**Catholic National and Regional Education Secretaries Meet**

**CBCI Office for Education and Culture**

**22nd January 2021**

**A Report**

The Catholic National and Regional Education Secretaries Virtual Meet organised by the CBCI Office for Education and Culture was held on 22nd January 2021. The meeting was presided over by Most Rev. Thomas D’Souza, Archbishop of Kolkata and the Chairperson of CBCI Office for Education and Culture. Member Bishop Most Rev. Andrews Thazhath was present through the meeting and the Other Member Bishop Most Rev. John Moolachira had informed earlier about the meeting of Assam Bishops which was on the same day. Rev. Fr. Jervis D’Souza, Deputy Secretary General of CBCI was also present for the meeting. The meeting was participated by 25 national and regional level Secretaries of the Catholic Church in India. Both Xavier Board President and the Secretary Fr. Antony Arackal and Sr. Annamma Philip respectively were present for the meeting.

The meeting began with a prayer by the President where he invoked the Holy Spirit to bestow on us courage and light to face the challenging realities of today. He then invited the participants for the meeting and mentioned that this meeting was the first one in 2021 and wished everyone good health and God’s blessings!

**The Inaugural Address by the President**

The Chairperson in his opening address made the following remarks: The year 2020 has taught us many lessons and even through many of its challenges we Educators learnt to be CREATIVE and DIGITAL. Though the National Education Policy 2020 was not presented in the Parliament and the country lacks technical, infrastructural and above all the preparedness of the teachers and the management, yet the process of implementation has begun. There are still many issues unclear about when the schools will re-open and how long the online classes will go on! How can we be prepared to face the future?

The Archbishop also said that he is aware that some parents have been withdrawing their children from our schools and putting them up for free education in Government schools due to fee issues. He said in West Bengal the parents had gone to the High Court to reduce school fee and the Court had ordered 80% fee to be paid. He exhorted all the regions to pay more attention to the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020 and take up issues with the State Governments as and when necessary.

The National Secretary of CBCI OEC thanked the Chairperson for his introductory remarks and for bringing to our attention some of the pertinent issues of education in India today.

**Presentation of CBCI EDU BASE**

The CBCI Office for Education and Culture has initiated a process of gathering and updating data on the Catholic Educational Institutions in India with the help of a software named as CBCI EDU BASE. This software is developed by BOSCOSOFT, a software company run by the Salesians of Don Bosco. The tool is ready and the national office has put together whatever data it has so far and these are basic data of over 8500 Catholic educational institutions in India.

The National and Regional Secretaries were given a presentation of this software and the process of data gathering by Rev. Fr/Dr. Thaddeus Gregory SDB, the Director of BOSCOSOFT. The participants were very happy with the presentation and responding to the presentation, the Chairperson Most Rev. Thomas D’Souza, thanked Fr. Thaddeus and said he looked forward to the information about our Catholic Educational Institutions. Fr. Joe Mannath, Fr. D. F. Bosco and Fr. Joe Manipadam and a few others congratulated the initiative but warned that gathering of data in the Catholic Church is indeed a herculean task and that we should not give up in gathering this vital data. There was also a problem of misunderstanding if a particular school has primary, high school and higher secondary sections or if each of them would be considered as different schools in some places.

Fr. Maria Charles, the National Secretary had then explained how this process was unfolding. He called for a meeting at the regional level with the Regional Secretaries to take this process forward in the month of February. For CBCI EDUBASE to be a success, the participants asserted that regional and diocesan secretaries needed training. He said the software was designed to give information about our Educational institutions at the local, diocesan, regional and national level. The process of gathering information would be through only the Regional and Diocesan Secretaries, he explained., but they have to be inclusive of all diocesan and religious schools and schools run by the Catholics. It was also opined that the National and Provincial level coordinators of Education commissions in various religious congregations within the Region could be also roped in. Sr. Annamma Philip, Secretary of Xavier Board also asked if data of Higher Education institutions would be included in the present data collection and she was assured that this data collection included data on schools, higher education institutes and technical institutes.

