

## **Report of 2<sup>nd</sup> national conference of ACRCI at Nagpur**

The second national conference of ACRCI- Association of Catholic Rehabilitation Centres of India was held at Pallottine Animation Centre, Nagpur from 3 to 5 March 2014. The theme of the conference was **“Catholic Rehabilitation: A call to enable the disabled in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”** More than 100 delegates representing regional units across India participated in this national conference at the orange city of Nagpur.

The conference started with Holy Mass, presided over by Archbishop Abraham Viruthakulangara at 12 a.m. in the Pallottine chapel in which all the delegates participated. General (Retd.) Ian Cardozo delivered the key note address at 3 p.m. in which he stressed on the importance of creating an inclusive society. He explained on the provisions of RCI Act (1992), to ensure the availability of qualified professionals, Persons with disabilities act (1995) to protect the rights of the disabled and The National Trust Act (1999) for the welfare of persons with developmental disabilities.

Formal inauguration of the conference was started with the solemn reception of the guests with colourful display of band by the special children of Jeevoday special school, Nagpur. The Second Annual Conference of Association of catholic rehabilitation centres of India was officially inaugurated at Pallottine Animation Centre, Nagpur by War hero Major General (Retd.) Ian Cardozo, who was also the Chairman of the Rehabilitation Council of India till recently. The differently abled children from Jeevoday Special School and Home for the Aged and Handicapped staged colourful cultural programmes with poise and verve and the audience was captivated by their perfection.

In his inaugural address Major General Cardozo asked the participants, “do your best in your service to the disabled children with love, without fear and with perseverance and never give up.” He appreciated the high quality services that the catholic institutions render to the children with disabilities irrespective of their caste, creed or economic conditions. Archbishop Abraham Viruthakulangara of Nagpur in his presidential address emphasized to include the children with disabilities in all the activities of the society. He said that “we have a prophetic role to play for ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities. We are doing this out of our love for Jesus Christ.” Bishop Joshua Mar ignatios,

Bishop of Mavelikara and CBCI commission chairman for education and Culture advocated to promote the welfare of the children with disabilities. He emphasized that “the society and all its facilities including churches and religious services should be accessible to persons with disabilities. We have to identify with the last, the lost and the least. We love God by serving the disabled children.” Bishop Gerald Almeida of Jabalpur in his address asked “If God is not partial who are we to discriminate among the disabled in the society? Role of the church is very important to empower the disabled, building them up and strengthening the society” Air Marshal Denzil Keelor, hero of 1965 and 1971 air battles thanked and praised the participants for taking up the cause and work for the disabled persons in India. Fr. Thomas Felix, who is celebrating the golden jubilee of priestly ordination and a pioneer and fore runner in the field of disability rehabilitation in India, said that “less ability does not make a person less human”,. Mr. Victor Vaz narrating his experience with the special children in the field of sports narrated how Special Olympics can help the special children for their integration in the society.

During the function four eminent catholic personalities, Major General Ian Cardozo, Air Marshal Denzil Keelor, Chairman of Special Olympics Bharat, Mr. Victor Vaz, Sports Director, Special Olympics Bharat and Fr. Thomas Felix were honoured for their meritorious services in the field of disability rehabilitation. Fr. Joseph Puthenpura, the president of ACRCI welcomed the participants and highlighted the importance of this conference. Sr. Joyline, the treasurer of ACRCI gave the vote of thanks. Mr. Martin Francis conducted the programme.

In the post inaugural session Major General Ian Cardozo discussed on the CBCI policy on persons with disabilities in India, which was approved by CBCI in its recently concluded plenary session at Pala, Kerala. He exhorted the participants to discuss on the policy paper and propose a plan of action for better implementation of the policy.

The second day started with Holy Eucharist, celebrated by Bishop Gerald Almeida of Jabalpur and concelebrated by all priests delegates. In his homily the bishop reiterated the spiritual dimension of working for the persons with disabilities and encouraged the participants to go ahead with courage trusting in the divine providence.

The deliberations started with a prayer at 9 a.m. After the prayer Bishop Joshua Mar Ignatios exhorted the delegates that Mutual collaboration of various organizations is necessary to ensure the rights of the persons with disabilities. He suggested to find out ways for all to come together for common cause and mutual collaboration.

In the first input session Fr. Thomas C.T. deliberated on the on legal provisions and rights of persons with disabilities and partnership with Government. Fr. Thomas C.T. in his key note address said “for effective rehabilitation of the persons with disabilities, partnership with Government is necessary.” Elaborating, he said that “the organizations working for the marginalized and disabled should have the spirit of collaboration with the Government bodies, dealing with the welfare of persons with disabilities. Public private partnership is part of the new approach to social issues”. He insisted the participants to maintain high standard of transparency and accountability in all our institutions. Knowledge of the Acts passed by the Government, rules and regulations, guidelines of govt. departments, policies, schemes etc. is necessary for those who are involved to work in this sector.

