

ACRCI (Association of Catholic Rehabilitation Centres of India)

Report of the Third National Conference held at Dharmaram College, Research Centre, Bangalore- 21 to 24 April 2015

The third national conference of ACRCI was held at Dharmaram College, Research Centre, Bangalore from 21 to 24 April 2015. Total 172 participants attended the conference. They were from almost all the states of India. The theme selected for the conference was "Rehabilitation: A call for fullness of life."

The 3rd national conference started with registration at 10.00 a.m. on Tuesday 21 April 2015. At 11.30 a.m. His Excellency Bishop Joshua Mar Ignatios celebrated Holy Mass with the participants. During the Holy Mass Bishop Joshua congratulated the members for the continuous support for such a beautiful cause and for the good work they are doing. He led the congregation to pray for the success of the conference and also for the target group for whom we are working.

The afternoon session started with an introductory message by Bishop Joshua Mar Ignatios. In his message he highlighted the eight objectives of ACRCI and he explained the implications of each objective. The participants were further divided into eight groups and each group was given the task to discuss on each objective and prepare a skit based on the respective objective. This session helped the participants to understand the objectives of ACRCI.

The formal inauguration of this national conference was held at DVK auditorium at 5.00 p.m. on Tuesday, 21 April 2015. His Eminence Cardinal Baselios Mar Cleemis Catholicos, CBCI President and Major Archbishop of the Syro Malankara Church formally inaugurated the conference. He, in his inaugural address thanked the participants for the meritorious service they are doing in the country. He said "while doing the rehabilitation work you are building up the Church. Works of rehabilitation of the disabled strengthens the spiritual base of the Church. God loves the persons with disabilities and while serving them you are mediating to share God's love." His Grace Most Rev. Bernard Mores, Archbishop of Bangalore was the president of the function. Archbishop Bernard Mores explained the pastoral dimension of Rehabilitation ministry. He narrated his experience with an ecclesiastical commission in Rome, in which he is a member, which discusses on pastoral responsibilities of the church towards persons with disabilities. He also explained the activities that he initiated in his diocese for the pastoral care of persons with disabilities. Bishop

Joshua Mar Ignatios, Chairman, CBCI Commission for Education and Culture and Bishop of Mavelikara delivered the key note address. He said "Concern for the disabled was one of the main themes of Jesus' earthly ministry. Persons with disabilities become witnesses to the spiritual healings of Jesus Christ. The church must continue this healing ministry" He also said that "service to the needy is a privilege and a responsibility". Archbishop Abraham Viruthakulangara, Archbishop of Nagpur delivered the words of blessing. He expressed the feeling that the Church in India should recognize the work for the special children. The priests and sisters working in this field is doing a great service for the church and in the name of the church. Rev. Fr. Mathew Koikara CMI, Episcopal Vicar, Rev. Fr. Xavier Manavath, Episcopal Vicar for Religious Sr. Ancilla S.H. Asst. General of S.H. Congregation and Rev. Fr. John Marius CMI spoke on the occasion. Rev. Fr. Joseph Puthenpura, president ACRCI welcomed the guests and the participants, Rev. Fr. Savio Fernandes proposed the vote of thanks and Rev. Fr. Roy Kannanchira CMI conducted the programme. Special children from Christ Special School Bangalore welcomed the participants with their welcome dance. They also welcomed the guests on the stage. A news bulletin of ACRCI was released on the occasion. A letter of appeal signed by all the participants was submitted to the CBCI president, Cardinal Cleemis regarding the formal approval of ACRCI and the work for the special children by CBCI.

The second day started with Holy Mass celebrated by His Excellency Most Rev. Varghese Chakkalackal of Calicut Diocese. In the homily during the Holy Mass Bishop expressed his appreciation for the participants for the great work that they are doing. He also highlighted the evangelization aspect of the special work. He said that "you are doing the same work that Jesus was doing. He was healing the sick and the disabled. When you work with children with disabilities, you are continuing the work of Jesus."

The first session of the day was started with an input session on "Child abuse and special child" by Dr. Avinash Desousa, a psychologist and psychotherapist from Mumbai. He explained the various ways of identifying conditions of abuse and how we can help the child to overcome stress of abuse. He also explained what are we to do in such cases and how to handle the situation.

The second session of the day was a group discussion. Members discussed in groups on the objectives of ACRCI and the problems that we face in our area to realize these objectives and the possible solutions. It was a fruitful discussion and the members came up with several suggestions.

