

IT'S HIGH TIME

WOMEN RELIGIOUS SPEAK UP ON
GENDER JUSTICE IN THE INDIAN CHURCH



Dr Hazel D'Lima

Cletus Zuzarte

Pallavi Xalxo

College of Social Work
Nirmala Niketan, 2019

A STUDY COMMISSIONED BY THE CRI (WOMEN)

IT'S HIGH TIME

WOMEN RELIGIOUS SPEAK UP ON
GENDER JUSTICE IN THE INDIAN CHURCH

IT'S HIGH TIME

WOMEN RELIGIOUS SPEAK UP ON
GENDER JUSTICE IN THE INDIAN CHURCH

Dr Hazel D'Lima
Cletus Zuzarte
Pallavi Xalxo

A STUDY COMMISSIONED BY THE CRI (WOMEN)

Copyright © 2020 Conference of Religious India (Women)

Cover Design: Archdiocese of Mumbai Charitable Foundation
– Catholic Communication Center

Printed at: ST PAULS Press Training School, Mumbai

Published by: CRI Women's Executive 2018

First Print 2021

Price: ₹100.00

(For Private Circulation)

CONTENTS



FOREWORD	7
PREFACE.....	11
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	15
1. Introduction.....	17
2. Charisms: Understanding And Manifestation Challenges	25
3. A Glimpse Into The Problems Experienced By Sisters.....	30
<i>Low Wages</i>	34
<i>Property Matters</i>	35
<i>Reflections On The Responses Of Sisters On Property Matters</i>	40
<i>Harassment Of Sisters</i>	42
<i>Ignoring Personal / Professional Competence In The Mission</i>	44

<i>Refusal Of Sacramental Celebration</i>	46
<i>Verbal Abuse</i>	47
<i>Verbal Abuse From The Pulpit.....</i>	48
4. Dialogue With Hierarchy: Challenges Faced	50
<i>Positive Outcomes</i>	51
<i>Negative Outcomes</i>	52
<i>Causes For The Lack Of Consideration Of Clergy / Collaborators.....</i>	55
5. Time To Speak Out!	60
6. Seeking Avenues Of Change: Formation.....	63
7. Suggestions For Change To Improve Working Relations With The Hierarchy	69
8. An Analytical Reflection.....	72
9. An Action Plan For An Effective Follow-Up Of The Study	80
10. Conclusion	85

FOREWORD

I was indeed honoured and felt highly privileged when Sr. Hazel D'Lima approached me to write a foreword for the Study Report of CRI Women on the issues women religious are facing in India today in their relation to the clergy in the context of their mission. At the outset let me express my sincere sentiments of joy and appreciation to the CRI Women for having undertaken this timely and much needed survey. Sr. Hazel and her team have put together a good report that points to the tense relationship that exists between the women religious and a good number of the clergy with whom they work. The report provides material for serious reflection on the part of the religious and their superiors on the one hand and the bishops and the priests on the other. I heartily congratulate Sr. Hazel and her team for their excellent work.

For the past 40 years many women in the Church have been reflecting on God, the Scriptures, the Church, the world and their own work through the eyes and the hearts of women. A new world opened out before them and a new awareness emerged which has helped them to understand that they have an equal share in the liberation brought about by Jesus and that they too are greatly responsible to make their contribution through their mission work in the Church and in the world. It is my deep conviction that a

person deeply rooted in God would never compromise with this non-negotiable element of gender equality. Gender issues are not merely women's issues. They are human issues, moral issues and spiritual issues. We, as images of God, deserve to live in dignity. In Gandhiji's words: "To call women the weaker sex is a libel; it is men's injustice to women". Such attitudes are often silently lived and not openly expressed. We cannot sit back passively on such a culture of silence in this matter.

This book is the result of the breaking of the silence by the representatives of the 130,000 Indian women religious who belong to nearly 300 Congregations and who are involved in various educational and health services, legal help, community development projects, animating the media of communication, inter-religious movements and other innovative social and pastoral ministries to the needy and the marginalized in every nook and corner of the remote areas as well as the cities of our country. They do excel in their services and are recognized by the people. They are a big force for good in India and especially in the Church. They have now had the courage to speak the truth about their situation in the Church publicly, ready to face the consequences and hoping for change. Though the team received responses only from 40% of the major superiors, the situation holds true for all women religious everywhere in the country. Jesus will certainly endorse their openness and courage saying, "The Truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32)

I was in Rome at the Synod on "Consecrated Life" in 1994. In one of the interventions, a bishop said, "in the Church, 75% of the consecrated people are women. If there

are no women, there is no Consecrated life and no Church. Hence the future of the Church depends upon the response we would be giving to the women religious. If they don't feel our support, eventually the Church will lose women too in this century." When I read some of the encyclicals and other documents of the Popes, I see that they are very much in favour of gender sensitivity and the dignity of women. The bishops at the Asian Synod were most concerned that "the Church should be a participatory church in which no one feels excluded", acknowledging that the "the contribution of women has often been undervalued or ignored" (EA, 34). Even after 2000 years of their existence, half of the followers of Jesus are not counted. They are neither visible nor audible in the Church. In India women constitute nearly 82% of the religious. The Synod of Bishops on "Consecrated Life" recommended very strongly that competent women religious must be given responsible tasks in the Church and that they should be included in the process of planning and decision making at all levels.