The input session was followed by group discussion. The participants were divided into eight groups and they discussed on the problems faced by the participants in the exercise of their mission from different corners like, from the Government, from the part of the church and from the society. During the discussions on the ground realities the participants from various states expressed their unhappiness over the improper functioning of various Government bodies and the corruption and injustice prevailing in the sector. While appreciating the Kerala Government for giving aided status to special schools for mentally challenged students. The delegates expressed the wish that all the states in the country should follow the same. “Protecting the rights and privileges of the disabled children is a priority of the Catholic church “, said Arch Bishop Abraham Viruthakulangara in his address.

In the afternoon session advocate Mr. Mohammed Raffique dealt with various legal provisions to protect the rights of the children. Moderating the session Sr. Mary Joyline explained the provisions given in Juvenile Justice Act for ensuring the rights of the children.

During the third session the new Governing Body was elected for a period of two years. The new Governing Body consists of:

Fr. Joseph Puthenpura (president),  
Fr. Thomas Chenganariparampil MST (Vice president),  
Fr. Roy Kannanchira CMI (Secretary),  
Sr. Pushpam CSS (Joint Secretary),  
Sr. Maria Joyline AC (Treasurer),  
Fr. Thomas Felix CMI (member),  
Bro. Augustine Polaprayil (member),  
Sr. Shiny ASMI (Member),  
Sr. Bindu Michael (member).

Zonal level coordinators also were elected during this session. Their duty is to contact all the catholic institutions in their respective states organize them and coordinate for effective collaboration. ACRCI Zonal Coordinators are:

1. Maharashtra: Fr. Thomas Thadathil (Ph . 09422038672)
2. Madhya Pradesh: Fr. Tom Maliekal (Ph: 09685969503)
3. Uttar Pradesh: Fr. Biju (Ph: 09412428984)
4. Chathisgarh: Sr. Anie Lakhra (Ph : 09669902316)
5. Orissa: Sr. Mercy Anto (Ph: 09438157469)
6. Andra Pradesh: Sr. Subha Francis (Ph: 09618969636, 09963862390)
7. Karnataka: Sr. Maria Sruti (Ph : 09741150669)

In the evening there was cultural programmes performed by groups of children from the different schools of Nagpur. It was followed by an hour of adoration before the Lord, praying for all involved in the ministry of special education.

The third day started with invoking the Lord and adoring him in the Holy Eucharist, celebrated by Bishop Joshua Mar Ignatios. As it was the beginning of lent Bishop Joshua blessed the ash and anointed it on the forehead of the participants as a sign of fasting and prayer. In his homily bishop highlighted the importance of lent for us and exhorted to tear the hearts and not clothes so that we will turn to the Lord and through our life witness turn others to the Lord.

The morning session started with group discussion on the CBCI policy on disability. Members discussed on various provisions of the policy and dealt with in detail on the strategies for implementation. They came up with

practical suggestions for the implementation of the policy at the diocesan level, parish level and at the employment level.

In the second session, Dr. Avinash D'Souza, one of the leading psychiatrists and rehabilitation specialist in Mumbai, led two sessions on "Psychological Issues in children with special needs" and "Sexual Issues in Children and Adolescents with Special Needs." He said, "the integral growth of a special child needs a collective understanding from their parents, caretakers, special educators and the society at large". He was delivering a lecture on "Psychological issues in children with special needs". In order to ensure their psychological well-being, he said, "Parents should fill their hearts and minds with positive attitudes so that no one can destroy their self-esteem."

The afternoon session was dedicated for general discussion on future plan of action of the Association and recommendations. The Conference adopted an action plan to expand the services rendered by the Catholic Church and its institutions for the welfare of the children with disabilities. ACRCI aims to reach out every disabled person in the country. The Association shall strive to support all its member special schools as far as possible to get support from government and other sections. The importance of registering with the Association also was explained. 56 special schools registered with the Association and became members.

The concluding session was chaired by Archbishop Abraham Viruthakulangara in the presence of Bishop Joshua Mar Ignatios. Archbishop Abraham and Bishop Joshua congratulated the delegates for the fruitful participation and the effective outcome of the conference. Fr. Joseph Puthenpura thanked all for the participation and Archbishop and his team of several priests, sisters and lay volunteers for the active leadership and service they rendered for the successful conducting of the conference. While concluding the Conference, ACRCI announced that the next National conference will be held in February 2015 in South India.

Fr. Thomas Chenganariparambil MST

Vice President, ACRCI