

**SIGNIS INDIA, Sixth General Assembly**  
**Nav Sadhana, Varanasi**  
**Seminar 13-15 February, 2009**

**Theme: Spirituality and Religion: A Media Persepctive**

**Introduction:** Fr Prannoy IMS welcomed the Signis members gathered in the Kala Kendra Hall and invited Chief guest and the dignitaries to the dais. He also briefed the August gathering about the Nav Sadhana and the importance of the Holy city Banaras.

**Inaugural Eucharist** was presided over by Rev” Patrick D’ Souza, Emeritus Bishop of Varanasi and was concelebrated by Rev. Thomas Thuruthimattam, Bishop of Ghorakpur Diocese, Fr Ivan Joseph Vicar General of Varanasi diocese, Fr Prakash IMS, Superior General of IMS, Fr. Rappai SJ, the president of SIGNIS India, Fr. John Paul SVD, the secretary/treasurer of SIGNIS India, Fr. Paul, the director of Nav Sadhana and the other priests who came from different parts of the country to participate in this Sixth General Assembly.

In his message Most Rev. Patrick D’ Souza appreciated the gradual growth of SIGNIS India, and reminded the participants about their specific mission saying: “The Lord has given you a responsibility as communicators, to proclaim His Word.” He also expressed his joy for having been able to do whatever he could while he was the chairman for Social Communications in CBCI.

Bishop Thomas Thuruthimattam CST, breaking the Word with the participants said, “We are called to respond to the challenges of the media in our present day. The treasure of communication Technology is a gift of God to us to proclaim his message of love. Media communication is the most effective and fruitful means of proclaiming the message of God’s Love.”

The inaugural Liturgy organized by SIGNIS Agra Region rendered a prayerful mood and an atmosphere to the Celebration.

The highlights of the liturgy were - Entrance dance by, offertory procession and Aarati during the Doxology.

**Inaugural function:**

Reliving the Indian Tradition, and with the background music of “Lead me from darkness to Light....” representatives of various Regions lit the Indian Lamp together with the Chief Guest for the function, Rt. Rev. Patrick D.souza, the Bishop of Varanasi.

The Director of Nav Sadhana Fr Paul D'Souza welcomed the participants to the Sixth National Assembly. In his welcome address he briefed the participants about the Centre and the activities carried out in and through Nav Sadhana.

The audio-visual presentation of the Theme of the SINGIS Assembly prepared by Fr Prannoy IMS received the praise of all.

In his presidential address Fr Rappai S.J. pointed out that every religion has spirituality; and spirituality is the search for the Divine. We have to go beyond the religion and search for the Divine.

After the address of the President, Bishop Patrick declared the Sixth National Assembly open.

### **Keynote Address – Swami Saccidanandna**

In his key-note address Swami Sachidananda Bharathi, DCP ( An Air force Pilot turned Swami after an accident) said, “Without Peace, there can be no sustainable development, and without development we will continue to suffer from poverty and hunger.” He said that the land of spirituality has become the land of fanatics. And so there is a great need to grow in grace and Peace. He spoke of four stages towards the growth of this spirituality of life.

1. Grace of God
2. Butterfly spirituality
3. Harmony with nature
4. Nature is the biggest teacher

He expressed that the spirituality can be measured in our ability to love. He synthesized his talk in the secular expressions of Emperor Ashok, Mother Theresa of Kolkata, Vivekanad and Mahatma Gandhi. He said that India can not exist without religion and there is profound grace in religions. We need to rediscover spiritual experience. And thus church has to go back to Christ and work for hunger, corruption and caste free India.

In response to the keynote address Prof: Shahena Rizvi said that our science, religion and spirituality are inter-related and are different sides of truth. And the aim of the religion is to tell what is right and what is wrong.

At the end of the session Fr Varghese Palappillil, the president of Agra region proposed the vote of thanks. Fr. Pranoy IMS beautifully anchored the inaugural function.

### **First Session:**

**Topic: Impact of Media on Religious divisions and disharmony by Fr Anil Dev IMS**

Teesta Setalwad who was supposed to speak on the subject could not be present. Hence at a short notice Fr Anil Dev IMS shared some reflections on the topic.

Sharing from his experiences he said, “Media productions can educate people, concentrate them and save them from certain bad habits and situations.” He pointed out an example

of how an audio programme helped to bring down the liquor-addiction in a particular area of Madhya Pradesh..

He reminded that often vernacular Press is used to malign the religious feelings of various communities and that electronic media is used to create communal disharmony.

