. Jesus' Formation for Mystical and Prophetic Leadership

Leadership that is not rooted in the liberative experience of God degenerates into an idolization of God, perpetuation of oppressive religious, socio-political and economic structures and glorification of personal power. Hence Jesus stood against the powers that dehumanized humans in the name of God and religion and prophetically denounced every form of oppressive understanding of God and courageously opposed the repressive measures which religion employed to keep people in fear and in guilt. The source of his prophetic courage was his intimate relation with his Abba. "How people pray when alone reflects their understanding of their relation to God and their experience of God. What Jesus experienced of God

in his moment of solitude and prayer comes to its most characteristic expression in the word abba."¹³ The early Church recognized that Jesus' authority as having originated from his encounter with his Father (Jn 5:30; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10).

Jesus' own religious experience finds expression in his prophetic mission of proclaiming liberation to the captives (Lk 4:18). The evangelists give evidence to his own consciousness of being a prophet (Mk 6:4; Lk 13:33). Luke who gives much importance to Jesus prophetic mission of liberation presents him also very powerfully as a prayerful person (Lk 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28; 11:1). Any authentic prophetic mission implies an intense experience of God. It is in God's name the prophet claims to communicate the message of liberation. Therefore, genuine mystics are prophets and genuine prophets are mystics. Jesus goes up on the mountain, symbol of the place of encountering God, and calls the disciples 'to be with him' before they are 'sent out' with authority (Mk 3:13). Though Jesus found time to be alone with his Father, he did not force his disciples to pray. His own life of communion with his Father evoked in his disciples an intense desire to pray. So they asked him to teach them to pray (Lk 11:2).

'Being with him' and 'being sent out' or a vision and a mission summarize the meaning of discipleship and therefore, the essence of Christian leadership. A vision without a mission defeats the purpose of God and a mission without a vision depletes the mission of its purpose. Even the last command of Jesus according to the Acts of the Apostles refer to the early Church's understanding of the importance of integrating the disciples' experience of God and their mission to proclaim the good news of liberation to the end of the world (Acts 1:8). Leaders who are called to transform the world must be mystics and prophets at the same time. The New Testament witnesses to a Jesus who was both a mystic and prophet at the same time. He educated his disciples to be like him to continue his mission. A right understanding of Christian leadership and the exercise of it cannot but be following this praxis of Jesus' style of leadership.

5. Implications of Jesus' Style of formation for Leadership Today

What are the practical implications of the style of formation which

Jesus introduced for the formation of men and women as religious, priests and the priestly people of God? In order to participate in the mission of the Church one has to experience that one is recognized for his or her worth as a human person, a child God, brother or sister of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Any discrimination in the name of gender, class, caste, language, ethnicity, region or nationality would not let the formation of the disciples of Christ to fully participate in the mission of the Church.

The structures of the Church, whether in the universal Church, diocesan and parochial level, religious communities of all orders and congregations and societies of apostolic life, in spite of the, noble and sublime values they are founded on, are occupied by persons who are sometimes not able to transcend their own fears, insecurities and prejudices. Therefore, if the structures of formation and those who are entrusted with the specific task of formation are not able to transcend those barriers they would not be able to assist the formation of those entrusted to them to break all barriers that divide, separate and discriminate people. With it all its sublime values of the Kingdom like justice, equality, love, peace, reconciliation etc., the Church continues to be patriarchal in its structures, attitude and expressions because some of its policies and those who leadership in the Church and places and institutes of formation are patriarchal in their thinking and acting. Many religious women and other women among the priestly people of God, internalize these patriarchal values and allow themselves to be enslaved and they even spiritualize their situation of victimhood in terms of virtues like humility, docility and submissiveness and justify their situation as the will of God or instituted by God. It is the bounden duty of the formators to assist the formation of the people of God, priests and religious to experience the glorious liberty of the children of God and experience from within that freedom to be and to become which Jesus, the freedom incarnate, had ushered in. Even when we cannot change structures of discrimination, we can change ourselves through the empowering Spirit of God, to affirm our dignity and freedom as human beings who are glory of God and relate with others with attitude of affirmation of self and others, recognizing the equality of all and by siding with all who struggle to regain their equality and dignity. Therefore, it is imperative that the formators are trained in the school of Jesus to be formator by being with him they

become agents of transformation for those seeking their formation to be mystics and prophets.