The third session witnessed the presentation of the reports of the group discussion. Rev. Sr. Elite CMC moderated the session. A summary of the group discussion is given at the end of this report. After the presentation of the reports, Fr. Thomas C.T. explained the steps for the organizations to register with the National Trust.

In the fourth session of the day, the members introduced themselves state wise. It was an opportunity to get to know each other. After the introduction of the participants, Bro. V.K. George (Montfort Brother) from Tura, Meghalaya shared his experience of working with the hearing impaired children. After that, Sr. Serena MSJ made a presentation on the activities of working with the children with autism.

At 07.00 p.m. all gathered in the auditorium and spent an hour of adoration to the Lord. Rev. Fr. Anto Amarnath led the adoration with his melodious and meditative bhajans and elevated the hearts of the participants to the Heavenly presence. All thanked the Lord for the special call to work for His special children and for bringing us together.

After the supper there was the cultural programme conducted by the participants. The eight groups that were given themes based on the objectives of ACRCI presented their themes in different ways like skits, group songs and folk songs etc. which were appreciated by all. Archbishop Abraham Viruthakulangara and Bishop Joshua Mar Ignatios were the guests of honour for the programme. Both the guests praised the creativity of the participants and the way they conceived and presented the themes.

The third day started with the Holy Mass offered by His Grace Archbishop Abraham Viruthakulangara. During the homily he invited all the participants to thank the Lord for gathering us together and to gain strength from prayer and go ahead with more Grace to work as the Lord wants us to do. He also reminded the participants to be mindful of their responsibility as ambassadors of the church to give witness in words, attitudes and behavior to the Lord.

After the breakfast, the first session was “Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment for the persons with disabilities” by Dr. A.T. Thresiakutty from NIMH, Secunderabad. She explained beautifully the importance of preparing the children for transition from school to work and the preparation for that. She also explained about the importance of vocational training and rehabilitation and various ways to do that. She narrated the vocational opportunities for the persons with disabilities in India at the public and private sector. She also spoke of the community colleges which can be a better option for our children. She also clarified the doubts of the participants regarding vocational training.

The second session of the day was on “Stress Management” by Rev. Fr. Biju Augustine. It helped the participants to understand stressful situations in their life and the methods to get out of them. Fr. Biju explained several simple exercises to relax the body and the mind. As we are engaged in a special task often the participants experience stressful situations or fell a “burn out” experience. This session helped them to realize such situations and come to the reality and to accept and face them positively. In fact, this was a much needed session for all the participants.

In the afternoon, there was the General Body meeting of ACRCI and it discussed various things regarding the organization and the ways to strengthen it state wise and on national basis. During the discussion it was decided to concentrate on strengthening the organization at the state/ regional level.

The Governing Board of ACRCI was reconstituted incorporating more members with more representation form unrepresented areas. Sr. Shiny Francis requested for a change as she is transferred from special education to another field. Bro. Augustine Polachirayil is also transferred and has gone abroad. Hence these two people had to be replaced and a few regions had to be represented in the board. The new Board of ACRCI has been constituted as follows:

1. Fr. Joseph Puthenpura - President
2. Fr. Thomas C.T. MST - Vice President
3. Fr. Roy Kannanchira CMI - Secretary
4. Sr. Pushpam CSS - Joint Secretary
5. Sr. Maria Joyline AC - Treasurer
6. Fr. Thomas Felix CMI - Member
7. Sr. Bindu Michael - Member
8. Sr. Annie Lakra - Member
9. Fr. Tom George - Member
10. Fr. Baiju Maniamprayil - Member
11. Sr. Josephine Boniface DSMP - Member

The State/ Regional coordinators also were rethought and since some states were not represented properly a few were selected to take leadership in those states. Thus the team of state/ regional coordinators includes:

1. Bihar - Sr. Catherine
2. Chattisgarh - Sr. Annie Lakhra
3. Karnataka - Sr. Maria Shruti & Sr. Prabha
4. Kerala - Fr. Roy Vadakel, Sr. Biji Jose CMC& Sr. Mercilit SIC
5. Madhy Pradesh - Fr. Tom George Malieckal
6. Maharashtra - Fr. Thomas Thadathil MCBS
7. North East - Bro. V.K.George

8. Orissa - Sr. mercy Anto
9. Tamil Nadu - Sr. Mercy ASMI
10. Telangana & A.P. - Sr. Shalini ASMI
11. U.P./ Northern Region - Fr. Baiju maniambrayil

The state/ regional coordinators will coordinate to strengthen the activities of ACRCI in their respective states/ regions by contacting and gathering them together.