The other points: he referred to are -

- sectarian use of channels to divide people
- colored and partial reporting is dangerous
- silence of the media maneuvers sectarian violence
- to heal the wounds Christian community is invited to address this gap
- We, the communicators must have sense of mission
- Our programmes are often alienated from the real situations thus we must produce relevant programmes
- We lack strategic planning in the church
- Our resources are scattered

Founder of ... Ashram and of Viswa Jyothi communications, Fr Anil spoke at length on Indian Spirituality. He said that the interiority, silence, austerity are the hallmarks of Indian Spirituality. He also said that the spontaneity in the pursuit of Truth is the realization of God.

In response to the topic, Fr. George Plathottam, the CBCI Secretary for social communications also shared his experiences with regard to the impact of media and he stressed the need to come together.

Mr. Allen Brooks moderated the session very effectively.

## **Second Session:**

### **Topic: Religious Fundamentalism – a challenge to democracy in India by Fr Lancy Lobo**

Using power point presentation to illustrate his arguments, among other things the main speaker Fr Lancy Lobo pointed out that we, Christians carry out 25% charitable works in India through our institutions like hospitals, schools, colleges, orphanages, home for the aged and so on but we do not have a say or little influence in the policy making in the country. We do not have even a little voice in the power structure.

He explained the various forms of Fundamentalisms such as:

- Conservative or revivalist
- Communalism
- Religious nationalism
- Religious Fundamentalism

He also spoke of how Hindutva brigade use print media to malign Christians.

And then he further says that we christians come across as weak because we do not fight.

Prof. Dr. Geshe N. Samten, the Vice Chancellor of Central Tibetan University, Sarnath who was responding to the topic said that religious fundamentalism cannot accommodate others. It is an obstacle to Democracy. We need to teach children about all religions. In Democracy we respect others; but in Fundamentalism this attitude is absent. We can change this through education, education on Peace.

In another response Mr. Amitabh Bhattacharya, the Chief Editor of Northern India Patrika, also shared his views and experiences of the theme. Fr. Peter Selvanathan chaired the session.

The evening was marked by the colorful and touching dance drama on the “Life of Jesus” presented by the artiste of Nav Sadhana.

Signis India honored Bishop Patrick D’ Souza with a memento and a shawl for his valuable contribution in the field of communications and very especially to SIGNIS India.

Signis India also honored a prominent personality of Agra Region Ms. Neerja Madhav for her contributions to the region. There were other awards given by SIGNIS Agra region to the various artists for their contributions.

The day closed with the screening of the Award-winnig film YERANG by Fr Joseph Pulinthanam sdb.

## **Day Two**

The day started with mass on Indian spirituality which was animated by Nav Sadhana; and presided over by Fr Anil dev IMS.

## **Third Session:**

### **Topic: Use/abuse of religion in Politics by Ram BuPuniani who has won Fr Maschio Peace Award**

His factual and humorous sharing based on his experiences presented deep thoughts for reflection. He spoke of three components of religion—Identity, Faith and Morality . He says religious identity is used in Indian politics to cause Communalism and politicians use religious identity to propagate their hidden agendas. Further he says Hindutva projects every small event as communal events. In communal violence the innocent people are killed but the culprits go unpunished. He strongly holds the view that Hindutva has a hidden Agenda that dalits remain uneducated; hence the Christian mission are attacked because these are the Christian missionaries who educated this poor and marginalized people.

He further says that journalism and education are two powerful means today to combat Hindutva agenda and we have to go beyond religions that inculcate commonality.

After the talk fr. Joachim SDB the moderator of the session, briefed the presentation and invited the participants for interaction.

## **Fourth Session:**

**Ram Puniani continued his sharing on the topic Use/abuse of religion in Politics as Mr. Sunil Dang could not be present.**

In his interaction to the participants he put forward his views saying the innocent people are killed in violence and those who instigate violence go unpunished. We are concerned yet we are silent.

He comments on “social Common sense” saying it is a set of beliefs that help but it keeps us sometime silent. And on the other hand the “Social Common sense” helps the hindutva to succeed in their hidden Agenda. Thus he says, “The “Social commonsense” has to be prevented.” Hindutva is not a religion and Secularism goes beyond religion.

He emphasizes to use and produce films consistently on secular values to educate various groups regularly. And reach out to more people.

In his response the public relations officer of MP and Chhattisgarh Fr Anand Muttungal said that the church kept away from the politics in India and thus did not engage in nation-building.

He said that he still believes in conversion even the conversion of priests and religious.

Another Response came from the director of National Institute of Social Communications research and Training (NISCORT) Fr.Jude Botelho said that all of us are part of product of media. And religion and politics interact with power and politics in the country. And further,. religion controls values. And he cited the example of famous film “Ram Ke Nam” by Patwardhan. He said that films influence lives of people. And the film actors, actresses and their images become real. At the end of his talk he concluded saying that the religion must go beyond and stand for values of kingdom.