**Challenges in the Education Ministry Today**

**Fr. Joy Cyprian**, Regional Secretary of West Bengal Region said that it depended on the Government to re-open the schools in the State and being the year of Election, Education of students is a top priority for everyone. He said there were a lot of setbacks in the school year of 2020-21 as in every part of the country. In an average, 50% of parents have not paid the school fee and the schools are also offering some resistance to the parents. While there is no income, the teachers are paid full salary, he said. The early re-opening of schools can solve a lot of issues. The online classes are not the best options as children’s eyesight are affected.

**Fr. Joe Manipadam**, National Coordinator for Education and Culture for Salesians of Don Bosco also spoke of problems with fee collection across Don Bosco Schools and many of the schools have written off the fee for this year in solidarity with the parents who had no regular income. He also said there has been a 10% dropout in our schools this year. He emphasised on implementing the National Education Policy and the revision of Catholic Education Policy. Though online classes are not that effective, we need to take care of continual education.

**Fr. D. F. Bosco**, the Regional Secretary of Tamil Nadu said in his region a lot of programmes were initiated to create awareness on NEP 2020. There were many protests in different forms (placard, signature campaign, Teachers unions protests) against the implementation of NEP 2020. He also said that in Tamil Nadu, regular classes have begun for X and XII class students and regarding digital education, the poor did not benefit from it much as it was unaffordable. There are many schools in the region which could not pay full salary to the teachers as school fees were not paid by the parents. There are still apprehensions about school complex and school clusters in the region and many of these challenges posed by NEP 2020 are yet to be explored.

**Fr. Joe Mannath**, National Secretary of Catholic Religious of India (CRI) said that we are in a hurry to get back to starting the schools but COVID 19 has taught us the flaws of that existing school system by way of study methods, assessment methods and the competitive models but we need learn a new way of offering education. We need a lot of changes in what we impart and how we impart to the students.

**Fr. Eugene Lobo SJ**, Regional Secretary of Karnataka said that in Karnataka too X and XII std classes have begun. The Government also has decided not to have classes up to 5th std and to conduct no exams for them. Here in this State too the parents are not willing to pay school fee and the Government is changing its orders on school fee very often and they are not worried about teachers; plight. Since there was no exams conducted, the last year fee too was not collected. He also observed that school data can be very erratic this year as students are leaving the schools for free education. The Government is also insisting upon installing safety measures and maintenance facilities with the renewal of the schools. The Karnataka Government has started implementing the National Education Policy and no Catholic School is represented in any of the committees formed for implementing the NEP 2020.

**Fr. Martin George**, Secretary, Department of Education CMI observed that we need to accept NEP 2020 and get ready to implement it. He said that State Governments have their own policies and the problems faced by CMI schools are also different in each State. Regarding fee collection while some schools have collected 70% of fees, there are many schools which have not collected more than 20% fee. Paying salary to the teachers has also become a huge challenge.

**Sr. Mariette**, General Coordinator for Education, Bethany Sisters said that forming of School complex is difficult and she suggested that efforts could be made to form such complex among minority schools. She also said that teachers are not ready and they need to be trained to adopt to the new NEP 2020. She also said that the schools are sandwiched between the Government, parent and teachers in imparting online education effectively. They also tried to motivate the parents through the teachers to pay the school fee as the teachers wanted 100% salary.

**Fr. Jacob Karamkuzhy**, General Councillor and General Secretary of MSFS was positive about managing fee collection in their schools. Initially, he observed, the COVID 19 situation was like a summer vacation and as challenges arose, we had learnt to cope with it and we have fairly managed it well.

