

Conclusions of the National Consultation on:

PARTNERSHIP IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

01. An invited group of 40 women and men religious and priests (theologians, social workers, activists, educators, counsellors, formators, etc.) from all over India gathered for a National Consultation on “Partnership in the Mission of the Church”, from December 7-10, 2003, at Ishvani Kendra, Pune. The Consultation was initiated by Streevani: an organization committed to the empowerment of women and to the promotion of gender-justice in the Church and the Indian society.
02. The Mission of the Church includes the ushering in of a just, egalitarian and participatory society. But the presence of unjust, oppressive structures and a patriarchal mindset have led to a Church and a society that are not just, egalitarian and participatory. Therefore, the Church in its endeavour to be a prophetic sign needs to address issues related to gender-justice in the Indian society.
03. Hence, to understand better “partnership in mission,” the participants journeyed for three days through paper presentations, panel and group discussions in a common search and dialogue.
04. Down through the ages, women more than men have experienced the pain of exclusion, of being denied power in decision making, of lack of professional training, of being subjugated to structures of patriarchy and stereotyped roles, of being denied full participation in the ministerial life of the Church, and of being seen as objects rather than subjects in the Church and in society.

05. This broken partnership and these unjust patriarchal structures go against the very values of the reign of God. Such a reign respects males and females as persons, includes women's voices and views in decision making, planning and deliberations of the Church sharing its resources without discrimination and shares power in order to build a world imbued with justice and equality.
06. Hence, it is essential that women and men work as partners in God's reign. However, the present societal as well as ecclesial structures with patriarchal framework and mindsets impede the implementation of this vision of partnership in the mission of the Church in India.
07. The presence of one lakh and twenty-six thousand women religious in India need to be appreciated and they should be brought into the mainstream of Church life. Their contribution at the grass roots and as pioneers in frontier missions needs to be lauded; sadly, they are excluded from many a decision making body and their contribution in intellectual fora is very meagre. Women religious have much to contribute to the thinking, planning and execution of the policies and plans of the Church in India and hence we want to encourage greater participation and partnership in the following ways:
08. *To voice jointly concerns and issues pertaining to women*
For a more credible, effective, relevant and egalitarian Church, the voices of both men and women need to be listened to. Women, who form half of the people of God, need to be awakened to claim their God-given rights and duties in building the Church and the new humanity. This cannot be done in isolation. Hence, it is an imperative that men are aware of, support and express with women the pain, concerns and issues pertaining to the empowerment of women in the Church and society at large.
09. *To share leadership roles in pastoral ministries*
Often decision-making and utilization of resources are handled mainly by men. Women have much to contribute, but have

had limited access to these roles and resources. Hence, it is necessary that men and women share leadership roles especially in the pastoral ministries. *For a restructuring of the power structures within the Church, it is imperative to de-link orders and juridical power, so as to develop partnership in ministries.*

10. *To revamp formation programmes*

The extended years of formation are crucial for moulding values, attitudes and behaviours of a younger generation of clergy and religious. Therefore, contextualized programmes of formation in mission need to be created. Issues like feminist theology, partnership in mission, gender-sensitivity, sexuality, collaborating and sharing of power with women in ministry need to be focused upon so as to change the patriarchal, stereotyped mindset of the young formees. Moreover, interactive programmes, which bring together young women and men in formation, will enhance emotional and affective maturity. Women formators should be part of seminary training.

11. *To create new forms of worship*

The Eucharist is the source and summit of mission. The Eucharist is at times used as a tool to control women religious, as they are dependent on the male clergy. There is a need for new forms of worship with feminine spirituality. Female religious need to celebrate creative liturgies in remote areas especially when the priest is unavailable. Besides, there can be better partnership in the planning and celebration of liturgical services. Space can be engendered in the Church structures for proactive participation of women and laity. Different services rendered by women and laity can be converted into ministries if they are mandated by the community.

12. *To use gender sensitive language*

Language is an expression of our mind and belief. A more gender sensitive language in liturgical texts, theological expression and in ordinary conversation will be one of the ways of genuine partnership.

13. *To theologize contextually*

Theologizing has been mainly the responsibility of the male clergy in India. This trend has led to a one-sided approach to the understanding of God, the Church and the Sacraments. For a more balanced and holistic approach to theology, women religious in particular need to be given a sound theological formation, so as to enable them to bring women's experiences and perspectives to theologizing, making it a more rich and meaningful expression of our faith.

14. *To develop respectful relationships*

Respect and equality in relationships is an essential ingredient for productive teamwork and collaborative ventures. Relationships need to be respected and not abused especially involving women and men at work in common ministries. The dignity of woman as a person needs to be enhanced.

15. *To confront unjust structures like globalization and communalism*

An urgent need is networking with other NGOs to confront the forces that dehumanize society, specially globalization and communalism. Joining hands with men and women in working out concrete strategies to bring about new and just structures will hasten the reign of God which is our common mission.

16. *To invite reflection on this theme by CRI, CBCI, etc.*

Wider reflection by all India Catholic bodies will help disseminate the agenda of partnership. Policy-making bodies should be sensitive to the specific needs of women and men engaged in the Church's ministries.

17. *To start new forms of Ministries*

Partnership is to be realized in initiating collaborative ventures for the transformation of structures of domination, independent of traditional forms of ministry. Partnership is also to be realized by sending religious personnel to work with groups or movements already working beyond the boundaries of religion.

18. The mission of the Church, is to usher in the reign of God actualizing justice, equality and freedom. In order to bring about effective partnership in the Church we need to work for changing the oppressive structures as well as transforming the consciousness of both women and men. There should be a critical attitude towards the patriarchal mindset operative in theology and literature. An urgency of re-reading the Bible from feminist perspectives is felt today. If we develop a pneumatological ecclesiology there is a good deal of scope to build up a Church rooted in gender justice and partnership.

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