

# **BUILDING LEADERS FOR MISSION IN MULTI-FAITH CONTEXTS**

**The Reports of the 6<sup>th</sup> South Asian Christian Youth Core Group and Leaders Forum**

*6<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2008*

*Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Training Center, Bangkok, Thailand*

## **Understanding South Asia**

A tumultuous region with a common cultural background and shared political experience, South Asia occupies a prominent place in the global map of ethnic conflict. Many groups have fiercely fought with each other, laid siege on the state, frustrated its nation-building efforts, and burnt bridges to capture the larger consciousness of the international community. In comparison, the region is unique in many ways from the standpoint of ethnicity, use of violence and approach to peace.

The region is one of the world's most complex regions with multi-ethnic societies, characterized by striking internal divisions along linguistic, regional, communal and sectarian lines, but externally linked to one another across national boundaries. Yet, multiculturalism or pluralism as a guiding principle of governance is hardly adopted into the popular political culture of the region. A probable exception is India where different ethnic groups, at least in principle, enjoy 'equally' a modicum of political space for cultural and political autonomy. But there, multicultural arrangements are hindered by the Center's intrusion into the affairs of political institutions, leading to political decay and rupture in center-periphery relations. The manner and the extent of state intervention in promoting the politico-economic interests of groups, therefore, determine the dynamics of conflict.

## **The Core Group and Leaders Forum of South Asia Christian Youth Network**

In the given context, it was not convenient for a 32-members group (list is appended) from six South Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan) to meet in a South Asian country for a Core Group and Leaders Forum under the aegis of the South Asia Christian Youth Network. So (having already met twice in Sri Lanka, once in India and twice in Nepal) the ecumenical partners and the youth leaders associated with the Network met at Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Training Center, Bangkok from the 6<sup>th</sup> of March to the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, 2008. The main focus of the meeting was the role of young Christian leaders in a multi-faith context.

In an informal gathering in the evening on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2008 the delegates spent time knowing each other. As many of the delegates were first timers to the Forum, it was imperative on the part of the Core Group leaders to make them familiar with the Network and hence the first session on the 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2008 was a brief introduction to the SACYN, its aims and background history shared by Rev. Dn. Adrian Watkins, CMS Regional Managar – South Asia, Thailand and Laos, Mr. Insar Gohar, former Coordinator of SACYN and Mr. Kasta Dip, present Coordinator of SACYN.



## **Greetings and Apologies**

Three great supporters of the SACYN by names Rt. Rev. Duleep de Chikera, Bishop of Colombo Diocese, Church of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Rev. Dr. Enos Das Pradhan, General Secretary of CNI Synod and Rev. Leslie Nathaniel, Mission Consultant, Church of Württemberg, Germany could not make it to Bangkok due to other official engagements. Their apologies and good wishes sent verbally through delegates were registered with appreciation.

## **Country Reports Sharing**

Mr. Kasta Dip, Coordinator of SACYN then facilitated a session which related the stories and news from different churches and participating organizations reflecting the SACYN and setting the context thereof. In this process each delegate was given a few minutes to share his or her experiences in youth work in his or her particular geographical and social context. It was one of the most eye-opening sessions in the entire conference as it brought forward the situations and difficulties faced by Christian youth in different areas and also highlighted the amount of work being done despite regional difficulties. The whole interaction was an excellent way of helping the delegates to look beyond their own geographical areas. It created feelings of empathy, understanding and made the need for open communication even more evident.

### ***The Church of North India***

The Church of North India (CNI) being the largest church, in terms of geography, has its youth spread across 26 Dioceses remarkably engaged in the life and mission of the church. Regular contextualized programmes are organized by the Synod and the Dioceses to make the youth spiritually strong, culturally oriented and socially relevant. Some of the major programmes organized during the last year include Certificate Course on Youth Leadership Development (ToT), Media Education for Youth Empowerment and Action, Youth and the Ethics of the New Communication Technologies, Diocesan Youth Festivals etc.

### ***The Church of South India***

The Church of South India (CSI) has had many changes in its leadership in the past one year. Currently Rev. Sanjay Samuel Ayer is heading its youth department as Youth Director. A major event organized by the CSI last year for its youth was a Diamond Jubilee celebration of the formation of CSI. Then, of course, there were many Diocesan programmes reported to have been organized.