We have become victims to certain stereotyped cultural myths of our times. Popular perceptions about women as 'second class citizens' should be changed. This Study report should act as an energizing eye-opener, not as a resigned eye-closer. We can live in a denial mode, but reality will continue to prick our conscience, if it is not dead. Re-reading, re-constructing our way of seeing and interpreting our social realities, our theology and our mission is the need of the hour for both men and women. This will inevitably lead to tensions and oppositions. Are we ready to take a stand and change our age-old traditions and attitudes?

I am sure that the courageous, creative and thought-provoking responses of women religious presented to us in this summary presentation by the Team will be read, reflected on and seriously lived by all those who are truly interested in building the New Kingdom Community of Jesus.

SR. INIGO SSA

Former Superior General

Society of the Sisters of St. Anne

PREFACE

A few months ago, Sr. Hazel D'Lima called me in connection with a study she had been asked to do on behalf of the CRI Women's Section. The study concerned gender injustice faced by women religious in the Catholic Church in India. She explained the background and asked me if I would be willing to write a preface as a male member of our Church. She felt that it would have a better impact if men and women were both aware of the situation of injustice and discrimination that women religious face in our Church, and if both together could see how far this was from the 'beloved community' Jesus envisaged. We could only right this terrible wrong if we worked together. There was no way I could disagree with this wisdom and so am penning a few lines.

As I write this, the Synod on the Amazon is drawing to a close. It is an amazing Church event. One of the highlights of the Synod is the recognition of the selfless and inspiring work of women religious in the Amazon region. We are told that 60% of all ministries in that part of the world is led and organized by women. Over the past three Synods, the role of women in our Church is being more and more highlighted. It seems self-evident to me that the Spirit of God is attempting to wipe the scales from our eyes and see what is becoming more and more obvious to everyone. Without the active

presence and participation of women in all walks of life, our world will continue to struggle for meaning.

The study conducted by Nirmala Niketan is long overdue. For many of us who have been aware of this situation for a while now, there is little that is new. I have heard such stories from sisters over the years and gone through the whole gamut of emotions from anger to disbelief at male arrogance, to frustration, sorrow and shame. I have accompanied sister superiors as they sought justice and a listening ear from bishops and male religious provincials. I have sat in silence as individual sisters wept through telling their stories. Enough! Its High Time.... This is now the call for action.

The Study clearly outlines what women religious go through, and the way in which they are belittled and taken for granted. Respect is obviously absent. We see highlighted the clericalism that Pope Francis is fighting against: the bullying and spiritual blackmail sisters face, the sense of entitlement that Priests are taught regarding their special status and their right to be served, the patriarchal mentality that sees women as possessions and inferiors.

I am so glad that the CRI Women's Section has gone through with this. As religious congregations depend on the ability for good relationships between themselves and the Diocese, a certain amount of delicacy is called for. So, I admire the decision to go ahead with this despite ruffling ecclesiastical feathers. Of course, it is going to cause concern among some bishops as questions will be raised and fingers pointed. I can also understand the helplessness some of them faced with recalcitrant priests who will

not obey. Perhaps the time has come for more stringent protocols and less tolerance for inappropriate behaviour.

It is disappointing that only around a quarter of the Women Religious Leaders participated in the survey. The delicacy of the matter and the fear of reprisals could have been a factor. I also wonder how much more telling the results would have been if individual sisters, instead of superiors were interviewed.

The Study makes it clear that all of us are called to deep soul searching and honest self-appraisal. We are all called to accept Jesus' opening words in the Gospels: Change your way of thinking and open yourself to the Good News! Pope Francis is constantly calling on our clerical church to seek conversion. He is moving it from a Eurocentric church to a global church of the poor. This means that we are all on a steep learning curve. Yet look at the opposition he faces from within the Church itself – cardinals, bishops and priests. No one gives up power willingly. We are called to a huge letting go of privilege, power and position.