**Fr. V.K. Swamy**, Regional Secretary of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh said that in his region, they had created a lot of awareness about National Education Policy. In this region, as there are two different Governments, their education policies also differ and these pose challenges to the Church. The schools have officially reopened in February this year and the exams for X and XII std will be conducted in schools and will not be a virtual one. More than 50 schools in the region have managed to collect about 50% of school fee and he also observed in Andhra Pradesh, the minority schools have many challenges to face.

**Fr. Charles Leon**, Regional Secretary of Kerala Region observed that in Kerala many schools are run by the Government and about 50% of the Schools are Government aided and that there are only 10% of schools which come under private sector. The parents are aware of the online education and hence fee collection was not a problem in Kerala region. The main issue is that integral growth of the children are lacking and that a study has revealed that children are psychologically affected. Even parents and teachers are facing psychological disorders. The Education Sector of KCBC has been very active and they have prepared material on National Education Policy and have distributed 10,000 copies to people. The Church has taken a pro-active approach towards NEP 2020 and they have prepared a 20 point implementation programme. The online programmes are organized at zonal level. The Higher Education Management has issues with the Government.

While KCBC has been recognized by the Government of Kerala and even in the recent appointment of teachers, though the issue of appointment of teachers (by management and Government appointment) of 1:1 is *sub-judice*, the KCBC has come an agreement of one time settlement and it has the appointment of 3500 teachers. He also explained that in Kerala, dioceses do not have a Diocesan level Education Secretary but have manager for School and colleges separately and the system varies for both Latin and Syrian rite dioceses.

**Most Rev. Andrews Thazhath**, Archbishop of Trichur said about having prepared a draft for the manifesto for the forthcoming Kerala elections on the part of Christians. This was prepared to inform political leaders about the views of Catholics and it was prepared by the Catholic lay leaders in Trichur with the cooperation and help from Catholic leaders in different parts of Kerala.

These suggestions are given together with this report for those who would like to prepare similar ones to approach their own State Governments.

**Fr. Biju Thottankara**, Regional Secretary for Central Region Madhya Pradesh shared his views on NEP 2020 saying that we cannot oppose it but we need to go step by step in implementing while improving ourselves. He also hoped that there will be certain amendments in the NEP 2020. We also need to learn to upgrade our imagination while dealing with situation of fee collection as well as online education. While he observed that it is not easy to influence the Government, yet we need to develop more tactics to influence the Governments.

**Fr. Maria Charles SDB**, National Secretary for CBCI OEC said that he is calling for regional level meetings with the Regional Chairperson for Education, Secretary and the Diocesan level Secretaries to discuss about various education issues connected with the Region and also to have a training programme for the Secretaries to take forward CBCI EDUBASE.

**Discussion on the Revision of Catholic Education Policy 2007**

In the light of the National Education Policy 2020, our Catholic Education Policy also needs to be revised. Efforts have been made in the past two years to revise the policy and there have been sub-committees appointed to work on the draft of the revised policy. But the Secretaries agreed that we need to revise it in the light of the NEP 2020. At this juncture, the revision of Catholic Policy is also important as to give a new impetus to the Catholic Church on our Education Ministry. We need to prophetic as well as ingenious in reading the signs of the times while remaining faithful to the teachings of Jesus and the Church. The National Secretary Fr. Maria Charles said that this is indeed a priority for the CBCI OEC and that he will once again get different groups to work on the revision of the Catholic Education Policy 2007 at the earliest.

As Church has been a pioneer in imparting modern education in India and been a missionary in taking education to the periphery of the nation, we need to be always inventive and charismatic in reaching out to the millions of young people who need to learn together with academic and skill education, higher values of education.

As the time was short, there were many others who could not share their views but we look forward to such meetings as often as possible.

The meeting came to conclusion with the final words of the Chairperson who thanked everyone for sharing and for participating in the meeting. He then said a prayer and gave his blessings.

Report prepared by:

**Fr. Maria Charles SDB**

National Secretary,

CBCI Office for Education and Culture

New Delhi