

## **Signis India National Assembly 2015**

**Venue: Navjyoti Niketan, Patna**

**January 28– 31, 2015**

**Theme: Celebrating Diversity**

The Signis India Assembly began with the inaugural mass celebrated by Abp William d Souza of Patna at 8.30am Con-celebrated together with the National Vice-President Fr. Ashok Vaghela, and Secretary Fr. Victor Vijay Lobo and the other Priest delegates. The Abp William welcomed the gathering to Patna to celebrate the Signis National Assembly as Patna as its host and thanked Signis for choosing Patna, a land of diversity with varied religions such as Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism....

Abp laid stress we as communicators like St. Thomas Aquinas whose feast we celebrate today, to listen to the Word of God, respond, give expression and assimilate it. Like the seed that is sown and bears fruit so are we as professionals in communication and media to translate the Word of God into our lives and become aware of the existing situations, to take stock and to be fruitful. So too, to face the challenges of building a humane, just and inclusive India.

After the Eucharistic celebration, the participants were asked to gather outside the hall of Nav Jyothi Niketan by Mr. Victor Francis the Regional Secretary of Bijhan Region. After the traditional dance the delegates were asked to find the person through the given badges to know each other while Mr. Frank the President of Bhijhan together with Victor Francis welcomed all with a flower.

The Vice-President of Signis India, who indeed is the acting President of the Signis National Assembly officially thanked the Archbishop for his cordial welcome and inspiring homily. Thereupon the lighting of the lamp was done by the Archbishop William, Fr. Ashok Vaghela, Fr. Vijay Victor Lobo, Mr. Frank Krieshner and Mr. Victor Francis.

At 10.40 am the Archbishop William, gave the key note address in which he said celebrating diversity towards- building a humane, just and inclusive India, could be expressed in another way, in the words of St. Paul to Corinthians: “we, though many, are one body”. He continued, You are many persons of diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives. Everyone working in media is called to the highest professionalism and ethical standards of excellence. Such as - the search for truth, - fairness in reporting, - respect for human dignity, - concern for common good. And to learn from Him what it means to love and how to express. He stressed Signis as a non-governmental organization spread out in 142 countries ,to bring together all the professionals of Radio, T. V., Film, etc. Finally : as a community of believers, a fraternity of media professionals, united in the body of Christ, you need to support and sustain each other in your own organization. To stand by one another and grow in our togetherness, as Pope Francis would say in our “neighbourliness” the Archbishop exhorted.

Mr. Victor Francis, welcomed and thanked all the members for making it. He then thanked the Archbishop on behalf of Signis for his support and being an inspiration. The Director of Nava Jyothi, Fr. Rajendra sj and the staff were also thanked for preparing the hall and other cores. Then Fr. Ashok presented a memento to the Archbishop.

## **Session I The Role of Christian Educational Institutions towards building a just, humane and inclusive India” – by Dr. Shanker Dutt, former chairperson; Bihar Sangeet Natak Academy.**

He mentioned of diversity in nature – flowers, birds, fruits, trees, etc, different elements in nature and humankind. That we used to belong but now we over belong. Education should not be based on the fixed curriculum rather leave room for change and the need to give witness for we are looked as education service providers. School is a place for teachers and parents to learn if they are willing and as educators the need to combat challenges.

Fr. George Plathottam – the moderator opened the question hour to the house. Frs. Dominic, Christi, Anand IMS and Srs. Laisa HC and Lalita Lakra, raised questions and were clarified. The session ended with the presentation of memento and few words of thanks and appreciation by Fr. Cyprian Kullu.

## **Session II**

**“ CELEBRATING DIVERSITY : A Catholic Perspective “by Dr. Muniba Sami, educationalist, writer, researcher and professor of Patna University.**

The moderator was Fr. Innocent, while Mr. Nirmal Raj introduced the speaker.

Dr. Sami shared about her personal experience of studying in a Christian school that had great impact in her later life as she moved out into the society and could distinguish the difference with those who had studied outside Christian Institutions. So much so the students remarked on the discipline and respect she had towards them compared to other teachers. The core values being Honesty, Discipline, truthfulness and being systematic. Then she went on to say about pluralism. Pluralism is a modern reality and holds our deepest feelings not in isolation but in relationship. We need to be inclusive which will help all religion to come together. She said wherever there is ignorance there is violence and so as media professionals to look into the constraints.