I like the recommendations that are offered in these pages. It is certainly a way to begin. How often the sisters are their own worst enemies! They have been brought up to treat clerics as special people and to defer to them. That needs to change. They have been trained to obey without questioning. That too needs to change. They need to learn from their sisters in the world that being a woman, does not mean being weak or docile. If they are to take their rightful place in our Church and our world, they are called to realize that formation is more than saying prayers and being 'good' – it is about being fully human. To be a Christian is not to

be a religious man or woman; to be a Christian is to be a whole man or a whole woman (Dietrich Bonhoeffer). The only ones we can change are ourselves.

This is not an easy time for any of us. But it is a blessed time. It is a time of birth and hope. Let us be brave. I pray that the courage shown in this study is the first step in our conversion.

Every midwife knows
 that not until a mother's womb
 softens from the pain of labour will a way
 unfold and the infant find that opening to be born.
 Oh friend!
 There is treasure in your heart, it is heavy with child.
 Listen.
 All the awakened ones,
 like trusted midwives are saying,
 "Welcome this pain.
 It opens the dark passage of Grace".

– *Jalauddin Rumi*

Br. Philip Pinto, cfc
Former Superior General
 Congregation of Christian Brothers

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The CRI Women's Section is indeed proud to acknowledge the completion of the study "Its High Time" concerning Women Religious and Gender Justice in the Indian Church, which was initiated in May 2018, commissioned by the then CRI Women's Executive.

Much thought, exploration and persevering action has brought to fruition a study that was greatly desired by the National Assembly of women religious in their aspiration for a fuller and more enlightened participation in the mission of the Church in India.

We wish to express our appreciation of the many collaborators who by their positive interest have supported the project, the first of its kind, undertaken by the CRI Women's Section.

We are thankful to:

The CRI Women's Section for commissioning the study, and committing themselves to the follow-up action proposed on a long term basis. Our thankfulness extends to the CRI National Executive (Women) and to the Western Region CRI for their financial support to the study;;

The laywomen and religious who helped in the designing of the questionnaire and their critical observations in the development of the study;

The Research Department of the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, which placed the expertise of the Faculty and the service of their administrative staff at our disposal; Sr. Joeyanne and Sr. Jessy of The Daughters of St. Paul who worked at the initial transfer of data thus facilitating the progress of the study;

Sr. Inigo SSA and Bro. Philip Pinto CFC who graciously took time to write the inspiring Foreword and Preface, encouraging us in the timeliness and relevance of the study;

The Director of ST PAULS Press Training School, Bandra, for their patient and constant guidance in the printing of this study.

Fr. Nigel Barrett and Fr. Melroy Mendonca of the Archdiocesan Communication Centre, Mumbai, who have so aptly designed the cover page of our study. We also thank Marcia and Astrid for their interest and collaboration in the designing process.

Finally, we thank Sr. Noella de Souza MCJ who has painstakingly edited the text, and has played a pivotal role as an active link with the printer, the cover designers, the religious and others who have encouraged and collaborated in this study.

Sr. Rita Pinto RSCJ

President, CRI Women's Executive (2018)

Sr. Jacintha D'Souza DHM

Vice-President, CRI Women's Executive (2018)

INTRODUCTION



At the start of the year 2018, L'Osservatore Romano published an article, "The Almost Free Work of Sisters" by Marie Lucile Kubacki on the widespread exploitation of nuns in the Catholic Church, based on the comments of several unnamed nuns. This article drew several responses from priests, especially from some religious sisters agreeing with the description of the situation and drawing attention to the exploitation of sisters in the Indian context¹.

Journalists started contacting office bearers of the CRI Women's section to ascertain their views since India has the largest number of religious sisters (estimated at about 90,000) in a single country.

¹ Nuns servants, Indians speak up by Jose Kavi in mattersindia.com in March 2018.

A sum up of the two articles as well as the responses from priests and sisters highlight the following:

- ◇ Seminarians during their formation get used to seeing sisters managing the kitchen and house-hold affairs of church institutions which make them see sisters as mere servants and they get used to ordering them around even if the sister is much senior to them.
- ◇ Low wages are another area of concern. Sisters working in diocesan schools or hospitals are not paid just wages. It is taken for granted that sisters are there to serve and that their congregations will take care of their needs.
- ◇ Many parish priests tend to see women religious as handmaids meant to carry out orders and fall in line with their vision of what Christian life in the parish should be. If this does not happen, they feel disappointed and frustrated. The negativity on the part of the priest expresses itself in negative criticism from the pulpit, refusing to celebrate Mass for the sisters or administer the sacraments.
- ◇ Nuns do not receive their share of social recognition and their rightful place in the church. They are always menial servants and foot soldiers of the hierarchical church with muffled voices and rights.
- ◇ The vow of obedience is abused by authorities to suit their gains with the complicity of the nuns' superiors.