### ***The Presbyterian Church of India***

The Presbyterian Church of India (PCI) had organized their annual youth festival which was also attended by two youth from CNI last year. Apart from this they had also had many other youth camps organized at different Synods spread across the North East India.

### ***The Church of Bangladesh***

The Church of Bangladesh (CoB) had two conferences at Synod level last year: A Leadership Workshop and A Workshop on Learning Christian Lyrics and Bhajans. Beside this they had Conferences, Seminars, Cultural Competitions, Sports and Tournaments, Debates, Christmas Carols

and Parties, Cottage Prayers, Observing Youth Sundays etc. at Diocese, Deanery and Parish level throughout the year. These were mainly designed on Biblical and Social themes.

It is noticeable that along with traditional topics and themes for the youth, we were able to introduce and discuss various new topics: Drug Addiction, Sexuality, HIV/AIDS, Globalization, Choosing Life Partner, Good Governance, Pre-marital Counseling, Adolescent Development etc. The church has declared to use its Lent collection for this year for the treatment and rehabilitation of Drug Addicted young people. The church is worried about the migrated young people who come to the cities for higher education and searching for jobs. It is not easy to provide them pastoral care and counseling as they keep on moving from one place to another very quickly and to know where and how they live.

### ***The Church of Pakistan***

The Church of Pakistan (CoP) had programmes organized at different Dioceses aimed at building effective and young leadership at various levels. Major programmes organized include Leadership Development, Awareness on HIV/AIDS, Character Formation and Career Counseling.

### ***The Church of Ceylon***

The Church of Ceylon, Sri Lanka had organized programmes such as Annual Youth Camps, Blood Donation Campaigns, Leadership Conferences and Talent Shows for its youth. The problems being faced by the youth in Sri Lankan churches are more of political than anything else.

### ***The National Churches Fellowship – Nepal and Endeavor Nepal***

The NCF Nepal and EN have been working with perseverance to equip the youth of Nepal for the mission of Christ. Nepal has recently been declared as a secular country but the political turmoil and instability still looms large.

### ***News from Bhutan***

Bhutan is slowly opening its gates for the mission activities of the churches. Although conducting a public church meeting could still be provocative, situation is much better than before. Recently there had been some programmes planned for the youth of Bhutan who are refugees in India at Siliguri, northern part of West Bengal.

### ***The Mar Thoma Church, India***

The Mar Thoma Church (MTC) celebrated its Platinum Jubilee last year where the youth played an important role in shaping up the activities. Besides, it also organized an International Mission Conference which was attended by the Mar Thoma youth all over the world which has resulted in the publication of a book on its theme.

### ***The Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, India***

A major programme of the JSOC was the Annual National Convention and Camp which was attended by its youth from all over India. Another significant programme was a convention organized for the students from IT industry and Nursing Schools.

## The Bible Studies

Each day began with a short devotion conducted by delegates from different churches. Then Bible studies were conducted by Rev. Vinod Victor, former Youth Director of CSI currently Coordinator of South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Programme (SAEPP). The key passages each day revolved around young leadership and were enriching as each one of those enabled the listeners to assess the given passage from an entirely different point-of-view.



In the first Bible Study Rev. Vinod delved at length on the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman. Pertinent questions as to why did Jesus have to go through Samaria, why did the disciples go to the city avoiding Samaria to fetch food, what are connections of the five husbands with 1 Kings 17 and what are the salient features of the people of Samaria that are relevant experiences of people today etc. were raised for discussion. He helped the group identify several interfaith issues in the text including Gender, Woman with a character, Marriage, Water, Worship, Food, Pollution, Caste, Religion etc. He led the group through the various mission nuances including establishing contact, entering into a meaningful conversation, transcending social taboos, common notions, majority understandings, popular religiosity, and fear, understanding each others need, establishing trust, redefining worship, leaving the pots and enabling Jesus to stay and help people who believed in him. He underlined that the basic lessons of mission to be learned in the text are love not hatred, acceptance not rejection and humility not haughtiness.