There was a general discussion on the functioning of the organization. A suggestion to conduct the annual gathering once in two years came up as such a large gathering demand much expense and hard work. But during discussion it was decided that since our Association is in the beginning stage, we will gather every year at least for the first few years so that all will come together and exchange ideas and experiences and it will strengthen our organization. After that we will think of some representative body. It was also suggested to have the general gathering for two days. Members suggested to organize some training programmes for the members.

It was informed to the members to use the official email id- 2013acrci@gmail.com for all communication with ACRCI. The members may kindly inform the change of telephone no. and email id, if any to ACRCI office. It was also suggested that all the organizations shall have an official email id and a telephone number that does not change even if the contact persons change. The members suggested that we should find ways to interact with the CRI members and inform them about ACRCI so that all the congregations will know of the association and officially support this movement. All expressed the need of an interactive website for our Association. As it was felt that financial constraints prevent us from such new initiatives, members felt the need of raising funds for the same. Rev. Fr. George MST initiated the process by donating Rs. 10,000. 00 for the same purpose and all thanked him for this generous gesture.

There was an evaluation of the conference through a format and through open discussion. All were of high opinion about the national conference. The sessions were very useful and the facilities at Dharmaram were really marvelous. All were very happy to have the opportunity to come together and meet people of the same field.

The concluding function of the conference was started at 06.30 p.m. His Beatitude Cardinal George Alenchery, Major Archbishop of the Syro Malabar Church was the chief guest of the concluding session. Bishop Joshua Mar Ignatios was the president. The members extended greetings to His Beatitude on the occasion of his Saptati (70th Birthday) and the feast of his patron saint. In his message His Beatitude

congratulated the members for their wonderful dedicated work. He said, “You are doing the same ministry of Jesus. If Christians understand the real nature and the evangelical meaning of this ministry people would have thronged to you as people thronged to Jesus. Every disabled child is equally important in dignity like every other person. Jesus came to give life in abundance. You are also doing the same- giving life to the body, mind and spirit. This ministry is really a work of Evangelization.”

Bishop Joshua in his presidential address said “Concern for the persons with disabilities is one of the main concerns of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Persons with disabilities become witnesses to the spiritual healing of Jesus. The Church must continue this healing ministry.” He continued to say that “service to the differently abled is a privilege and a responsibility. Our interaction with them must be our affirmation of our faith.”

Rev. Dr. Thomas Aykara, the Rector of Dharmaram College, Rev. Dr. Saju Chakkalackal, the former president of Dharmaram Vidya kshetra, Rev. Sr. Betty CSS, the Assistant General of Samaritan Congregation also gave messages and enhanced the morale of the members by their beautiful and encouraging words. Sr. Teresin Ferrao proposed for the vote of thanks.

The fourth day was a day of outing. Though some of the participants departed, all the others went out to visit various places in Bangalore and enjoyed the trip. All the participants departed with enthusiasm to go back and work with more commitment and joy and wishing to come back together after one year.

Fr. Thomas C.T.

Vice President, ACRCI

Report of the group discussions

The participants were divided into eight groups. They were given the task to discuss on the objectives of ACRCI and give suggestions to realize the objectives in the Church today. Each group discussed the theme given to them. The proposals made by the groups are given below for each theme:

I.To bring to light the contributions of the Catholic Church in the society through this service.

1. To produce Documentary videos
2. Create a website and give good presentation of our activities
3. Make use of the social media like, Face book, you tube etc.
4. Arrange programmes of our children during parish fest
5. Invite local leaders to our institutions
6. Publish articles on activities of our institutions and on disability in all catholic periodicals
7. Arrange awareness programmes for the public
8. Organize Christmas programme, sports etc. in public for our children, arrange exhibitions
9. Invite other people to celebrate birth days and special occasions with our children
10. Involve clubs like, Rotary, Lions etc. to be involved in such programmes
11. Organize some fests at the Diocesan level including all special institutions
12. Celebrate World Disability Day (Dec. 3) with the public
13. Regular documentation of all the activities and programmes
14. A PRO is good in every institution to contact the public regularly
15. Equip the staff with technical knowledge to make use of the media
16. Create awareness in the society so that they become active in matters regarding disability and institutions catering the cause of the disabled.
17. In order to counter the propaganda against the services of the church we should let others know what we are doing and we should involve others in our activities.
18. Publish the activities and the achievements of the institution
19. Lack of expertise in networking is a defect and we need to collaborate with all likeminded people and organizations.
20. Mutual support and collaboration is necessary

II. To help the individuals and institutions to find solutions to the problems faced by them in running the institutions.