By way of finding a way out of the exploitative situations, a few religious women expressed the following:

- ◇ Women religious leaders must speak up without fear. Most nuns are beholden to the hierarchy and

clergy and are willing to follow orders, rather than be true to their charism, vision and ministry.

- ◇ While priests and nuns may have different roles in the church, there must be gender equality, not subservience, nor servitude.
- ◇ With women's education and training they become a threat to the male clergy instead of being recognised as a strength for the mission.
- ◇ The importance of a more enlightened formation for priests and religious was stressed.

The back and forth discussion that followed the publication of the two articles prompted the office bearers of the CRI Women's Section to meet and share their views along with a few interested religious and catholic laywomen who play an active part in the cause of women in the Church. It was recognized that there is increasing exchange of views both within the Church and the wider public on the status of life and working conditions of women religious worldwide and particularly in India. Such deliberations have received increased attention with the highly publicized cases of sexual harassment of women religious at the hands of the clergy. Many sisters felt that the situation has hardly changed over the years and matters are swept under the carpet "discreetly" so as to avoid criticism of those who are in leadership positions in the Church. Such a situation demands a well-thought out and reasoned response which would be more effective when backed by hard data and evidence. Till the present, there has been no concrete study commissioned on an all-India basis, to ascertain with specific tools the ground situation.

This study is a response to such a felt need, an effort to fulfil the mandate of the women's wing of the CRI, India, which raised the issues of concern and hence commissioned such a study. The mandate of the study was to identify problematic issues faced by women religious in their relationship with clergy in different parts of the country, so as to find constructive ways of dealing with such issues.

In view of the rationale outlined above, the study proposed is not aimed at presenting a comprehensive analysis of all the dimensions that make up the gamut of relationships between women religious and the clergy. Such a study would involve samples of various parties involved in the life of the Church in India and would be of such a mammoth scale, beyond the competence of the CRI. The present study also keeps in mind the CBCI document (2010) "Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India" which through the organization of workshops and seminars has desired, to create an awareness of the gender policy with suggestions for its application at local, regional and national levels. Another initiative was the drawing up of CBCI Guidelines to deal with sexual harassment at the Workplace (2017). The present study aims at complementing and building on such initiatives by providing concrete and reliable data on problem areas which cry out for the application of these documents. Further, the study also aims to identify and appreciate good practices that are already in existence, which one could learn from, and thus make concrete suggestions for the actualization of the Church in India as a discipleship of equals.

Since a National Assembly of the CRI had been announced for the last week of May 2018 in Chennai, it was decided to use the occasion to communicate with the major superiors of women's congregations, to elicit their thinking and plan a follow-up with their collaboration. With the permission of the Executive committee of the CRI Women's Section as well as that of the General Secretary, CRI, the President of the Women's Section delegated two experienced senior sisters to speak to the Assembly of major superiors about the survey that was proposed to be conducted. By way of preparation for the survey, the articles that had appeared in the *L'Osservatore Romano*, as well as the outline of the proposed survey were circulated.

The response of the sisters present at the Assembly was overwhelming. The oral interventions made by several of the sisters made it clear that they welcomed such an initiative and thanked the CRI for the same. They assured the organisers of their readiness to participate in the survey. The sisters were given time to go through the questionnaire and ask for whatever clarifications they needed. With the full consent of the Assembly, a schedule for the submission of the survey was drawn up with the possibility of sending their replies online or by post to the Research Unit of the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, in Mumbai by the end of August 2018.

A study regarding the occupations of sisters in the Church in India as well as the working relations with priests and the hierarchy had never been done earlier, hence the situation of work-involvement as well as work-relations had to be explored. It was not merely a question of knowing the number of sisters in menial or other occupations (as alluded to in the article) but also understanding the perception of

sisters regarding their engagement in the mission of the Church. The data required was therefore of a quantitative as well as of a qualitative nature. Thus, the CRI initiated its exploration accordingly.

The specific objectives of the study were:

- ◇ To understand the engagement of women religious in various services and in the apostolic work of the Church.
- ◇ To explore the perception of sisters regarding their status, working conditions and working relationships with priests and the hierarchy in the context of their mission.
- ◇ To find out the scope and challenge of dialogue with priests and bishops regarding their work situation in the mission.
- ◇ To explore possible solutions and suggestions in the context of the work situation and the scope of further development in the mission.
- ◇ To explore suggestions of religious sisters, regarding the formation of sisters and seminarians to acquire the maturity necessary for pastoral and professional relationships in the mission.
- ◇ To invite the reflection of sisters on their role as consecrated women in the Church, responsible to contribute to the building of the Church in India.