In his second Bible study Rev. Vinod Victor helped the group to look closely at the little servant girl of Naaman who was instrumental in his healing. Vinod helped the group relive the hurting memories of pain that the girl had to undergo and urged the group to see her in the real life situations around them. She was uprooted from her family, denied her childhood, orphaned, thrown into child labor or domestic slavery, was a victim of war living as a captured refugee in a foreign land. Yet she had comforting memories of healing of the prophet of Yahweh whom she knew perhaps had split Jordan, healed the bad waters of Jericho, filled the widows oil plates, blessed the Shunamite with a son and then restored him to life, cured the pot of stew from death and fed hundred people with twenty sheaves of barley. She was challenged by the call of responsibility and instead of being silent spoke. Despite her nameless and powerlessness she was willing to be a channel of blessing. She had compassion, faith and a contagious hope. It was her intervention that helped the healing in the home. She turned their shame into honor, fear into hope, sickness into healing, disbelief into faith, despair into joy and agony into peace.

Mission is ordinary people doing extraordinary things, it is not famous people who are central therein but faithful people. Mission is making connections- between a person who needs healing and a God who can heal. Mission is the humility to testify to the truth in any hostile setting in a language of humility. Vinod also cautioned the group of Gehazi's around and the willingness of the prophet in understanding the faith struggle of Namman when the king would worship his god. (Gehazi's around are the ones who seek self profit and the struggle of Naman if he could bow down when the king would worship his god at the temple leaning on his hands).

In the third Bible study Vinod led the group through an interesting discussion on the eagle. He reminded that an Eagle doesn't often die of old age, but of starvation due to the limitations- \*his once sharp beak bends inwards, losing his grasp on his prey.\*his claws grow inward, losing his strong grip\*the eagle also develops cataract\*and finally the feathers on his wings loosen and begin to fall. But, the Eagle has 2 choices. He can choose to remain the same (and die of starvation!) or go through the process of renewal. In this process, the eagle bangs his beak (against a rock), till the inward bent portion chips off and a new beak grows in place as sharp and as effective as that of a young eagle. With the new beak, the eagle pulls out the old inward bent claws, awaiting the arrival of the ever strong claws! Interestingly, the eagle looks at the hottest part of the sun, for the cataract in his eye to melt! And finally for his old feathers to fall off, he faces the storm head-on, rejoicing for the renewal in his strength.

The entire process takes about 40-45 days! Vinod also helped the group see the mission realities in the life of Eagles including the fact that the Eagle builds its nest in high places, at the end of a branch, off a dangerous cliff. He also reminded that the stirring of the nest is necessary for many of us to understand mission. The eagles once it stirs its nest carries the eaglet on its back, and mid-air turns over-dropping the eaglet to learn to fly on his own. If at any point, the eaglet is falling to the ground-the parent swoops in from nowhere, to his safety, carrying it on its back-only to repeat the process all over again! He said that The Eagle is the only animal that can be found in high places and touches the ground when necessary and said Let's not get too earthly and of no heavenly use, and too heavenly for earthly use!

### **Relating to the Context of Multi-Faith in South Asia**

Rev. Dn. Adrian Watkins, CMS Regional Manager South Asia, Thailand and Laos led a session on "Mission in Multi-Faith Contexts". He explored the broad outlines of the nature and theology of Christian mission before highlighting some of the key issues and tough questions for mission in multi-faith contexts. These included (1) Christian understandings and perspectives on salvation (2) Contextualization (3) The nature of "conversion" (4) Motivations for mission (5) Mission to the Poor (6) How to unite across frontiers, boundaries and differences in Christ's mission including appropriate mission structures and (7) Exploring the



tension between dialogue and proclamation as mission methodologies and the possibility to integrate both for effective mission based upon right attitudes for relating to those of other faiths. He concluded with some questions for the participants to consider: (i) How can SACYN be a networked yet united movement of South Asian Christian young people for mission in multi-faith contexts? (ii) What are the key mission issues for your churches and organizations? (iii) Does your church have a mission orientation, focus and identity and (iv) How can we train ourselves and others for the tasks of mission?

