

Meeting with the Leaders of Christian Educational Institutions

The meeting was attended by the following people:

1. Most Rev. Elias Gonsalves, Chairperson, CBCI Office for Education and Culture.
2. Fr. Maria Charles SDB, National Secretary of the CBCI Office for Education and Culture.
3. Fr. John Ravi SJ, National Coordinator.
4. Fr. Joseph Manipadam SDB, National Coordinator.
5. Rev. Abraham Mathew, NCCI National Office.
6. Dr. Michael Williams, Mount Carmel Schools.
7. Rev. Ribin John, NCCI National Office.
8. Dr. Nalini Abraham, Development Practitioner.
9. Fr. Sojan, AINACS Secretary.
10. Fr. Varghese Vinayanand OIC, Syro-Malankara Church.
11. Rev. John Wesley, Evangelical Church of India.
12. Fr. Biju Kannampuzha, Syro-Malabar Church.
13. Dr. Nirmala, YWCA President.
14. Dr. Monodeep Daniel, Dean, St. Stephen's College, New Delhi.
15. Dr. Abhi Sethia, Leader Evangelical Teachers Fellowship of India.
16. Dr. Pushpa Joseph, Editor: Magnet CRI New Delhi.
17. Sonia Daniel, Director, Communications, EFI.

The meeting commenced with Bishop Elias Gonsalves saying a prayer. Fr. Charles moderated the meeting, and welcomed and felicitated the Bishop. Fr. Charles said that it is time to stand together once again. Then he spoke about the agendas of the meeting; The challenges faced by the Christian Education Institutions in India, Concerns we need to take to the Ministry of Education, and the need for Christian Education Institutions to work together.

Then the Bishop said that it is good to discuss and deliberate on time. Different Churches have contributed to education, but NEP has no mention of it. We should make a difference to all our Institutions which all our churches want. We need to see how we can move forward. Then everyone present introduced themselves.

Dr. Nalini thanked Fr. Charles for the initiation for the meeting. She informed everyone that she had a lot of conferences on different aspects of education. She said that everything is rapidly changing, and people will not remember Christian Education if we do not do something about it. A participant said that NEP 2020 is a threat, and the Minority rights is a problem. He said how can we safeguard our Christian institutions? The POCSO Act, which he calls as a Draconian Law, is a threat. He said we need to be prudent and also need to safeguard our own people especially the administration staff. The POSH Act is also a threat. It's time to stand together. Are we united? We can only present our concern when we stand together.

Another participant said that there's a concern that we won't have permission to run the school if there's a church there. There are a lot of concerns on property and land. The government is not renewing the lease for the land. A participant said that the government are telling the schools to leave the land.

Participant said that almost 12 years back there was a meeting where all the principals of the schools were called. They said that there was an infringement and Christian schools are creating a different culture in India. The government is interested in our land. They are taking up school in Gujrat and Andhra Pradesh too. Hinduism is being shaped into a new model. Hindutva has nothing to do with Hinduism. Anti Muslim slogans are being thrown out. He said that all this is happening because of us only. We are only seeing what benefits us and this is what they are taking advantage of. We don't have a clear vision of how we can move forward. We have to educate our schools on how to run and administer. We are going to either engage, accompany, or resist the government.

Another participant said that we already have a united Christians front. He said that the concern from the government is that they are making this country into a Hindu country. He said many of our schools have an alarmingly low rate of admissions. They went from 1500 admissions to 500 admissions in the schools. We don't have an idea on how to tackle our problems, and we should see to that.

A participant expressed that there's no problem from the outside, but the problem is us. He said that it has been so many years that he's been knocking on doors to unite the education institutions. Some don't even know how to run schools and the principals are completely wrong. We are doing capital expense from revenue sources and vice versa. This makes the status of all minority schools come down. He also said that a lot of our schools are scared of the government. They quickly do what they're ordered without checking the face value. They are unable to make strong decisions.

The participant said that if everyone present in the meeting got together right now, they'll be the biggest educational body here, and then everyone will soon join in. We will have to be prepared for all three. Talk to the government sometimes, resist the government sometimes, and negotiate with the government sometimes. The question is Can we do it?

A participant informed everyone that for each and everything, and every decision we take, we have to get it through to the committees. Another participant said that we are educationists, let us trust each other. Tell the committee that we ourselves will make the decisions because the time for process has gone. We don't have much time.

Participant said that we need a forum to represent ourselves, we need to create awareness. Our problems are not being solved they are taking new forms, and awareness is important. Then Fr. Charles asked where will this situation lead to? How will we convey this to all the Bishops and Secretaries.

A participant said that we need to keep our house in order first. There are teachers appointed in the school without an appointment letter, and no PF. Many schools do not even have a Minority Certificate. The Bishop then said that the Centre and State are playing with the new schools and are not giving the Minority Certificates. A participant said that the government was telling them to submit the documents of their school again and again. Punjab government sent commissions to the schools to get data. It was mandatory and they had to submit hard copies too.

Then Fr. Charles asked what is the course of action for the future? A participant said that we should have an executive body of the core group from different Churches. Fr. Charles said that we'll have an executive body from different National bodies. Then we can work in Unison and that would be great step towards the future.

The Bishop then thanked Fr. Charles. He said that the reading and reflections from everyone have enriched the group. This will give us hope and make the way clearer for us. Faith in the Lord will help us to bind together. He said that each one of us has meticulously spelt out what was in our hearts. We have our differences but yet we have one mind to keep our Minority rights preserved. We can only do this when we come together and work. When our actions are right, we would be doing right. He said that we need to make sure that this group is active and working. We need to move forward with this group actively. And then he thanked everyone for coming.

After a long session of discussions, the meeting was concluded with Dr. Michael saying a short prayer.