A team of women religious from the forum of Religious of Justice and Peace as well as Satyashodak (a mixed group of religious and laity from women's organizations) worked together and drafted a questionnaire which was finalized by, Dr. Hazel D'Lima, Dr. Gracy Fernandes and Sr. Noella de Souza. The questionnaire retained the essential points

mentioned in the article and sought to ascertain whether the claims made in the article actually reflected the condition of women religious in India. In addition to this the tool provided space for the respondent to corroborate the statements with actual experiences from their life which was analysed qualitatively by the researchers.

These questionnaires were circulated to all the major superiors of religious congregations in the country. Of these, 121 respondents participated by their written responses to the study. The Research Team ensured that there was confidentiality maintained at every step of the Research Process from the sending of the tool, receiving of the data, selection of the data collection to data analysis.

The Research Team and their roles:

College of Social Work Research Unit	Collect the information, entering the transcripts into the report and proof reading of the draft.
College of Social Work – Nirmala Niketan Institute	Space (a separate room with no access to outsiders other than the team members) was provided to ensure that confidentiality of the topic was upheld during the discussions and framing of the draft report.
Daughters of St. Paul	Data Entry into SPSS, a statistical package (that enables a researcher to code, systematically classify data and take relevant representation of data through various statistical tests).
College of Social Work – Faculty Team (appointed by Dr. Lidwin Dias)	Data Cleaning, Analysis and Report Drafting
CRI Office Bearers	Review of the draft report, to give feedback on the objectivity to be maintained and correspondence with the objectives of the study.

The responses of the participants brought out the importance of the qualitative data but specifically the meaningfulness of the qualitative information. The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS whereas the qualitative data was categorized into themes which were highlighted by the actual words of the respondents. The questions framed in the tool enabled the respondents to articulate their experiences in qualitative words which formed the bulk of the data collected. The responses enabled the Research Team to capture the sentiments of the women religious as objectively as possible and to highlight their actual plight. This report is a forum or a platform where the hidden voices got an opportunity to speak out, “It’s High Time...!”

The protocols/tools used for the purpose of collecting information from the research participants in this study may be availed from the authors, on request.

- 2 -

**CHARISMS:
UNDERSTANDING AND
MANIFESTATION
CHALLENGES**



Charisms are gifts and graces of the Spirit for the universal mission of the Church. Every charism of religious life is a gift of the Holy Spirit within the body of the Church, for her mission, within the reciprocity and wholeness of gifts in the Church (universal and local). The religious vocation animated by a specific charism is a call to holiness and to mission. The specific purpose of the congregation is expressed in the particular mission in which the Sisters are engaged.

When we talk about ‘understanding the Charism’ of one’s congregation, it can be understood as the way the

contribution of the religious is accepted in the context of a situation which involves the dynamics of work relationships with the clergy. “In some instances, and in some dioceses, they give us the freedom to share and work according to our charism whereas others do not; it all depends on the individual”. “Some of the Priests understand our Charism and show respect when we take leave from pastoral ministry for our annual retreats, recollections and other congregation programmes. Others show a lack of understanding and behave like task masters creating an atmosphere of friction in the parishes”.

Table 1: Clergy Collaborators / Employers understand the Charism of the Congregations

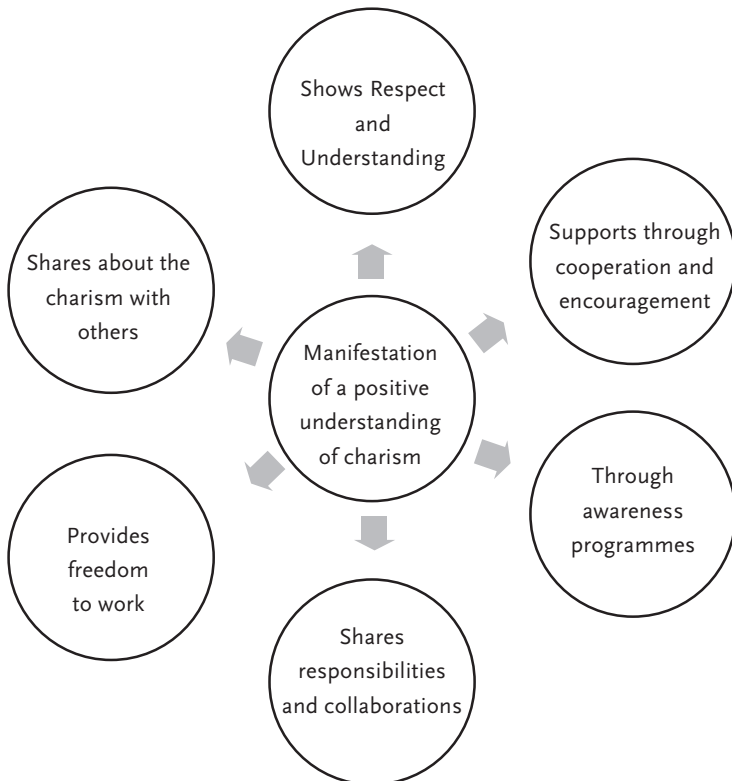
Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	48	39.7
No	37	30.6
Both Yes & No	20	16.5
No Response	12	9.9
Sub-total	117	96.7
Not applicable	4	3.3
Total	121	100

