

Report of Eighth Signis India National Assembly-2011

Study Days (11& 12 February,2011)

The 8th Signis India assembly was held at Seva Kendra, Kolkata from 11 to 15th Feb. 2011. The inaugural mass was presided by Most Rev. Lucas Sircar, the Archbishop of Kolkata. During the homily, he said “communicating is not enough but communicating in God’s ways is important. The Lord has left them the way how to communicate. And that’s what Mother Teresa followed. There is no holiday for communicating.” The liturgy was organized by Signis Bengal.

Mr. Sunil Lucas, president of Signis Bengal welcomed the dignitaries to the capital of Culture and Mother Teresa. The dignitaries present included Abp. Sircar, Bp. Lobo, Sr. Nirmala MC, Mr. M.J. Akbar, and Fr. Chinnadurai. Inaugurating the session Sr. Nirmala said with “deep humility and inner joy I inaugurate the seminar: **“Mother Teresa- The Communicator”**

The Keynote Address was given by Mr. M.J. Akbar, editorial director of India Today - English and International editions. In the Address he mentioned “Mother’s house is the Palace of joy. There is no need of telling to smile. She as a communicator communicated in all the ways we cannot think of.” Talking on what is communication, he said, “Communication is not my ability to speak or what to hear. One can have great ability to shout, write. What is communicating to is get the Ego Out. This we know from Jesus how he communicated through touch as he made Lazarus alive. In the Same way mother gave life to many through her touch. Her power was in giving life.” He released the special coin of Mother Teresa and presented to all dignitaries.

The afternoon Session was on the topic: *Mother Teresa: A Communicator of Compassion.* Profs. Arundhati Ray, Dr. Seba Bardhan, Fr. Mervyin Carapiet, and Mr. Anto Akara shared their experiences with Mother in the session. The panel was moderated by Fr. George Plathotam SDB. Arundhati Ray said that it was through mother’s compassion and love she communicated to the world. Dr. Seba Bardhan said “On every step I found her so humble and simple.” Fr. Mervyin Carapiet portrayed Mother as compassion transparent. Mr. Anto Akara stressed the unique language that mother used in communicating.

The evening session was held on *Mother Teresa as My Inspiration.* Ms. Pramila Pavamani, Ms. Ann Xavier, Mr. P. M. John, Mr. Aroop Chaudhry shared their experiences with Mother. The panel was moderated by Fr. Jude Bothello. Ms. Pramila pavamani said, “I was doing great service to the city of Calcutta but when we saw what Mother Teresa was doing, I was really touched and was afraid that we can’t do what she did. Ms. Ann Xavier said, “Mother did every little thing and that was her Joy. Mother’s child like faith has been inspiring.” Mr. P. M. John shared his personal experiences with Mother who changed his life and inspired him to do the service to hundreds through ‘Antara’ his organization. He said, “Mother was a living saint. No money, no land is needed to do God’s plan. It’s possible only if we have a faith like Mother.”Mr. Aroop Chaudhry said that every creature of the city of Calcutta was important for Mother. Her courage was admirable even in adverse situations. She did the exact of ‘you follow first what you preach. He said Mother encouraged persons to become better Hindus, better Muslims and better Christians, and in this way she converted people.

On the second day the third session began with theme *My Encounter with Mother Teresa.* The session was moderated by Rev. Fr. Vincent Chinnadurai. The Speakers for the session were Ms. Urmi Basu, Sr. Cyril Mooney, Ms. Ritu Singh and Fr. George Plathottam.

Sr. Cyril Mooney said “The serenity of mother was the first virtue that touched me. She had a deep appreciation for the poor. I deeply appreciate the work of her sisters (M.C. Sisters). And we hope that the world will be changed.”Ms. Urmi Basu said “I was raised in an atheist family. I saw the work of Mother through her sisters and that led me to make social work as my career.” Ms. Ritu Singh said “My experience with mother has been very deep. She chose Calcutta perhaps because it is a city which honors mother immensely. In this city we have so many mothers who are worshipped like maa Kali, maa Durga and Sarasvati etc. It was through my mother that I got influenced to appreciate M. Teresa.” Fr. Plathottam said “No one gets tired of hearing about Mother Teresa. She never wanted to come in the limelight of media. Her courage was something very admirable. She allowed only media attention only with the poor. She touched the life of thousands as they encountered Mother Teresa. We have to take the message that poor should be our concern otherwise all our seminars and talks on her would be of no meaning.”