1. Conduct awareness programmes for the superiors of the institutions, teachers and parents.
2. ACRCI can organize some training programmes on legal provisions at the state/ regional/ national level
3. Some of us should become expertise to give intellectual contributions at the state or national level
4. Implement the system of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation
5. Train more personnel in different branches of special education
6. Invite the Government officials to visit our institutions occasionally
7. Develop good and positive relationship with parents, local people and government officials

8. Update our knowledge and information regarding disability and rehabilitation, legal provisions, rules and regulations etc.

III. To enter into dialogue with various Government departments at the state and central level.

1. We need to be in constant touch with different Govt. Departments. We have to be informed of the various schemes of the Govt., laws and regulations, policies etc. We should also be transparent in all our dealings, accounts and reporting.
2. We shall have good relations with the public leaders, invite them for our programmes etc.
3. We shall not try to bribe the officers or else we will be put in trouble, instead have good relation with them and regularly make follow ups.
4. We have to submit all files and documents in time
5. Proper awareness and training need to be given to the fathers and sisters working in the field regarding govt. policies, schemes rules etc.
6. It is good to invite some govt. officials for such conferences so that we will get more inputs regarding govt. policies and schemes.

IV. To work for the protection of the rights of the marginalized in an organized manner.

1. It is good to substitute the word 'marginalized' to 'persons with disabilities'
2. Many of the priests and sisters do not update their knowledge. So we need to organize seminars and workshops on these issues.
3. The superiors often have a charity approach, instead of right based approach. Hence ACRCI may invite superiors also for such meetings.
4. ACRCI reports shall be sent to the major superiors also. This work must be discussed in CRI meetings
5. We need to have organized work in India. Hence more collaboration and networking is needed.
6. We need to start a website of ACRCI
7. The candidates to priesthood and religious life shall be exposed to the field of disability during the period of their formation.

V. To reflect the merciful love of Christ in the society through affirmative action.

1. We should respect the feelings, emotions and aspirations of the child, parent and the family of the disabled child. Parents require our support and assistance. So we should work for full inclusion.
2. Sometimes we fail to get the support of the superiors in our work. In such situations we need to affirm our commitment to the cause.
3. We have to come out of our personal as well as congregational ego and support each other. ACRCI can be a platform for this
4. When we work with children with disabilities, we do not get immediate result. So we have to affirm ourselves that rehabilitation does not always mean high standard results but gradual change in the persons with disabilities.
5. As service providers we should ensure that the parents are the primary care takers and we assist them in their responsibilities.
6. We have to teach the parents about the value of life and equality of every child whether normal or special.

VI. To foster mutual collaboration by coming together and forming an organized pressure group before the Government

1. Proper guidelines and procedures to apply for Govt. schemes be made available to all our member units.
2. Create awareness among the superiors so that they accept and creatively support the work done by the members. This is needed for moral, social and financial support.
3. Coming together at the state level will help us to work in each state in a collective way and we can support each other.
4. At the national level also this collaborative work will function as a pressure group and we will get more strength.
5. Training programmes on different topics at the state and central level will enhance our knowledge and skills.

VII. To help the catholic organizations / Institutions on important matters like Registration and Administration of our institutions, member ship in national bodies like the National Trust, legal requirements, Rights and benefits, Grant-in-aid from Government, Fund raising etc.

1. Regarding registration and administration- we have to maintain all records properly and ensure transparency in our dealings and transactions
2. We should have healthy relationship with govt. officials
3. We should know the policies and schemes in detail and the procedure to follow it up.
4. We should get all registrations done and renewed at the proper time, like, registration in National Trust etc. It will help us to negotiate with national level organizations or forums.
5. We can approach the corporate for funding, provided we have a very good track record, good relationship with them, we are transparent in dealings and we have a strong organizational structure.