Sisters engaged in various ministries work in collaboration with the diocese or with other religious congregations. The main activities that the participants of the study said that they were engaged in are not confined merely to sacristy work but a multiplicity of works needed in the parish. These ministries include a vast range of pastoral, religious, educational, healthwork in parishes:

Family Visits, Liturgical Services, Teaching Catechism, Basic Christian Communities (BCCs), Parish Council, Family Apostolate, Marriage Counselling, Boarding Schools for Children, Evangelization, Eucharistic Retreats, Perpetual Adoration Centres, Non-formal Sectors, Work with Youth, Women and Children at Risk, Young Girls, Street Children, Education, Medical Apostolate, Working for Orphans, School Dropouts, Working in Leprosaria, HIV Centres, Free Hostels, Empowerment of People.

The sisters felt encouraged in their engagement because of a positive manifestation of understanding by the clergy in the following ways:

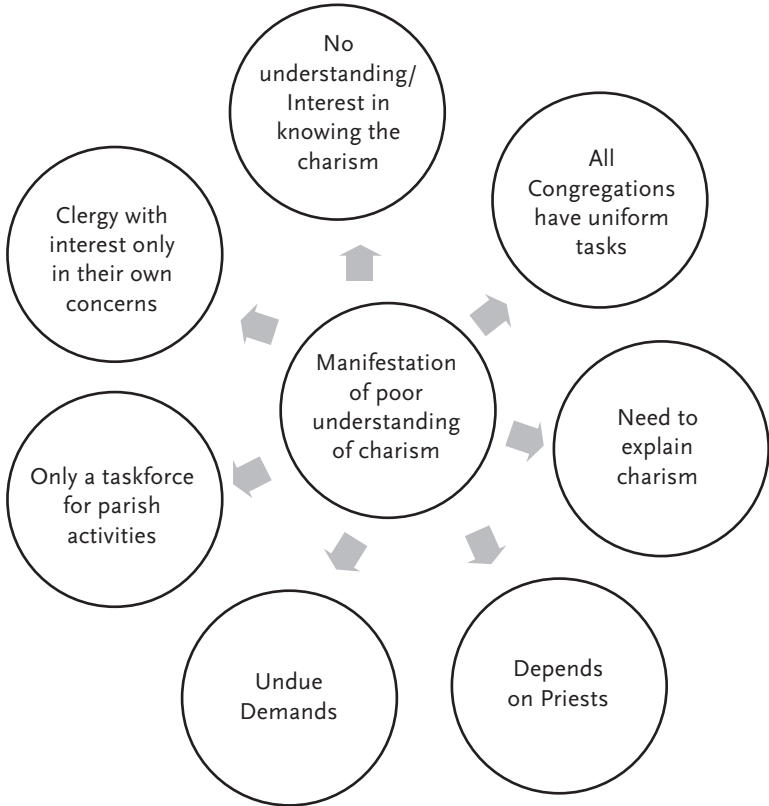
Diagram 1:
Manifestation of a positive understanding of the charism



The contribution of sisters is appreciated more in the execution of parish tasks rather than the genuine interest and understanding of their charism. “They are not bothered about ‘charism’, they want maximum service from the Sisters”, “Priests do not care about the charism, spiritual life of the congregation or interest in the life of Sisters, only work to be done... they only want cheap labour”.

The understanding of the charism is seen more from the lens of the attitude of the clergy. When a person is not encouraged or appreciated, there comes a feeling of hurt. When one respects the other partner in the mission there is a cordial relationship, consultation and understanding in decision making. The lack of understanding of the charism, both its spiritual life and mission orientation, is seen more in the disrespect of persons. “Some of the Priests do not acknowledge the uniqueness and spirituality of the congregation, they consider themselves to be superior to the Sisters and make fun of their Congregations”.

Diagram 2: Manifestation of a poor understanding of the charism



In the presence of a non-understanding environment, a few participants have expressed that the written contract with the diocese helps to clarify the role and contribution of the Congregation in keeping with its Charism as the following response indicates: “Fortunately, there is respect and mutual understanding between the province and the diocese. The written contract specifies the charism of the congregation”. Having a written contract can be upheld in most areas as the best practice to enter into a working relationship with a diocese and its representatives.