### **Understanding Urban Context and Youth Ministry**

Mr. Jacob Isaac's session on Youth Work and Ministry in South Asian Urban Contexts received great applaud as it presented the Spiritual, Political, Social, Cultural and Religious contexts of the modern youth's life in a very modern manner which touched the right chord with the youth's hearts. He stressed

the need for making the churches accessible to the young, with a youthful approach. The qualitative goals in modern youth ministry like leadership, spirituality, structures, worship, evangelism and developing relationships were mentioned.

There were some group works, short and concise, with challenging and practical questions. Through the group activities, a rough idea about the forthcoming South Asia Youth Conference could be drawn. Also, the groups gave inputs on the changes required to keep up with the changing times to make the network viable and effective. A summing up of discussion at the end of each group work ignited thoughts and shaped the agenda for the SACYN to carry on in the days to come.

### **South Asia Youth Conference 2009**

The delegates reviewed the aftermath effects of the two South Asia Youth Conferences held at Colombo in 2002 and at Bangalore in 2005. It was noted with appreciation that many of the delegates who attended these Conferences are now providing leadership to the churches and organizations they are associated with. The friendship and mutual respect shared and experienced by the delegates during the Conferences has touched the pinnacle of trust, bridged the gap of people to people relation, and has thus strengthened the network through regular communication.

The Ecumenical Partners especially the CMS, USPG and the Methodist Church, UK represented in the persons of Rev. Dn. Adrian Watkins, Mr. John Hayward, Rev. Jessie Anand and Mr. Steve Cheal took stock of the whole process of discussion. It was encouraging to have them in the Forum as they shared their ideas and concerns for the youth in South Asia. Sadly they expressed their limitations to support yet another South Asia Youth Conference planned in 2009 as generously as they did it earlier. This expression led to a big question ‘whether we should have a Conference as large as of 350 to 400 South Asian youth or not’?

After working out the feasibility and possibility of a big Conference in groups the delegates equivocally expressed the concern that we should go for a Conference and look out for some more partners. The potential partners identified for approach are as listed below:

1. The Christian Conference of Asia
2. The South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Programme
3. The Evangelical Fellowship of India
4. The World Students Christian Federation – Asia Pacific Region
5. The International Anglican Youth Network
6. The Lutheran World Federation
7. The Presbyterian Church of USA and Ireland
8. The Church of Scotland
9. The World Council of Churches
10. The Council for World Mission
11. Some others were also mentioned.

### ***Venue for the SAYC 2009***

As mentioned above earlier the Conferences have already been held at Colombo (2002) and Bangalore (2005) the Core Group thought that Kathmandu would be an ideal choice for holding SAYC in 2009 as

it is convenient for Visas and travels for all delegates. Mr. Kasta Dip will study the feasibility along with the local youth and church leaders.

### ***Finance and Travel Costs of Delegates***

It was discussed with great concern that the largest part of the budget goes on meeting the travel costs of delegates. If these costs can partly be borne by the sending churches then the financial burden on partners will be less heavy. It was also felt that some regional partner churches, especially those from India, would be able to share a proportion of any flight costs for at least some delegates from their churches. So a proposal came for record which was unanimously agreed that the member churches would be requested to share part of the travel



costs of their delegates. In that way a spirit of co-ownership will be earned. Rev. Dn. Adrian Watkins and Mr. Kasta Dip while visiting or meeting the leaders of the member churches and ecumenical partners at different forums and programmes will share this concern and seek for cooperation.

### **Recommendations and Suggestions**

The following recommendations and suggestions were received regarding the SACYN and the ensuing Conference:

a) Participants should go back with a specific agenda, to enable them to put across their experience at the conference in a better manner. To this, the following points were pointed out:

- to promote the relevance of the theme
- to share the presentations and ideas learnt
- to report situations
- to support Kasta Dip in his purposes, to communicate and create networks among South Asian youth
- to identify resources for forthcoming conferences
- to report youth activities in local youth magazines
- to be advocates for the network
- to appeal to church heads to associate with the SAYCN
- Sanjay Ayer to assist Kasta Dip in his role.

b) Forthcoming Conferences:

- to draw up future plans, keeping within deadlines
- to engage in more precise planning
- proposed time for next conference: next summer or October
- to have a mini core group meeting to draw more precise plans
- Adrian Watkins will draft a project proposal documents and circulate to some youth leaders and ecumenical partners for their comments. It would then also be given to some church leaders for their further comments and endorsement and then when finalized it could be used as a

fundraising tool. This will also have the aim to develop ownership of a future conference and share responsibility for raising funds.

c) It was suggested to have a prayer chain for issues that concern youth.