Then the moderator Fr. Innocent asked the house for intervention. Frs. Richard, Dominic and Bro Shilanand SJ clarified their doubts and questions. At the end Sr. Lalita proposed the vote of thanks to the Speaker and moderator.

## **Session 3 - Open house on “Challenges, possibilities and opportunities of radio, TV, Cinema and Web communicators in addressing Issues of Social Justice and Inclusion.**

Dr. John Paul SVD was the moderator, while Mr. Frank opened the session. Fr. John Edappilly emphasized on the challenges: Respect for religion; - nobility and sharing of the Gospel; - Language of the majority of the times; - audio visual language has to challenge emotions; promote laity; transparency of money attacks our credibility; - fare wages and just attitudes; - not biased and ghetto minded. Fr. Norbert Herman SVD spoke about art used by the Church. Questioned about our productions as of what values we promote. While Fr. Anand shared about the difficulties and challenges overcome when he made use of the media for help i.e: Radio Mirchi. Fr. Anthony asked the delegates to be abreast to address the social issues and the need to be in the PRESENT and PRESENCE. Presence is a challenge for us and an opportunity to make use of blogs, emails, etc,....., to train and educate the laity to be present; to encourage and promote catholic media; to conscientize on the leisurely purpose of the T.V to be avoided and use for right purpose. Then Dr.

Magimai too said about the need to create awareness among people; alter the mind set of people and advocacy. To make use of the means of communication: by Recording on mobile and uploading, use of WhatsApp; to keep in touch with the local reporter; short film festivals; Youtube. The last person Fr. Cyprian Kullu, spoke on challenges faced in Jharkhand and Nethraghat field firing range, human trafficking and through dam construction people are displaced. Fr. Richard proposed the vote of thanks.

The day ended with gratitude to GOD.

## **DAY TWO**

The day began with Holy Mass at 7.30 am. The Holy Mass and choir led by Signis Kerala and Tamil Nadu Region. The session started at 9.20 am with a Hindi video prayer dance produced by Fr. Alex Tirkey, SJ (Satya Bharati) – BIJHAN Region.

Mr. Frank Krishner, President of BIJHAN region gave an introduction to the theme “Public Hearing on Violence on Christians and Minorities.” Krishner stated that in the past years we have experienced the incidents of polarization and that has caused a lot of turbulence. Violence is of different forms. He introduced the panelists. The victims of violence against Christianity had come to the assembly to share their personal experiences of communal violence. And the panelists needed to listen to them and give their suggestions and opinion needed.

The following were the panelists:

1. Dr. Daisy Roy - Patna PUCL President and History Professor, Patna Women’s College
2. Mrs. Nivedita - Journalist
3. Padamshree Sr. Sudha Varghese, SND, advocate, vice-chairperson, Patna Minority Commission, C.E.O. of NARI GUNJAN and member of Patna PUCL
4. Bishop Abraham-Believers Church

Mr. Vijay Kumar (a victim of violence) shared that on January 11, 2015 how a mob of Hindu fundamentalist barged in to his prayer hall and how they were beaten by mike stand the violent mob. They were blamed for conversion. Similarly Mr. Suresh Chowdhury, Mr. Samuel Murmu, Mr. James and other victims shared their experiences.

Dr. Daisy Roy presented the historic view of communal disharmony and Mrs. Nivedita also presented a paper on communal violence on *Love Jihad*.

Sr. Sudha Varghese said that we should enjoy the constitutional rights. Land ordinance is supposed to be in very urgent situation. She emphasized that no complaints come to her from the Christian minority groups.

Bishop Lal Chand said there are 7 billion people on earth created in the image and likeness of God. In India itself there are 1.2 billion population, 23 lakh languages and 23 thousand dialects. So why religious people hate each other? It is because they don’t know each other. Fools multiply when righteous people do not do anything.

In the afternoon, a session was moderated by Fr. John Paul, SVD in which some of the SIGNIS members: Fr. George Palthottam, Fr. Anand, IMS, Fr. Cyprian Kullu and Dr. Magimai also shared the issues of their areas.