It is equally important that both the formators and those seek adequate formation to be prophets and mystics be affected by the stark reality of discrimination at all levels of the society and how human dignity is trampled by systems and structures even in the Church. A disciple cannot remain neutral in any oppressive system. Sometimes the formation programmes are conducted away from the reality of the life-struggle of the people. The negative aspects of globalization make some people who are enjoying the benefit of it, make them insulated against the cry of the poor and needy. We need to realize that if we do not raise our prophetic voice against the devaluing of the worth of humans then there would not be anybody to do so. Religious and priests living a counter culture and contrast-community can fulfill this mission of the Church to challenge the kingdoms of this world that would not let humans to live as humans. Therefore, it is imperative that along with other learning to be effective witness of the Kingdom those in formation must be challenged by the death-dealing situation around them and be affected by it. Unless one is affected deeply one will not be moved to commitment and action. Only those who are prepared to give themselves completely and unconditionally to condition the mission of Christ must opt for a radical commitment to follow Jesus. It is easy to guide such believers to live their commitment, come what may.

Conclusion:

Jesus' understanding of leadership as a call to self-emptying service subverts all other notions about leadership whether religious, social or political. He has a deep insight into the human tendency to dominate and control and to create systems and structures that enslave fellow-humans. Jesus' praxis in establishing the Kingdom of God reveals his own authority which has its source in his intimate relationship with his Father. It is to continue this mission of building the household of God, to establish a new society of God's dream that he calls the disciples and gives a formation for leadership. No one is excluded from this new society. Unlike other teachers of his time Jesus followed a pedagogy that is dialogical, participative and liberative. His pedagogy was not for domestication but for freedom –

a freedom to be and to become what one is called to become. It was Jesus' vision that everyone becomes a leader by unfolding himself or herself with a commitment to participate wholeheartedly in the struggle of all those who become authentic humans. His own life revealed that a leader must be both a mystic and a prophet at the same time. He evoked in his disciples the desire for such a life of authentic relation to God through him and prophetic courage to stand against everything that destroys the full-flowering of the human person. Christian understanding of leadership following the praxis of Jesus can be expressed in the words of Dianne Bergant who says that "...it should be exercised so that it is faithful to the covenant relationship that binds believers together, a relationship that values collaboration rather than coercion, cooperation rather than competition, interdependence rather than independence or dependence, respect rather than disdain, compassion rather than indifference, justice rather than exploitation."¹⁴ The praxis of Jesus as an authentic and ideal leader has much relevance today as there are people who would go to any extent to demean themselves to acquire power and hold on to it to control and dominate others. Some use their ill-gotten wealth even to buy positions of power. Jesus' style of leadership challenges any type of dehumanizing exercise of power. His formation of disciples was oriented towards assisting to emerge as leaders who can discover their capacity to transcend everything that prevents them and others from becoming better humans. Leaders of Jesus' vision are those who rely on their religious and moral authority than their positions of power, other-centered than self-centered, more self-emptying than self-serving, more willing to die for others than making others to die for securing their positions. To be a leader like Jesus is a costly affair. But only leaders like him can transform the world.

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- ¹¹ Cf. J.Parappally, "Jesus: The Formator of the Disciples, " *Asian Quest* 19/3 (1995), p. 8.
- ¹² S.Kappen, *Jesus and Freedom* (New York: Orbis Books, 1977), p. 56.
- ¹³ J.D.G.Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, II Edition (London: SCM Press, 1993), p. 187
- ¹⁴ D.Bergant, "Jacob's Well," *The Bible Today* 30/5 (1992), p. 285.

Formation of the Lay Faithful: for Mission or Maintenance

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In Church parlance, "The term "laity" is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church. That is, the faithful who by baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the People of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world. Their secular character is proper and peculiar to the laity. . . By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will." [LG31].

Later, we read in *Lumen Gentium* that "the laity have as their special vocation to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth." [LG33]

Pius XII once stated: "The Faithful, more precisely the lay faithful, find themselves on the front lines of the Church's life; for them the Church is the animating principle for human society. Therefore, they in particular, ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church, that is to say, the community of the faithful on earth under the leadership of the Pope, the head of all, and of the Bishops in communion with him. These are the Church..."

The Survey Vatican Statistical Yearbook 2010... gives us the

following statistics:

The Catholic presence in the world	= 1,166 billion
▪Number of bishops	- 5,002
▪Number of priests	- 409,166
▪Non-ordained male religious	- 54,641
▪Permanent Deacons	- 37,000
▪Number of students of philosophy & theology in diocesan & religious seminaries	- 1,17,024
▪Female religious	- 740,000

Why are these numbers significant?

