

Meeting Report

Introduction:

The CBCI Office for Education and Culture convened its National Council meeting on 22 July 2025 under the overarching theme “Catholic Education Today: Challenges, Collaboration, and Commitment to Excellence.” The National Council Meeting of the CBCI Office for Education and Culture commenced with a solemn opening prayer led by Fr. Maria Charles SDB, National Secretary of the CBCI Office. The session was presided over by Most Rev. Elias Gonsalves, Archbishop of Nagpur and the Chairperson of the CBCI Office for Education and Culture, who delivered the welcoming address.

In his opening remarks, Archbishop Elias emphasised the need for collective reflection and renewed commitment to the mission of Catholic education in India. He welcomed all participants and highlighted the value of unified efforts to navigate challenges and strengthen the Catholic educational apostolate across the country. Following this, the participants introduced themselves and shared their designations.

Presentation on CBCI Office Activities:

Fr. Maria Charles delivered a comprehensive presentation outlining the mission, core objectives, and major achievements of the CBCI Office for Education and Culture. He highlighted key initiatives undertaken to support Catholic educational institutions, including capacity-building programs, advocacy efforts, and national collaborations. His presentation provided valuable context for the meeting and offered participants a clear roadmap of ongoing projects and future plans, emphasizing the Office’s commitment to excellence in Catholic education.

Issues of Concern in Catholic Education:

A major part of the meeting focused on current concerns facing Catholic educational institutions. The floor was opened for sharing by the participants, who brought attention to several critical challenges, including:

- **Implementing the National Education Policy (NEP) in Catholic institutions:** Catholic institutions face challenges in aligning their educational frameworks with NEP guidelines while preserving their identity, autonomy, and values-based approach, especially in areas like language, pedagogy, and administration.
- **Incorporating Religious Education within the curriculum:** There is a growing concern about ensuring space for Religious Education in the curriculum, balancing constitutional rights with academic requirements while nurturing faith, moral values, and holistic development among students.

- **Governmental and external interference in the appointment of teachers and administrative staff:** Educational leaders reported increased interference from government bodies in recruitment processes, threatening institutional autonomy and compromising the Catholic ethos in staff selection, leadership development, and institutional governance.

These discussions helped identify common issues, exchange strategies, and promote a spirit of mutual support among the members.

Formation of a National Core Team:

The meeting moved on to deliberate on the establishment of a National Level Core Team under the CBCI OEC. Participants were encouraged to suggest names and offer recommendations regarding the team's composition, responsibilities, and operational model. The objective is to form a central body that can offer direction, facilitate coordination, and represent the Office at various levels.

Strategic Recommendations for National Bodies:

The participants then offered suggestions for enhancing the impact and collaboration of associated Catholic educational networks such as:

- **AINACS (All India National Association of Catholic Schools)**
- **Xavier Board of Higher Education in India**
- **AICUF (All India Catholic University Federation)**

Key proposals included fostering synergy among these bodies and aligning their projects more closely with the priorities of the CBCI Office for Education and Culture.

National-Level Collaborations:

Fr. Maria Charles emphasised the importance of strengthening existing partnerships with national organisations to enhance the reach and impact of Catholic education. He invited participants to suggest new collaborators across education, and faith-based sectors. The discussion aimed to foster strategic alliances that align with the Church's mission, promote shared values, and create opportunities for joint initiatives, capacity-building, and advocacy efforts at regional and national levels.

Guidelines and Checklist for our Educational Institutions:

An important agenda item addressed the need for standardised guidelines and checklists for Catholic educational institutions. The aim is to promote:

- **Institutional excellence:** Catholic educational institutions are encouraged to uphold high academic standards, promote innovation in teaching, and foster holistic development, ensuring quality education rooted in Gospel values and contemporary educational best practices.
- **Ethical practices:** Emphasis is placed on maintaining integrity in all institutional processes, including admissions, staffing, and financial management, to reflect Christian values, build trust, and create morally responsible educational environments.
- **Accountability mechanisms:** Transparent systems for monitoring institutional performance, compliance with policies, and stakeholder feedback are essential to ensure responsibility, improve governance, and reinforce the credibility and mission-driven focus of Catholic education.

This initiative seeks to ensure that all Catholic institutions maintain a high standard in line with Gospel values and educational integrity.

National Consultation on Education (18–20 November 2025):

Planning for the upcoming National Consultation on Education, scheduled for 18–20 November 2025, was also undertaken. The Council reviewed previous formats and brainstormed ways to enhance the next consultation in terms of:

- Thematic relevance
- Participant diversity
- Methodological innovation
- Greater outreach and impact

The participants unanimously agreed to organize the upcoming National Consultation in collaboration with the India Didactics Association. This partnership was considered strategic, as the Association will facilitate all logistical arrangements and provide access to both national and international resource persons, thereby enhancing the quality, reach, and effectiveness of the consultation. This event is expected to be a key moment of reflection and strategic planning for the Catholic education community.

Participation in the Planet Fraternity Project:

The meeting dedicated focused attention to the Planet Fraternity Project, a significant global initiative inspired by Pope Francis. Emphasising its alignment with Catholic values, the CBCI Office for Education and Culture encouraged institutions to actively engage students in the program. The project fosters a spirit of global fraternity, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility. Members were urged to incorporate its principles into school life to promote peace, inclusivity, and sustainable development.

Feedback on the National Office Functioning:

Fr. Maria Charles invited feedback on improving the functioning of the National Office for Education and Culture. Participants shared constructive suggestions aimed at enhancing efficiency, responsiveness, and service delivery to diocesan and religious educational bodies.

Conclusion:

The meeting concluded with a prayer of thanksgiving led by Archbishop Elias Gonsalves, acknowledging the fruitful discussions and reaffirming a shared commitment to quality Catholic education across India. Participants expressed appreciation for the collaborative spirit of the meeting and looked forward to continued engagement through future initiatives and consultations.