Later, questions for the group discussion were framed by the drafting committee. The members of drafting committee were: Mr. Magimai, Fr. John Paul, Fr. Anand and Sr. Lalita Roshni Lakra. All the participants were divided into six groups and were given two questions each. The questions for discussion were as follows:

1. What could be some of the definite strategies to counter the growing communal violence as an individual and as a SIGNIS association at diocesan, regional and national level?
2. How can we make use of social media to promote culture of peace in the society?
3. How can we create awareness among the youth and train them to use media to promote culture of peace and counter the growing communal violence?
4. How can we collaborate with human right organizations, social movements and other like-minded organizations to influence the policy makers?
5. How can we identify the fundamental communal groups, know their ideology and their support system and sensitize people through various media?
6. What are the concrete steps we need to take to support the victims of violence, socially, legally, psychologically and financially?

All the secretaries of six groups presented the report after the discussion.

Seven short films which were produced and directed by the Signis members were screened before dinner at Ravi Bharathi Regional Media Centre of Patna. Signis website was launched by Archbishop William D'Souza of Patna. Thereafter the mementoes were given by the Archbishop to the participants of Signis Film Festival 2015. The Dinner was sponsored by Archbishop D'Souza.

### **DAY THREE**

#### **Report of the Business Day, 30<sup>th</sup> Jan 2015**

The day began with Holy Eucharist at 7.00am organized by the Western region having Fr. Ashok Vaghela as the main and the Fr. Stephan and Dominic as concelebrants.

The session began at 9.00 am with a prayer lead by Fr Anand Mathew IMS. Dr Magimai Pragasam presented the final statement of India SINA 2015 requesting the members to make the needful corrections. With the necessary amendments the statement was passed by the floor with an applaud of claps.

After the approval of the statement, In the absence of the President of Signis India Mr Sunil Lucas, Fr Ashok Vaghela SJ, the vice president of Signis India, officially declared the Signis India, Assembly - 2015 open. Fr. Ashok honored the Bhijjan Region for their contribution in organizing, planning, and implementing the assembly in Patna.

The assembly proceeded with the business session. A short introduction was given by Fr Ashok Vaghela, the Vice-President. Fr Victor Vijay Lobo, the national Secretary, Signis India, read out the names of the delegates from different regions eligible to vote.

There were 34 delegates.

New members Fr. Justin from Varanasi and Fr. Stephen from Tamil Nadu were welcomed by the signis India. Fr Ashok presented agenda of the day before the assembly along with his views regarding Signis India. Fr. Victor Vijay Lobo presented the report of Signis India Governing Body meeting which was held in Mangalore in September 2014 as well as the report of the Signis

National Assembly which was held at Dharmaram, Bangalore, on 24.04.2014. Since there were many points which required an in-depth study, the passing of the report was postponed. The members felt the need to go through the report once again individually and thereafter to send the same to the national secretary. It was agreed upon. With the vote, the report was passed unanimously subject to corrections.

After Tea break, Fr. Victor Vijay presented the budget report of the year 2014-15. The executive team also expressed the need to make the local contribution to the national office by the members whose projects are sanctioned and receive funds. The report was passed unanimously by the floor.

Afternoon session began at 2.15pm with the presentation of regional reports.

The secretary presented the amended constitution. The floor suggested that the amendments to be sent to the members prior to the assembly and it should be taken up in Next General assembly.

Thereafter the presidents of the different regions were honored and followed by a group photo. Fr George Plathottam SDB, the CBCI national secretary for social communications, presented the report. At 4.30pm the regional projects were screened for the members. Out of 77 projects, 40 were approved, 25 were rejected and remaining projects were approved in subject to corrections. The members sought a response from the project screening committee for the rejecting so many projects. Along with the responses the members also expressed the need to organize a seminar in order to provide proper orientation and better project writing skills to its members. The National secretary announced that he is ready to come to the regions to give the orientation on writing the projects.

Later the Venue, Place and theme for the next national assembly was discussed.

The following points were brought in view of the upcoming national assembly 2015-16.

- Location –Tamil Nadu, Kolkata
- Time– First week of Feb.
- Theme- Family and Media

The session ended at 5.45pm with a thanksgiving hymn.

Fr Victor Vijay Lobo

Secretary and Treasurer , Signis India