The principal characteristic of the laity is that they live in the midst of the world and try to renew the temporal order in such a way that "while its own principles are respected, it is brought into harmony with the principles of the Christian life and adapted to the various conditions of times, places and peoples." [AA 7]

The Catholic presence in the world = 1,166 million

Non-ordained = 1165.9million = 99.96 %

Those who receive formal
formation in the faith = 1,362,833 [1.36 mn] = 0.88%

Those who receive minimal
formal formation in the faith = 1,14,637,167 [114.6 mn]
= 99.12%

99.96 percent of all Catholics ... members of the Church
responsible for witnessing Christ in the world are non-ordained!

These numbers bring to mind certain questions:

- "Do we believe, with the Church, that the 114 million lay Catholics in the world are more than simply recipients of the Church's ministry – that they are called to share responsibility and participate in "being" Church?"...
- Are we a Church made up of 1.4 million recognized apostles and 1165 million recipients of their ministry? Or are we rather a community of over a billion commissioned apostles who have been called and gifted by Jesus Christ to participate together in his redemption of our world

- Is formation a right and duty only for those called to ordination or religious life?
- Are lay Catholics somehow without any need to receive “necessary help from the Church” in order to carry out our apostolate effectively and in a manner leading to holiness?

Formation is not the privilege of a few, but a right and duty of all (Christifideles Laici, 63).

Being Church needs one to understand “Church” as assembly of disciples /followers of Christ. Only then can we be effective and credible Christian witnesses.

Handing on the faith within the Church for genuine, effective discipleship.

In whose hands is the handing on of the faith? Parents, catechists, prayer group & church-group leaders, teachers of religious education [RE] in schools, etc – all belonging largely to the 99 % of those with limited / minimal formal training in the teachings of the Church and its relevance to existence.

The secular role of laity in the Church has been largely ignored. Training if any is directed towards lay participation in delegated pastoral and liturgical ministries in the parish

Can the Church institutions just be a place where the laity receive the spiritual goods of the Church? If all lay Catholics are apostles to the world as the Church teaches, then the institutions that nourish them must become places of apostolic formation, nurturing and support. The worldwide network of parishes and institutions that have sustained the faith of lay Catholics for centuries can and must become primary centers of lay formation and outreach to the world.

While it is true that most pastors and parish staff are already stretched to the limit with the difficulties of maintaining parish structures and initiatives; it is imperative that they find the time or ways to nurture, form, and support hundreds of their parishioners in knowing, understanding and living the faith. If not the Church stagnates at the level of maintenance of the faithful rather than preparing them for mission,

The fundamental objective of the formation of the lay faithful is an ever-clearer discovery of one's vocation and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfill one's mission (Christifideles Laici, 58).

The Synod Fathers after having described Christian formation as "a continual process in the individual of maturation in faith and a likening to Christ, according to the will of the Father, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit", have clearly affirmed that the formation of the lay faithful must be placed among the priorities of a diocese. It ought to be so placed within the plan of pastoral action that the efforts of the whole community (clergy, lay faithful and religious) converge on this goal"(Christifideles Laici 57)

At present, only a tiny minority of lay Catholics receive preparation for their apostolate. Perhaps one to two percent of lay Catholics, receive any genuinely apostolic formation. The vast majority of these fortunate lay men and women receive their formation outside their local parishes through lay movements, third orders, secular institutes or through certificate and degree programs sponsored by a diocese or university. The ministry of the various lay movements, of course, influences and benefits a much larger number.

When we look at the problems and concerns of the world – the signs of our times, one is confronted with the magnitude of materialism, immorality, lack of value for life, environmental concerns, poverty, corruption... the list is endless. The laity are in the forefront and constantly called to be witnesses to a counter-culture... The responsibility to make a difference is placed on their shoulders! After 20 centuries of evangelization, most of the human race has not yet heard the Gospel proclaimed or the norms of Jesus taught; there are hundreds of millions waiting to hear the word of God, and the laity are expected, more than ever, to do the proclamation.

Adult Catholics need more than a catechesis designed for children. Along with the ordained, we have also been consecrated for a mission. We are called not only to receive Christ in the sacraments, but to bring Christ to the world. Adults need an integrating catechesis that prepares them to live as apostles, gifted men and women of faith, who are called by God to shape the world they live in through their love and work.