After the speeches the floor was open for questions. There were few interactions from the participants which was well handled by fr. George Plathottam, who was moderating the session.

**Fifth Session:**

**Panel Discussion:**

**Fr Joseph Pulinthanam SDB**

**Mr. Magmai Pragasm—Cinema and Spirituality**

**Dr. Priyankar Upadhyay—Media for religious harmony**

Fr. Geo George SVD who was the moderator of the session introduced all the speakers.

The first speaker Fr Joseph Pulinthanam shared his experiences about making his award winning film YARWNG (ROOTS). He said that the film touched the emotions of the people and according to him that was its success.

The second speaker Mr. Priyankar Upadhyay, the director of Malviya Peace Study Centre, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) presented his paper on the theme “Media for religious Harmony”.

In his presentation, Mr. Magimai shared the following 12 skills in watching a film:-

1. Be prepared
2. Remember your intention to be hospitable

3. connect with characters
4. pay attention to our reaction
5. consider the significance of what you are seeing as a willing student
6. Look for the big picture.
7. bring your whole family while watching
8. watch for a sudden surprise
9. Don't turn away from the shadow
10. be courteous and grateful
11. Let the movie simmer. Spend quality time.
12. Don't trivialize a movie. Watch till the end.

Due to lack of time he screened a film based on the theme after the dinner.

### **Third day Banares Darshan**

Banares Darshan began at 5.00 am and concluded at 8.15 pm.  
The participants were led by three guides in three groups to various important places in the city.

Highlights of the day: Sunrise meditation on the banks of Ganga; boat ride through Ganga,

Visit to the Convent of the Little Sisters of Charles De Foucauld.

Breakfast at Maitri Bhavan

Visit to various Buddhist Centres, Archaeological Museum.

Lunch at Bishop's House

Visit to the exhibition of the SRA sisters Charism

Visit to the School for the Blind;

Programme at the Fr Anil Dev's Ashram; Dances by the Blind Students and drama 'Amanat' by Prerana Kala Manch.

Prepared by

Fr. Norbert Herman & Sr. Lissy

## **SIGNIS INDIA, Sixth General Assembly**

**Nav Sadhana, Varanasi**

**Business Days 16-17 February, 2009**

The Sixth SIGNIS India General Assembly started on 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2009 in Nav Sadhana, Varanasi. The Assembly started with a short prayer led by fr. John Paul Herman SVD, the Secretary/Treasurer of SIGNIS India. Mr. Allen Brooks, the Vice President welcomed the gathering. First of all homage was paid to the two departed members of SIGNIS India Fr. S.M. George and Mr. Dubey. Fr. Rappai SJ, the President of SIGNIS India called the names of the candidates, conferred their presence and then the voting

cards were distributed to them. The following were the voting members from various regions –

Agra 5, Andhra Pradesh 4, MP & Chhattisgarh 3, Kerala 1, Orissa 3, North East 6, Northern 5, Bijhan 4, Tamil Nadu 2, West Bengal 4, western 4 and Karnataka 4

The total number of delegates was – 45.

After the roll call one member from MP & Chhattisgarh, 5 from North east and 2 from the Northern regions were accepted by the assembly. The time-table then was presented and approved by the assembly.

Mr. Augustine Lourdasamy, the President of SIGNIS World then addressed the gathering. He explained to the members the meaning of the work SIGNIS, the sign of fire, the Holy Spirit. He also pointed out how the boring activities of Church create disinterest among the people and children. He stressed on the need for networking, bringing out the quality productions, conduct good training programmes and bring professionalism in the organization. He also stressed on the need for life witness.

Fr. Rappai, the President of SIGNIS India also addressed the gathering. He reminded the members about the role of of SIGNIS in communicating the Good News. He insisted on the following matters – Building up a SIGNIS family and owning it too, networking, financial support, using ‘Wavelength’ as means of communication, making SIGNIS a group of professionals and committed people, going beyond and create a nation that is hunger free, caste free and corruption free and reaching out to all people of goodwill.

The minutes of the previous assembly were read and with a few corrections suggested, the minutes were passed. Fr. Varghese proposed it and Mr.MD Vincent and Fr. Joseph Manickathan seconded it. 36 delegates voted in favor of it, 4 abstained and 5 were absent.

The second session started with reading and presenting the report of 2008-2009 on Power Point by Fr. John Paul Herman SVD, the Secretary/Treasurer of SIGNIS India. The members appreciated the hard work of Fr. John Paul. For the report the following suggestions were made – The report needs to high light the meetings and the activities of the executives, if the activities of the regions are included then all the regions should be included and give SIGNIS at a glance.

The Secretary/Treasurer also presented the financial report of the year 2008-2009. the members suggested that the Wavelength subscription could be written separately and an audited report could be presented. Fr. Jomon proposed that the financial report be passed and it was seconded by Fr. Joachim. The proposal was accepted by 38 members, 4 abstained and 3 were absent.