The fourth Session focused on the theme *Mother Teresa- Through the Lens*. The session was moderated by Rev.Fr. P.J. Joseph S.JMs. Payal Mohanka the director of **From Saint to Sainthood** said that the Spirit of service was something wonderful to capture through the lens. Mr. Korak Day the director of **My Karma** said “one of my Mothers is Mother Teresa. I was more interested in feeling Mother Teresa than seeing her. I considered very important to feel her feelings.”Fr. Roberge Gaston said “if picture arouses feelings then it is icon. Media icons are called celebrities. For me a celebrity can’t be holy person because she/he is for self. But saint is for others and holy person. She was the best promoter of peace through her efforts against any elements and persons who were against peace. For this, one needs guts. But it was much more than guts that is inspiration.”

In the afternoon the Fifth Session began with the theme *Mother Teresa:The Spiritual Communicator*. The session was moderated by Sr.Pushpanjali. The Speakers for the session were Bro. David M.C, Mr. Sugata Bose, Sr. Nirmala Maria, M.C and Fr. Alfred Huart S.J. Bro. David M.C said that the impact Mother made on the people was based on her faith and love. She lived her holiness in her down to earth simplicity. God spoke to her in the silence of her heart. It was prayer that gave her energy for what she did.” Mr. Sugata Bose said “Mother remains a unique phenomenon. She was love incarnate. She was totally unconscious of her greatness. For her in every problem solution was God.” Sr. Nirmala Maria M.C said “Mother was full of presence of God. She had a wonderful sense of humor. She could see immediately the least wanted even in the crowd. She brought Christ in her little ways. She was mother to all. Her presence never failed to communicate.”Fr. Alfred Huart,S.J said that it was possible for mother to speak to so many people because she was serene in her heart. She was able to communicate God so powerfully. “God can equally communicate through light and darkness according to St. John of the Cross. This is true of mother Teresa. The dark night is purifying. Where she got stupendous energy to serve? It was from the union with God. Union with God is more important than being just communicator. And that is what Mother Teresa did.” He added.

The sixth session was on the theme: *Mother Teresa: Untold Stories*. The session was moderated by Mr. Magimai.Mr. Agarwala shared the story of VHP persons who wanted to defame mother by false story of conversion of a girl who was bribed the VHP persons. He said this was the only time Mother was puzzled and did not know how to handle this fake news and story. He also shared the story of mother’s simplicity like thinking that electricity

bill was too much etc. Mrs. Agarwala said that she had learnt value of prayer and love from mother. Ms. Chanda Chakraborty said that there were moments when Mother did not know what to do. But she relied on God all the more. Ms. Sandra Singh said that the tough of Mother was so delighting for her from her childhood days. Mother was like a confessor for her. Mr. Sunil Lucas sharing on his experiences said that what he had learnt from Mother was that, 'when it is God's work, do not doubt.' The next day was Outing Day.

General Business Meeting (14&15 February 2011)

On 14th February at 7.00 am the day began with the Holy Eucharist presided by Most Rev Lucas Sirkar SDB, the Archbishop of Calcutta. The liturgy was organized by Signis Western region. The inaugural Session began with a short audio visual prayer: *Make Me a Channel of Peace* played by Dr. Magimai. Fr. Norbert Herman invited the office bearers and Bishop Chacko on the dais. Mr. Sunil Lucas felicitated the Bishop with an Uthario and Mr. Allan Brooks with a Coin. Fr. Vincent Chinnadurai, the president of Signis India, welcomed the guests and specially congratulated Most Rev. Bp. Chacko Thottumarickal SVD, the president of the CBCI commission for social communications, for being appointed also as the president FABC Social communications. He congratulated Signis Bengal for organizing the Assembly so efficiently.