Apostolic formation for the laity must include:

- Spiritual formation which nurtures an intimate relationship with God and love of others;
- Intellectual formation in the doctrine and teaching of the Church. For lay Catholics, the Church's social teaching is especially important because it contains principles for discerning real world situations and responding as an apostle;
- Formation in relational skills;
- Formation in personal evangelism skills;
- Formation in group and organizational leadership

(cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 60; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 28-32)

Benedict XVI calls for renewed awareness of our 'being Church' and thus for the laity to be co-responsible for the "Church's being and action" Let us remember that while pastors are on the front lines in the Church, the laity are on the frontlines in the world, and it is there where they must exercise their mission as Christians, with their testimony and good example.

An enormous gap exists between the Church's vision of the lay apostolate and the lived experience of most lay men and women. Most lay men and women have never heard, much less grasped, the significance of their identity and their mission in the body of Christ. Since the role of the laity in the Church is so significant and urgent, it demands a good grounding in the faith. We cannot communicate to others what we do not have ourselves. Hence the need for sound, continuing education in the faith... formation for mission not maintenance!!!

RESPONDING TO SPECIAL AREAS OF CONCERN TO PROMOTE INTEGRAL AND INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

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The evangelistic mission of the Christian family calls for a change of heart—a metanoia, a conversion, a new kind of commitment leading to new evangelization. The growing loss of faith in the developed world and its extension into other parts of the globe has to be stemmed if Christian values of love, service, brotherhood and spiritual strength are to be protected and promoted harmoniously. The exhortation of Pope John Paul II for a mending of the Christian fabric of society means that one has to see all human problems and issues through the lens of Christian charity in its fullest form.

It is commonplace today to quote St. Paul's pious exclamation that there are no longer Jew or Gentile, slaves and free men, male and female and that all are one and equal, in an attempt to drive home the point that the Church's members are a well-knit group, working together towards the goal of witnessing to Christ in every walk of life. Yet a frank and honest search inwards will reveal darkness and dust, clouding our best intentions and missionary zeal. If we accept the fact that the Church has a definite duty to bear witness to the Good News in the world, then surely all its members are bound to take up this mission of evangelization through their life examples and experiences. Only such a sharing in the Church's mission of preaching and teaching Christ can give us the privilege of being called Christian.

As Christians living in this world, we have to partake of earthly responsibilities in our routine lives, in our families and communities, in work-places, in the Church, at prayer time and at play or work. As baptized Christians, every member becomes a prophet and receives a share in the royal priesthood of Christ, all Christian alike because they are each called to act as a conscious witness to the Truth. "You

have an anointing (chrisma) from the Holy One" (1 John 2:20). We are thereby part of the flock of the faithful and have a share in the royal priesthood of Christ.(1Peter2:9-10) Baptism gives a share in the common priesthood of all believers and also brings about the sacramental bond of the unity of Christians.

It is necessary therefore that this participation in Christ's prophetic office is fulfilled not only by the hierarchy of the Church but just as importantly by the laity. Thus to teach in order to lead others to faith is the task of every preacher and of each believer. For lay people, this evangelization acquires a specific character and a special efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world. Along with this, the lay persons who are capable and trained can collaborate in the active ministries of the Church. The common priesthood given through the sacrament of baptism is the same for all believers, male or female. St. Paul affirms that the baptism of Christ transcends and obliterates whatever social differences exist among human kind. "It is through faith that all of you are God's children in union with Christ Jesus", for all who are baptized into the union of Christ have taken upon themselves the qualities of Christ himself so that there is no difference between the members. (Gal 3, 26-28) This is the basic dignity of the royal priesthood that all Christian share. If the above is accepted in full by the hierarchy of the Church and is realized in all its gravity by the laity, there would be joyous journey of witnessing to Christ in every aspect of human life.

This leads one to seek answers to certain disquieting questions, some of which are :

Do we really believe that all members of the laity are called to participate in Christ's mission of evangelization in word and action? If yes, has this participation translated into an effective process of transformation of oneself and of communities?

If no, what are the barriers to actualization of the common mission of evangelization and sharing in Christ's priesthood? Which are the areas where Christ's mission of evangelization which realizes the ultimate power and scope of the human person, can really touch and empower? Which are the leadership paradigms in the Church that facilitate such transformation and empowerment? How does such an empowered person respond to special areas of concern in human life and relationships in a manner that is both integral and inclusive? Are there models of leadership in the Church that are inclusive and just, in

the way Christ saw justice and the dignity of the human person?

