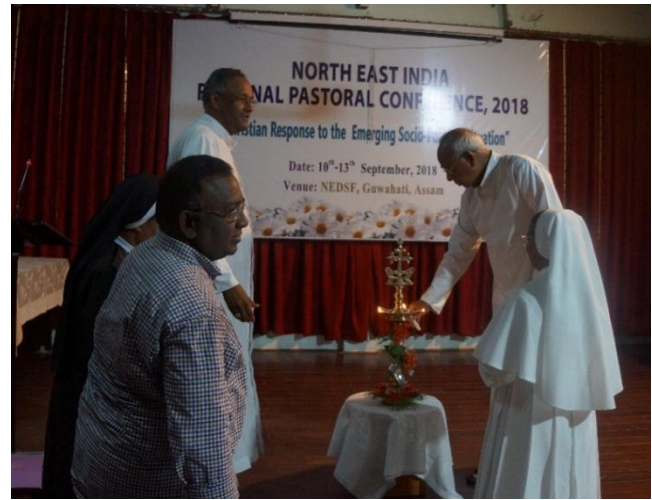


Introduction

The Pastoral Conference which was held from 10 to 13 September 2018, had a consultative and interactive session on Ecumenism and Dialogue in the North East context. Besides the Catholic Church other churches too equally took part in the Pastoral Conference. The conference identified various areas of working together to promote the gospel values among the natives of the region. Many committed leaders both from religious and laity took part and delivered their views on the topic. The pastoral conference therefore became a platform where people irrespective of their denomination which



they belonged to and came from to address the issues related to the region. The key participants were Bishops of the region, Vicar Generals, Provincials and regional superiors (men and women) of religious congregations serving

in the region, Regional Secretaries of all the commissions, representatives from CRI, representatives from Diocesan Fraternity lay leaders and representatives from the main stream Churches. There were 210 participants for the workshop cum animation.

Inaugural Function (10th September 2018)

The North East India Regional Pastoral Conference 2018 started with a graceful inaugural function at 6 pm on 10th September 2018 in the North East Diocesan Social Forum (NEDSF) at Kharghuli, Guwahati. The Deputy Secretary of NEIRBC, Fr. G. P. Amalraj initiated the proceedings of the conference. A short prayer led by Sr. Joy BS, Provincial of the Bethany sisters was followed by the lighting of the lamp by the following dignitaries, viz., the President (NEIRPC), the Secretary (NEIRPC), the Chairman of the Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue, the new President of the CRI (NE) and the Provincial of FMA Guwahati. After a hymn

to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God (Acts: 3:1-10), a prayer dance by the students of Women Development Centre, Guwahati set the participants in a reflective mood for the conference. At the invitation of the Deputy Secretary, Most Rev. Dominic Jala, SDB, President of NEIRPC and the Secretary General, Most Rev. John Thomas along with Most Rev. Thomas Pulloppillil, Chairman of the commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue took their seats on the dais. The Secretary General welcomed everyone warmly and explained the manner and modalities of the conference. This was followed by the self-introduction by the delegates, after which Most Rev. Thomas Pulloppillil, addressed the assembly on the theme of the conference. Most Rev. Dominic Jala gave his presidential address and declared the Pastoral Conference 2018 open. With the general information from the Director of NEDSF and a vote of thanks by the Deputy Secretary the inaugural session came to an end. The evening prayer was led by Fr. Johnson Thurackal and the day came to an end with dinner.

Paper presentations (11th September)

1. Existing Political, Economic, Social and Religious scenario of India from National perspective.

By Dr. Vijayesh Lal, EFI (Evangelical Fellowship of India) presented statistically the existing Political, Economic, Social and Religious scenario of India. And he placed on record the reasons for the silence of the tall leaders of our country



when the minorities being attacked and threatened. He suggested that the Christian response could be: (a) Be awake and sensitive to the targeting of other minorities and the marginalized in India; (b) Standing with the powerless which is a mandate of our Lord himself no matter what the cost be; (c) Church must work to increase awareness within the Church and outside the Church (in Nation Building); (d) Work towards unity among the Christian communities; (e) Need to promote constitutional values of fraternity, justice, equality and liberty, and (f) Walking faithfully with Christ our Lord, and serve Him with utmost passion and humility.