Noticing the big expenses for the Asian assembly a question came up that should all the executives need to go for the meetings or not. All members supported the idea that all the executive members need to go for the Asian and World meetings as they represent the country.

The third session started with the sharing of resources between SIGNIS India and regions. The proposed programme was presented and was accepted by all.

Then fr. John Paul presented the proposed budget for 2009-2010. The members suggested that a few corrections could be made and the extended executive committee could approve the actual budget. Mr. Sunil Lucan proposed it and it was seconded by Sr. Jasintha. All the members unanimously accepted the proposal.

The fourth session was the presentation of the reports by all the 12 regions. Fr. Ashok Vaghela SJ was the moderator of the session. It was wonderful to see 6 regions presenting their reports with the help of audio/visuals. Following members presented their regional reports on behalf of their regions –

Fr. Vincent B. Wilson (Tamil Nadu), Mr. MD Vincent (AP), Fr. Albert (Kerala), fr. Joseph Manickathan (NE), Mr. Sunil Lucas (WB), F.r Cyrian Kullu (Bijhan), Sr. Jasintha (Karnataka), Sr. Pushpanjali (MP & Chhattisgarh), Fr. Dominic (Northern), Fr. Dibya (Orissa) and Mr. Felix (Western). With the presentation of the report the sessions was ended.

In the evening a special prayer session for the suffering Christians in Orissa and other parts of India was organized by Orissa and West Bengal regions. Also during this session the video magazine produced by Fr. Rappai and a documentary on Orissa and Karnataka was screened.

### **17<sup>th</sup> February, 2009**

The day started with screening of the video on attacks on Christians in Karnataka by Karnataka region as part of the morning prayer.

**Wavelength:** And after breakfast the session started early at 8.30 am with the screening of the video on SIGNIS World brought by Mr. Augustine, the President of SIGNIS World.

After the screening the issue of our magazine 'wavelength' was discussed as how to increase its subscriptions and make it more professional. The assembly suggested that each member be given 3 copies each and they find the subscribers and the fee could be deducted from the regional funds which is to be given by the SIGNIS India Office to each region. And this was agreed upon.

Fr. Joachim was included in the editorial board. The members are asked to inform about their productions through website. It was also suggested that the folk and tribal media be added as another section in the magazine and Fr. Vincent B. Wilson agreed to be in-charge of this section.

The members also suggested that the advertisements also could be given in the magazine. The president Fr. Rappai insisted on the team work and asked all the members to contribute to the magazine.

As the national office was finding it difficult to register the organization under the societies act, Fr. George Plathottam came forward to offer his office (Media office of the CBCI) address for the purpose of registration.

**Venue, date and theme of the next assembly:** Three places were proposed – Mangalore, Ooty and Orissa. Many members opted for Mangalore as the first choice and second choice was for Ooty. The date for the assembly was proposed to be in the first half of February, 2010.

Following two themes were suggested for the assembly – 1. Women and Media and 2. Youth and Media

The assembly authorized the extended executive team to finalize the venue, dates and the theme.

Then Fr. George Plathottam shared in the assembly the activities of Social Communications of CBCI.



After this the amount disbursed for 2007-2008, recommended by SIGNIS Asia for 2008-2009 were read out by Mr. Allen and Fr. Rappai subsequently. It was suggested that these list need not be read and could be put on the notice board.

Then Fr. John Paul, the Secretary together with the other screening committee members Mr. Magimai and Fr. George Plathottam explained to the assembly the difficulties in screening the projects as many had not followed the guidelines given earlier. They informed the gathering that they have conditionally recommended the amounts for those who have to re-write the projects under the guidelines prescribed by SIGNIS. The projects have to reach the national office before 15<sup>th</sup> of March. The amounts recommended by the screening committee were read out by Fr. John Paul.

36 members voted for the proposal, 3 abstained and the rest were absent.

After this there was a short evaluation of the assembly. Following are the remarks made by the members – The place and the warmth of the reception was good. All the members enjoyed the hospitality of Fr. Paul D'souza, the director of Nav Sadhana and his team. Liturgy was good. The cultural programmes were well organized and the regional reports on Power Points were good and encouraging.

Besides these there were few suggestions. They are – Need for study material, too much input so need time for interaction, there has to be some time to introduce the members, need to analyze the media productions, need more clarity, too much work load on secretary, which could be shared by the Vice President, need more time to plan for the next year, executive committee can do the planning for the next year,

At the end Fr. Paul D'souza thanked all the Members.

The General Assembly came to an end with the thanksgiving Eucharist which was presided over by Fr. Rappai, the President of SIGNIS India.

Secretary