The answers to these questions are not too difficult to find. The laity still do not believe or understand that they have a right to participate in Christ's royal priesthood or that they have an active role to play in realizing Christ prophetic mission here on earth. Despite all the decades of papal exhortations and preaching on the importance of lay people in the Church life and work, these have not been matched with appropriate actions to acknowledge or actualize this fact. Thus the right and responsibilities of the laity in sharing in Christ's priesthood remains unfulfilled and far removed from the substantial position and role of believers of the early Church. Consequently the lay people have over the years learnt to lie low, to just listen and be docile, leaving to the clergy, the anointed few, all the rights and duties of Christ's priesthood. This is also one of the reasons why their response to the shared evangelistic mission lacks enthusiasm and is indeed lukewarm. The laity find it convenient in the existing state of affairs, to leave the trappings and duties of Christ's royal priesthood to the ministerial and hierarchical levels. This is also the reason why many of our people especially the young, find an outlet for their religious zeal in new Pentecostal groups where the participative mission of evangelization and shared leadership is emphasized. *Lumen Gentium* reminds us that "Although by Christ's will, some are established as teachers, dispensers of the mysteries and pastors for the others, there remains nevertheless a true equality of all with regard to dignity and the activity that is common to all the faithful in the building up of the Body of Christ".

If despite the above and numerous other affirmations regarding their importance from the Councils, the laity still remain lethargic and unmindful of the exacting yet rewarding nature of building up the Body of Christ through their life experiences and testimony to his mission, then the reasons thereof should be sought for in all humility and sincerity. The ever-enlarging role assumed by the hierarchy easily leads to spiritually indecisive and weak Christians who are reluctant to take up positions or to react to situations even in times of crisis. They are instead content to sit back, watch and criticize whenever the occasion arises. It is sad but true that lay persons often adopt a studied attitude of indifference and even of deliberate refusal to see the vast and valuable good work done by so many members of the clergy and to vent hasty and severe condemnation of real or perceived wrong doings within the Church. It must be emphasized

that the longer such a situation of over-riding powers and privileges exists on one side and a general feeling of apathy persists on the other side, the further will recede the goal of realizing Christ's mission of evangelization and participative priesthood. This will, as it already has done, steadily lead to further weakening of Christian belief and to erosion of Christian values all over.

If, as we would all earnestly desire, we are able to emphasize and clearly define the parameters of participative priesthood and sharing in Christ's prophetic mission and implement them sincerely instead of mere voicing of what now sound as cliches, then there would be a resounding and active surge of volunteerism in church ministries, models created of Christian family life, real and true work-culture and love and care for all. We would then be blessed to see in our lifetime, a Christian response and action to resolve basic human problems. Thus, under the combined leadership of a committed and empowered clergy and lay people including religious, we could achieve eradication of, poverty and want, exploitation and greed, corruption and abuse, pollution and contagion. All this would become possible because of Christ's spirit that is one of oneness, of love and compassion, and of upholding the dignity of the human person.

That the prophetic mission of Christ requires the platform of the Christian family as the most important and integral part of the Church and society, is a truth that has to be reinforced over and over again. It therefore needs to be supported and respected at all times. Married persons should use their special calling as spouses, parents and members of community, to stand out as models reflecting the love and peace of the Holy Family itself. Women, who are the heart and core of families, are far too often left out from the scheme of things and have therefore to be consciously re-integrated into social, religious, political and cultural arenas, both as active players and as leaders in their own right. Her toil, prayers and sacrifices for keeping the family members together, her role as an individual member of the Church congregation and in groups connected thereto, needs to be acknowledged and enriched. Just as the role of Mary in the early Church cannot be ignored in the light of strong evidence to her active presence at all stages of Christ's redemptive ministry, so too have we to recognize and support the contributions of women, both religious and secular. There is an urgent need today to hold members of the Church together, to bring them to prayer as a family, to have role

models which will exhort and inspire. Here the women in our Church, our religious sisters, our mothers, sisters and daughters can fulfill the mission in the way that Christ desires.