Fr. Vincent in his welcome address said that the Church in India has been very efficient in the field of health and education for a long time. He also acknowledged the role and contribution of the Laity in the field of communication in the church. The organizing of MTIFF-2010 was a tremendous success. There was good cooperation and support from CBCI through Fr. George Plathottam. There were also great contributions from the regions by way of films, productions, workshops etc to Signis and the church at large. He also conveyed the good wishes of World President Mr. Augustine Loorthusamy to the Signis gathering.

The Presidents of different Signis Regions, who collaborated in the Mother Teresa Film Festival, were given the memento. Fr. P.J Joseph and Mr. Sunil Lucas were specially honored for organizing the film festival. All the regional executives were also felicitated by Bishop Chacko.

Most Rev. Bp. Chacko, while addressing the assembly, said "When communication takes place there is happiness. There's a dictum 'Communicators are least Communicative'.

Our Church should become a communicative church. There are low cost media, group media, and mass media. There are also certain converging technologies: TV in mobile, 3G etc. Let us open our horizons and embrace the whole arena of communication. What do we communicate? – TRUTH. What is Truth – Jesus. There is so much ‘untruth’ – parallel, packaged and communicated to people. This is a concern. Do we stand for Truth? Signis should go beyond its present form of functioning – come together, share our reports, take funds etc. Proactive steps taken by Fr.Anand, during Kumb Mela in MP, were good. Let us also take advantage of NISCORT and its courses.” After the Bishop’s talk, he released Dr. Gurram Pratap Reddy’s book : *History of the Church of Andhra Pradesh*.

Georg Amshoff of CAMECO speaking on *New Trends in media* said that Media is not only of technology but it is also of relations. Media also should deal with crisis management. He informed that funding has been reducing due to lack of funds available. What is important is that the focus is on quality. It can be achieved by collaborating with other organizations in the region and diocese. Networking with other agencies will make easy to get some funds for our activities. He stressed on looking for local funds. We need to be aware of the new changing trends. Funds are available only for new and well thought out initiatives.

Rev.Fr. George Platottam SDB, CBCI Secretary for Social Communications, spoke on CBCI Perspective on Communications. He said “Airways belong to whole people. Government cannot control it. Hence, start Community Radio. FM has already been captured by commercial sector. We need to learn facets of starting and running Community Radio.” He also said that there is a great need to collaborate between Signis, ICPA and CBCI Commission for communications. He also expressed his views regarding the creation of websites for each diocese. He also informed that various groups like ‘Artists’ Forum’ other clubs need to be formed and work under the purview of nationally legalized agencies. He suggested to review the constitution of Signis India and to have a five member team as SIGNIS executive body.

Rev. Fr. Jude Botelho, Director of NISCORT, talked about the Signis World as the member of Signis World Association. He shared with regard to International meeting at Chiangmai. He said that the thrust of the World meeting was on peace building. Creating a culture of peace for children was the main focus of the assembly. Speaking on

‘Communicating Spirituality’, he said “How do we communicate God experience? We’ve not touched Social networking. We’ll be left in the lurch if we don’t make use of it. We also need to focus on Professionalism & Duality. Our projects should have a marketing plan. Professionalism attracts young people.”

The next agenda was the Roll Call. Fr. P.J. Joseph was appointed as scrutiny officer. It was decided that a Regional member has to be accepted by the national assembly also. The registration papers has to be sent to the national Office as per Constitution 5:221; 6:21.

Voting 10:6 – Regional member will get 6 votes. The Secretary Fr. Norbert Herman called the names according to the region. All the eligible voters were given the cards. Agra Region-6, AndhraRegion-6, Karnataka Region -2, Kerala Region-4,MP, Chhattisgarh Region-4, North East-6, Northern Region-6, Orissa Region-4, Bijhan Region-6, Tamilnadu Region- 6, West Bengal-6,Western Region-4,National Office beares-3,National Members-1,CBCI-1,NISCORT-1. Total-65.Accreditation of new members took place and they were given Signis India constitution. Later the Time Table for the day’s proceedings was approved.