- to have daily prayers for South Asian countries and forthcoming conferences
- to have a prayer space on Facebook and Orkut
- to have Shincy as the prayer coordinator
- to mail specific prayer requests to Shincy

d) The following suggestions were made under potential sources for raising funds:

- to try to be self-reliant and raise funds independently
- to approach local church leaders and heads
- to suggest allocation of funds from church youth budgets to SACYN

e) The following suggestions were made for the newsletter of SACYN.

- to send the news of different programmes and activities to Kasta Dip regularly
- to make the newsletter a quarterly publication
- to send photographs along with the report if available

f) The website of SACYN and Bookmarks

- Kasta Dip will follow up with E2 Solutions, based in Delhi regarding the website and gaining control of the input on this and other related matters. The website will need to be revitalized, advertised and used as source of news and information.
- It was noted that the book marks advertising this have been printed in Karachi and will be circulated shortly to participants and churches.

### **Attending a Sunday Worship Service at an Anglican Church (Thai Congregation)**

On Sunday the delegates visited an Anglican Church in the downtown of Bangkok and worshipped with its Thai Congregation. Welcoming the visitors the local priest requested the visitors to share their purpose of coming to Thailand which Rev. Dn. Adrian Watkins did with great articulation. Then the delegates sang a hymn in different languages of South Asia conveying the message of beauty and unity in diversity.



The reports have been prepared and circulated by: **Mr. Kasta Dip**  
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## The 6<sup>th</sup> South Asia Christian Youth Network (SACYN) Core Group and Leaders Forum

### List of Participants

S.No.	Name of Participant	Country	Church/Organization	Role
01	Rev. Adrian Watkins	UK	CMS	Resource/Partner
02	Mr. Steve Cheal	UK	Methodist (UK)	Resource/Partner
03	Rev. Jessie Anand	UK/India	USPG	Resource/Partner
04	Mr. John Hayward	UK	CMS	Resource/Partner
05	Rev. Vinod Victor	India	CSI/SAEPP	Resource
06	Mr. Jacob Isaac	India	Kerygma/Methodist (India)	Resource
07	Ms. Moumita Biswas	Thailand/India	CCA	Resource
08	Mr. Kasta Dip	India	CNI/SACYN	Coordinator
09	Mr. Jocky John	India	CNI	Delegate
10	Ms. Gandhari J. Yuhanna	India	CNI	Delegate
11	Rev. Anilal Jose	India	UTC/CSI	Delegate
12	Rev. Sanjay Samuel Ayer	India	CSI	Delegate
13	Ms. Nessa Anne Christina	India	CSI	Delegate
14	Rev. George John	India	Mar Thoma	Delegate
15	Ms. Shincy Aniyankuju	India	Mar Thoma	Delegate
16	Dr. Lalnun Danga	India	PCI	Delegate
17	Mr. Benjamin Lalrinsanga	India	PCI	Delegate
18	Mrs. Deepa Jacob	India	Syrian Orthodox	Delegate
19	Rev. Martin Mondal	Bangladesh	Church of Bangladesh	Delegate
20	Rev. Albert Halder	Bangladesh	Church of Bangladesh	Delegate
21	Mr. Suroj Shakya	Nepal	NCFN/CE	Delegate
22	Dr. Dharmaraj Rizal	Nepal	NCFN	Delegate
23	Mr. Insar Gohar	Pakistan	Church of Pakistan	Delegate
24	Mr. Sosheel Anjum	Pakistan	Church of Pakistan	Delegate
25	Mr. Eric Attique	Pakistan	Church of Pakistan	Delegate
26	Mr. Richard Subedi	India	Bhutanese Churches	Delegate
27	Rev. Sam Ponniah	Sri Lanka	Church of Ceylon	Delegate
28	Mr. George Jeyasingaraj	Sri Lanka	Church of Ceylon	Delegate
29	Ms. Amani de Silva	Sri Lanka	Church of Ceylon	Delegate
30	Rev. Vineeth Koshy	India	NCCI	Delegate