We are aware that Christ's mission of evangelization can be realized only when we the lay people take up our responsibility to create a new order in our workaday world, a world where truth prevails, where justice and equity is accessible to all and where all forms of discrimination is ended. This would translate into a world where every person is born free and is entitled to health, care, food and education, and has easy access to all public services that are delivered on time with quality and without favour or partisanship. Here, women and children will be protected and their rights upheld, the elderly and the differently-abled, treated with care and regard under a rights-based approach. Only if we as members of the laity are clear about the defining role and responsibilities of the people of God and as participants in the prophetic mission of evangelization, will we be empowered to act upon and to take decisions on aspects hitherto unfamiliar to many. Some of them would be:

- (1) To develop an awareness of the role and duties as a member of Christ's royal priesthood and use the services of trained women and men, religious and lay persons for this. The Gender Policy for the Church in India formulated by the CBCI contains many practical interventions by the laity especially women, for realizing true equality and equity in the Church.
- (2) List out areas and institutions in which lay participation is already prescribed but is weak and ineffective and identify the reasons thereof.
- (3) Determine hitherto untapped areas and institutions which have potential for laity participation ensuring acceptance of these by the hierarchy and allowing for flexibility in implementation.
- (4) Develop a programme of continuous and evolving leadership-promoting activities that will identify individuals who can serve as leaders and role models as missionaries of Christ.
- (5) Foster in the hierarchical and ministerial members of the Church at all levels, a genuine desire for bringing in inclusive leadership of the laity as laid down by the II Vatican Council.
- (6) Draw-up well designed schemes for laity leadership and participative priesthood in consultation with enlightened and

committed members of the clergy, religious and the laity.

- (7) Ensure a culture of prayer, service and practice of Christian virtues, in all leaders so that the principles of integral and inclusive partnership in Christ ministries are in accordance with Christ's mission for his disciples and followers.
- (8) Instill in all members of the laity a genuine love for the Mystical Body of the Christ that is the Church and the knowledge that they are integral partners in its growth and life, so that they may not turn to the ever growing number of Christian sects and denominations.
- (9) Promote in all members of the laity, a deep conviction that each of them is responsible for carrying out Christ's mission on earth and that it is not the responsibility of the hierarchy alone.
- (10) Foster in all especially in the lay leaders, a concern for the lapses and aberrations in the practices and actions of Church leaders and work together to redress and make amends for wrongs done.
- (11) Work for attitudinal changes in mindset that excludes lay people especially women, from positions of responsibility in Church institutions and ministries.
- (12) Use of all media of communication to encourage educated and the more talented members of the laity especially women religious and mothers, to take up positions of leadership at various levels of church bodies.
- (13) Collaborate with the hierarchy in order to ameliorate social and economic inequities relying on the values that Christ has taught-compassion, selfless service, and respect for the dignity of women and men, who are all called to be his apostles and disciples.
- (14) Remove the cloak of arrogance, and condescension that mark much of the hierarchical attitudes towards lay people.
- (15) Remove tokenism in permitting representation for women in church bodies.
- (16) Realize that the Church cannot be part of the consumer bandwagon with palatial church buildings and institutions and is bound to promote a policy of simple living and high thinking. There should be a conscious stand for positive and affirmative

action for the poor and the marginalized sections of society.

- (17) The laity along with the clergy should see the Church as wounded by negligence and subversion of Christ's principles and teachings especially those of compassion and care, respect and equity for the poor, the disabled, the sick and the marginalized. This will lead to realization of the divine in ourselves which will lead us to see the divine in others.
- (18) Engage in dialogue with other religions, governments and communities so that the contribution of the laity can be channelized towards tackling the scourge of poverty, illiteracy, exploitation, unemployment, sickness, climate change and other ills that plague our society.

Even though we are only a small group of below 3 percent of the population in India, there is for us a good opportunity to be the leaven that makes the dough rise, to make our presence felt as a family of followers of Christ and this we can achieve when we are in the forefront of services and are ever willing to offer solace to the suffering and the needy, to be the strong voice in their support and to work for removal of all forms of injustice and discrimination. It is time that we have a relook at how the Church in India fulfils this duty of bringing value to life experiences, promoting brotherhood and equality of all. This should take the place of arrogance, selective charity, compromising on principles and tolerance of corruption and nepotism. The Church in India should use the large number of women and men who are known for their deep spiritual values, have wide knowledge and experience in various fields of human activity and are willing and competent to work as partners with the hierarchy. Only such a partnership that is integral and inclusive can revitalize Christian ministries, institutions and structures and offer real Christian peace and harmony in a stricken world.