2. North Eastern perspective based on the historical point of view.



Dr. David Syiemlieh presented a paper on the theme from the North Eastern perspective based on the historical point of view. His reflection on the coming of Christianity to NE from the Pre and Post-independence period, and the growth of the church before and after the foreign missionaries and the transition

and the influence of foreign missionaries on the indigenous people were nothing but the truth. The point for reflection was that the Naga and Mizo underground movement and later Bodo Land movements which led to unrest in the region. He asserted saying that the church had always played a vital role in the Peace movement of the region as well as in the politics of the region with attempts to infuse Christian values into politics but not with sufficient vigour. And the worrying factors today are:

- (1) The Christians supporting parties are known to be critical of the church.
- (2) The attention to the youth of the church in particular is urgent.
- (3) The Church will be required to re-orient itself to the new challenges the societies are facing, if it wants to be relevant.

3. Current political situation and the concerns in Arunachal Pradesh.

Shri. Nabbam Tuki, the Former Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, was introduced by Fr. C.C. Jose. Shri. Nabbam Tuki spoke on the current political situation and the concerns in Arunachal Pradesh. Mr. Taw Tabin, who responded to the speaker stressed on the threats to pluralism in the state. The session which was moderated by Fr. John Timung was brought to a close with a vote of thanks.

4. “Socio Political Situation in Assam”.

Dr. Virginius Xaxa of Tezpur Central University presented the paper titled “Socio Political Situation in Assam”. He touched on some major issues affecting the tea tribes and the tribal minority people like NRC, Land issues, the yearly cyclical disasters, poverty, health issues which he calls the economic indicators. He pointed out the shift of politics from traditional parties to

the right wing nationalist parties in order to make the inflow of fund smooth. Apart from that the rapid process of urbanization throws new challenges for those with lower income.

5. 'A Brief Outline of Socio- Political Scenario in Manipur'.

Fr. K.D Joy of Imphal Diocese read the paper titled 'A Brief Outline of Socio- Political Scenario in Manipur' by Dr. C. Mathew Kamei who could not be present to present his paper.

The paper brought out some major issues that build tension between the hill and the valley dwellers. Responding to the paper, Fr. T.S. Dominic said that Education is one of the main means to bridge the gap. And in the face of religious intolerance a person is to be guided by the gospel values, prayer and reason.

6. 'Socio–Political Process:

Dr. A.K. Nongkynrih from Meghalaya, in his paper "Socio–Political Process: The context of Meghalaya", touched upon some basic issues threatening Meghalaya like Socio-Political Process, Political situation, Situation of Political Parties, Drugs and Gangsters. Responding to the speaker, Fr. Barnes Mawrie SDB said that 'politics in Meghalaya is becoming a household affair, and what we see today is "personal development" and not "social development". And the growth of non-tribal population in the state is an indication that suffronization which is not a distant reality. And Islamization cannot be ruled out.

Paper presentations (12th September)

7. Perspective of Mizoram

Dr. Luke Sangkima, who spoke on the theme from the perspective of Mizoram, was insistent that the church is in the forefront, after the government, for bringing about positive changes in the society. Mr. Michael Lalthanmawia, responded saying, 'Faith and Christian Faith alone is the only defense that the State of Mizoram has against any evil force as of today'.

8. Perspective of Nagaland

Mr. Jonas Yanthan, who presented his paper on the theme from the perspective of Nagaland, was so emphatic that the state, though predominantly a Christian yet not driven by the values of Christianity. He stated that he was convinced that Jesus is the answer to our theme and so we need to inject the values of Christ systematically in to the society. Fr. Anto from Dimapur who responded to the paper said that the church leaders need to be role models.



He went on to say that the time has come for all of us to move from colonial model of leadership and participatory model of leadership. He concluded saying that Christians need to lead a transcended and transformed life as models in the context of pluralism.

9. 'A Reflection from Tripura Perspectives, Mandate, Message and Method'

Dr. Vincent Darlong, who was the speaker, presented his paper on the theme: 'A Reflection from Tripura Perspectives, Mandate, Message and Method'. He stressed the need for vigorous involvement of church with its people to enable them to become ambassadors of the church to promote spiritual and moral education in all areas of social life. Responding to the speaker, Fr. Joseph Pulinthanath SDB, spoke that the socio-political issues in Tripura that have an essential link with economic issues and his conclusion is that the church has greater responsibility to accompany the people.