- 3 -

A GLIMPSE INTO THE PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY SISTERS



The two articles which were a take-off point for the present study mention several areas of exploitation concerning religious sisters in India. Since this is the first study of its kind, we were obliged to give the sisters some leads which could help them to spell out more clearly their own experience of problems faced. These leads taken from the articles are as follows:

- ◇ Low wages for work in ecclesiastical institutions
- ◇ Matters concerning property
- ◇ Harassment of sisters in their pastoral/apostolic engagements.

- ◇ Refusal to administer sacraments or celebrate Mass as a way of manifesting negative reactions to the sisters.
- ◇ Ignoring the personal or professional competence of sisters in the service of the mission
- ◇ Sisters humiliated by negative criticism from the pulpit.

The table below shows the frequency of the problem situation as filled by the respondents. Since most respondents had also filled the names of the diocese in which the problem situation occurred it has been possible to draw up a table showing broadly the regions as well as the number of dioceses in which a particular problem situation occurred more frequently.

To the question asking for examples of difficulties experienced, the respondents gave qualitative information on actual situations that took place and their perception of the particular happenings. Thus, one has a combination of quantitative and qualitative data on the points in question.

Table 2 (a): Problems experienced by Sisters

Problems	Frequency
Property matters	30
Ignoring personal and professional competence	10
Low wages	32
Harassment	33
Refusal of Sacraments	25
Total	140

Table 2 (b): Problems experienced by Sisters (Abuse)

Abuse	Frequency
Verbal Abuse	23
Verbal Abuse – Humiliation from the pulpit	30
Sexual Abuse	03
Total	56

Table 3: Types of Problems experienced by Sisters as per number of dioceses in geographical zones

Geographical Zones	Dioceses/ Cases	Property Matters	Harassment	Sacramental Blackmail	Abuse	Ignoring Prof. Comp	Humiliation from Pulpit
North	No. of Dioceses	5	8	3	6	3	5
	No. of Cases	8	12	3	8	3	6
North East	No. of Dioceses	6	0	1	0	2	1
	No. of Cases	10	0	1	0	2	1
South	No. of Dioceses	15	13	20	21	11	31
	No. of Cases	23	16	26	26	12	41
West	No. of Dioceses	7	5	1	0	5	4
	No. of Cases	8	6	1	0	5	5
East	No. of Dioceses	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
	No. of Cases	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
Central	No. of Dioceses	6	3	2	5	4	5
	No. of Cases	11	3	2	7	4	5
Central East	No. of Dioceses	8	1	2	1	1	2
	No. of Cases	8	1	2	1	1	2

(NB: Only dioceses mentioned in the responses feature in this table.
NR = No Response)

LOW WAGES

The sisters work in various institutions like schools, hospitals, parishes, homes for the aged as well as in parishes in rural as well as urban settings. They are among the lowest paid employees and sometimes not paid at all when working in sacristies, where they prepare for sacraments to be celebrated. They are expected to do all kinds of work even in other settings of the parish or institutions. The findings of this study reveal that nearly 32 participants specifically mentioned 'low wages' in reference to 47 dioceses. One respondent says: "Sisters who work in the school as principal or teacher are paid less than Rs. 10,000 a month and are expected to do the maximum work as a principal, clerk, ayah etc."

There are various reasons stated as to the reasons why sisters are paid low wages. They are 'retired', "they are superannuated" or they are 'collaborators' in the mission. Despite being qualified they are paid less in comparison with lay persons and even with male religious. In some cases, the salary is just nominal as in the case of caring for a priest in a clergy home.

From the responses it is seen that the salary for a principal is less than Rs. 10,000 and for teachers the salary ranges from Rs. 3,000 to 7,000. The lowest pay is given to those who are involved in pastoral work and those who work in the sacristy. In comparison to lay collaborators, the religious sisters receive the lowest pay. The wage is to be shared as it is given as a package deal to a group of sisters. In some places it is called a stipend or an allowance and it is not paid regularly. Those working in hospital settings (as in

one case the diocesan hospital) are paid only a stipend. The wages received are so low that sisters have to often depend on the Province to compensate for their basic needs. The pain and anguish experienced by the sisters is very well indicated in the statement made by a sister: "In most of the dioceses, the salary in the schools is much lower than what we pay to the teachers in our own schools; which means we are obliged to give Sisters to the diocesan schools with a low salary and employ a teacher in our schools paying a higher salary".