Minutes of the previous Assembly at Kolkata was presented by the Signis India Secretary Fr.Norbert Herman SVD. In the Minutes of the Kolkata assembly clarified the venue of Signis 2010 Kochi as Pastoral Orientation Centre (POC),Vellarimattom ,Kochi, Kerara. After some clarifications the members were asked for any corrections.

Later the financial report was presented and was passed after some clarifications. After this the budget was passed. The proposed budget was approved for the year 2011 – 2012.

Later a clarification with regard to the membership of JESCOM as National Member was made. However the matter was resolved by clearing the doubt and stating that JESCOM was a National member as they have resumed paying the annual fee as National member. Before breaking for lunch Fr. Jacob from Agra region spoke and introduced the magazine ‘Companion’.

The Signis India General report was presented by the secretary and presentations of Regional Reports were presented by regional secretaries. After having different reports various members expressed their opinions such as that reports should be short, time should be kept, reports should be focused, with common format for report, only new initiatives to be reported and not regular activities, best reports can be awarded, there should be priorities set for the

year, with a common goal for the whole nation for each year, and the outcome of the programs be reported and not the data only. They also felt that we should be responsible for the money we receive from Signis.

Fr. Norbert Herman read out some of the corrections which needed to be done in the projects. There were some more clarifications made by Fr. George Plathottam. After that the National Screening Committee's Recommendations were announced by the Secretary. After having announced the recommendations: there were some clarifications. It was clarified whether a non Signis member can apply for projects and can be recommended. Some members had objections and wanted to know the procedure. The screening committee clarified that it is not mandatory that non members do not apply for projects. It was also clarified that the Bishop Chairperson at the National level had the right to sign projects of any project coming from national bodies. Finally it was decided that the matter will be referred to Nunciature for further clarifications. The evening prayer was led by Bijhan and Orissa region. After the Dinner, Signis Members films were screened.

Election

On the second day (15th February 2011) the Morning Prayer was led by Karnataka region. At 9.00 am Elections to Signis National Executives were held. Fr. Jude Botelho was named to conduct the election. He took over the dais and called for a few minutes of silence and invoked the grace of the Holy Spirit. Fr. Jude Botelho suggested that we have the election to the post of President first. Fr. Wilson was called on the dais as the observer. The total vote was counted which numbered 63. It was suggested that a member will be elected with absolute majority, which means one has to get 32 votes. The process of voting was described.

Proposals for President:

Fr. Vincent Chinnadurai was proposed by Mr. M.D. Vincent and seconded by Fr. Arulanadam Mr. Allen Brooks was proposed by Mr. Nirmalraj and seconded by Fr. Jacob, Fr. John Edappilly was proposed by Fr. Albert and seconded by Mr. Amruthkumar, Mr. Sunil Lucas was proposed by Fr. Robin Gomes and seconded by Fr. Benny. Fr. P.J Joseph proposed to close the nomination seconded by Fr. Anand IMS for the presidential candidature. In the first round the Vote counts were: 16, 6, 18 and 23 respectively. Since there was no absolute majority the assembly went for the second round and Mr. Allen

withdrew his nomination. The second round voting counted: 13 for Fr.Vincent, 14 for Fr. John Edappilly and 36 for Mr. Sunil Lucas.