10. Group discussion:

The following 2 questions were discussed by all the ten groups:

1. Identify three emerging socio-political challenges in the region.
2. Propose three responses of the Church to each of the challenges.

General session

At the general session at 4.15 PM., the representatives from the 'Council of Baptist Churches in North East India' (CBCNEI), who are the members of the 'United Christian Prayer for India' (UCPI) shared their initiative to mobilize 'Peace Prayer for India'.

Emeritus Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil in his **observations** on the Pastoral conference 2018 highly appreciated the choice of competent speakers and urged the floor to be sensitive at the presence of members of other churches, bold and firm in speaking the truth and courageous at this period when Christians are going through some sort of uncertainties.

Bp. Michael Herenz, Bishop of CNI, North East Diocese from Shillong appreciated the organizers of the Pastoral conference and well-chosen papers, assured the assembly of his cooperation, praying that God will continue to work through His servants.

Rev. Ray Chawdhury, President of the CBCNEI expressed his joy of having attended the PC. He said that our heart is one, 'One body of Christ'. He appreciated the Catholic Church for the work accomplished in the church as a whole.

Challenges

1. Corruption at all levels;
2. Hindutva agenda / Suffronisation / Infiltration of RSS in the bureaucratic system;
3. Social evils / Degradation of Moral values of youth and addiction / Break down of Families
4. Lose of Tribal identity and giving rise to Militancy
5. Compromising Christian values & Lack of Authentic witness and credibility to the Gospel values

6. Illegal Migration / Displacement, Issues connected with NRC

The Responses of the church should be (Proposals):

1. To constitute a **think tank** in all level (who could also act like PRO at all level).
2. **Animation** of youth & Family on **Nation building** and **faith formation**.
3. Help people to get their **land registered** in order to keep their right on land and identity.
4. To conduct **awareness programmes** by using the existing infrastructures available and through family apostolate by **removing the social evils**.
5. **Conscientizing** people at various levels on the impact of corruption and by **empowering** the laity by empowering the Catholic Council.
6. By strengthening the **unity of the inter-church (UCF)** collaboration, initiate dialogue with Hindu intellectuals and to preserve the **unity** among various religious **congregations with dioceses**.
7. Encourage to **foster ethnic identity** and Christian marriages.

Evaluation (13th September)

The evaluation started at 8. 30am., which was chaired by Most Rev. Dominic Jala, President, NEIRPC and moderated by Rev. Bp. John Thomas, Secretary NEIRPC. The session began with a hymn to the Holy Spirit and a prayer led by the chairperson.

Positive Points of the Conference:

- i) The theme was relevant and the speakers were well chosen.
- ii) The time management was done well.
- iii) Presence of the representatives / Leaders from the other churches good.
- iv) Papers presented were good.
- v) All states were exposed and most of the speakers were laity.
- vi) The level of awareness and the emerging points presented were good.
- vii) Orientation given before the group discussion put us in the right track.
- viii) Organizational part of the Conference was very good.
- ix) Ecumenical points were brought out very clearly

Some points for improvement were:

- i) To include women speakers.
- ii) Preparation of a working document for study on the theme prior to the council.
- iii) More time could be given for interaction.
- iv) Lay participation in the conference should be encouraged.
- v) Response to each paper presented not discussed much.
- vi) If the questions were sent earlier, then we could also discuss in the parish with laity.

Outcome

1. The participants learnt the need to make laity politically literate and encouraging them to participate in politics with the gospel values.
2. Learnt the importance of forming a Think-Tank Forum at the Regional level, consisting of expertise that will disseminate information and respond to issues tactfully and process and disseminate it to the Christian communities.
3. Learnt the need to strengthen United Christian Forum for building up unity, forgetting differences.
4. The participants also learnt how to develop the language and culture of the people, which will pave a way to preserve culture and society.
5. The need to integrate the Social dimension of the gospel, not compartmentalization in to social and religious but reorient to the gospel. To use 'Word of God' in the Social Dimension.
6. Learnt how Christians can bring about socio-cultural and religious integration and transformation.
7. Learnt that moral **responsibility** of the Christian community is to **disseminate the message of peace and harmony** in every segment of the society.
8. Learnt how the church has championed the causes of inculturation by not finding dichotomy with their culture and Christian's faith.