Proposals for Vice president

Fr. John Edappilly was proposed by Fr. Anand seconded by Fr. Paul D'zouza, Fr. Ashok Vaghla proposed by Mr. Allen Brooks and seconded by Fr. Anand IMS and Mr. Allen Brooks proposed by Fr.Norbert and seconded by Fr.Lawrence.Fr. Stanley K Proposed to close the nomination for Vice president seconded Mr. M.D Vincent. The voting counted: 40, 10 and 13 respectively. Fr. John Edappilly who got 40 votes was declared Vice President

Proposals for Secretary/Treasurer

Mr. Magimai was proposed by Jai Bernard seconded by Mr. Amruth Kumar, Fr. Anand IMS was proposed by Fr. Jacob and was seconded by Fr. Ashok and Fr. Norbert Herman SVD proposed by Mr. Allen Brooks and seconded by Fr. P.J Joseph. Mr. M.D Vincent proposed to close the nomination for the candidature and Fr. Thomas Ovilil seconded it. The vote counts were: 16, 15 and 32 for Fr. Norbert respectively. The electoral chief Fr. Jude Botelho announced the members of Signis National office bearers after consulting with them whether they would take up the responsibility. They agreed to do so. The new President Mr. Sunil Lucas addressed the Assembly. He thanked the assembly for putting trust in him and sought the support from the assembly. Fr. John Edappilly, the Vice president and Secretary Fr. Norbert Herman too thanked the members and sought the cooperation of all the members.

Proposals for Screening Committee members

Fr. Ashok Vaghela was proposed by Mr. Magimai and seconded by Fr. John Edappily, Sr. Jessy proposed by Fr. Stanley seconded by Fr. Anand IMS, Fr. Anand IMS was proposed by Fr. Jacob and seconded by Fr. Lawrence, Mr. Marraiah was proposed by Fr. Cyprian and was seconded by Fr. Alex, Mr. Allen Brooks was proposed by Fr. P.J Joseph and seconded by Fr. Johny Biswas and Fr.Thomas Ovelil was proposed by Fr. Cyprian and seconded by Mr. M.D Vincent. Mr. Jai Bernard proposed the nomination to be closed and Mr. Marriah seconded it. Fr.Thomas Ovelil and Allen Brooks were elected as the screening committee members.

Regarding the venue and theme for the next study days cum Assembly 2012, Fr. Stanley proposed Delhi.

Theme Proposed

The topics suggested were: Spirituality and Media / Youth and Media / New Media

The evaluation comments were:

"Well organised and professionally managed. The resource persons were very competent and from varied backgrounds Record number of resource persons saw the audiences attentive and participatory All the sessions were well attended, even in the afternoon because of the choice of topics for the study days The coffee machine was a great hit MJ Akbar keynote address was inspiring Cultural programme "Showcasing Bengal" was a delight to watch Kudos to SIGNIS Bengal, but apart from Sunil Lucas and Fr PJ Joseph, where were the rest of SIGNIS Bengal members?"

- Fr. Jacob : CBCI General Body in 2012. So plan well and if possible make minutes and send it to members for feedback.
- Fr. Anand: Study days and Panel was excellent entering into people's heart. We also need to communicate well. Happy hour is counter culture. And he suggested that not to make it part of Signis.
- Fr. G. Plathotam : All aspects are appreciated. Amend constitution with a committee. And proxy letters should be sent one month in advance.
- Fr. Jude : The two days of study days were enjoyable.
- Nirmal Raj : There were lots of touching stories. But there were no interactive sessions. No group sharing sessions either. Too many talks.
- Dr. Magimai : Invite veteran SIGNIS members for business sessions for their suggestions.
- Today we made history. 1st time a lay president. I'm proud of it.
- Wonderful hospitality. But no action plan for the theme. No direction.
- M.D.Vincent : Certain regions are weak. West Bengal no longer a weak link.
- Fr. P.J. : Happy to have a lay person as president. Next time we should see a woman. Our discussion was a Spiritual journey. Need professionalism. Main a strict transaction, letters, files, activities and receipts.

- Fr. Thomas Ovilly : Thank you for electing me. I'll try to be fair to everybody.
- Mr. Frank : The heart of the lay person is opened. Make a yearly calendar. Have a resource panel for reaching out at regions.
- The Thanksgiving Mass was offered by Most Rev. Bp. Joseph Suren Gomes for the successful completion of the Assembly.