PROPERTY MATTERS

Land is a 'space' which is required to give a tangible witness of service to the community, e.g. a school or a hospital. The nature of work demands a definite space in order to achieve the goals of service. Such requests of service have been made to religious congregations at the time of their foundations in a parish. The emphasis was not to have papers of ownership but to render the services required for the people. Therefore, historically through the narratives it was observed that these lands were given to the religious to facilitate their service in the form of 'gift deeds' or 'an internal understanding' between the congregations and the hierarchy for the most part.

Today land has become a precious fixed asset the price of which has been soaring to become a source of finance and wealth to those who can lay claim to it. Given the fact that land has become a source of revenue, it has unfortunately become a bone of contention even in ecclesiastical circles where documents concerning the ownership of land transactions are mostly with the diocesan hierarchy. Thus,

the ownership of land has become a condition either to be under the control of the diocesan trust or to pay a rent or to pay the price of the land as per the current market value or eventually to leave the mission. As expressed by a participant, “The land given for the mission 50 and 60 years back, the dioceses are asking for rent or asking us to purchase the same with present market rate for the land or asking us to leave the place and hand over the property in the dioceses of w, x, y & z”. Those in authority generally made oral contracts keeping in mind primarily the interest of the service to be rendered in the mission. However, when the question of land ownership arises there is resistance to give ownership to the sisters.

Some responses show that women religious were not allowed to purchase land or were “allotted very little land for their use”. Even the transfer of the property to the name of the religious sisters has been held back. In addition, no proper documents (written legal records regarding the ownership of land) are handed over to the sisters. As stated by one of the participants, “The Bishop is not ready to have a written contract with the diocese, since we are diocesan sisters..., so far no written record is given. Recently, a community of a male congregation has been started near our novitiate and the Generalate is in the same compound. All the lands are in the name of diocese. Land is given in writing for the men congregation, not for us”. The internal written document written years ago is found at present to have no legal standing. Sisters find it very difficult to represent their case to the Church authorities concerned who ‘now’ state the need for ‘legal documents’ and not just ‘internal written documents’. The problematic regarding property matters

reflects the power relations between men and women in the church. The power over property is only one symptom of the power dynamics that lie within the structure of the church.

In a particular case one could see gender differences when it came to provide security measures on the properties where convents are built as compared to the diocesan properties: “It’s been said that the whole people live without walls then why you?” But the property of the parish and the diocese is well walled in.

Today there is a greater move towards the rectification of legal documents regarding the ownership of land. Ownership of Land is established when one has legal documents attesting the name of the owner and his/her ownership rights. The legal papers of most of the land in question have been in the name of the Diocese, not in the possession of the sisters who utilize the land for services. The land documents were not “handed over”. The terms of the possession of the land are often not clear to the religious sisters (an expectation which was communicated to the diocese), as it continues to be registered in the name of the diocese. The official documents continue to remain in the hands of the church authorities, the sisters do not have any bargaining power and the authority or hierarchy of the church retains the power to take decisions. Since the sisters often do not have written or legal documents, they remain in a very ambiguous position before the public authority. Sisters have been on properties for a long time, and have no document to prove the legal title which makes it difficult for them to initiate new works. Now the dioceses want to reclaim these lands for various purposes like expansion or construction of churches, schools or staircases. The

sisters over time wish to develop their property in line with the services rendered; however, they cannot as the official legal papers continue to remain in the hands of the Church authority. Even in instances where the land legal title is clearly in the name of the sisters the diocese continues to utilize the property for their own purpose without consulting the religious congregation.

In a particular case it was more than 70 years that land was given to build a convent and school. At present “the Church has included our building in their RTC²” which means that the sisters are not able to utilize the land documents “for the school recognition renewal purpose”.

When the sisters were invited to the mission there was an expectation that they would continue their mission on the land. It would appear that the diocese wants to retain ownership of the land since they keep making different demands and use the land occupied by the sisters in different ways according to their purposes. In many cases it has been noted that the dioceses have difficulty in parting with the land as retaining ownership gives them the power to make modifications on the land for their own purposes, as for instance, to build a hall, for fundraising and construction of a staircase and toilets on the congregational property without their consent. The land given at the time of the foundation was then taken back and used for various other purposes. “The land, which was given to us at the foundation time, has been reclaimed for expanding the

² RTC = record of rights, tenancy and crop inspection is referred to as RTC in short or “pahani” in local language. Pahani (RTC is an important land record that contains details of land such as owner’s details, area assessment, water rates, soil types, nature of possession of land, liability, tenancy and crops grown.

Church but it is used for fund raising purposes”. Yet another recent incident, “In 1974, a canonical religious community was given land for educational purposes by the diocese. The property was owned in our name from then onwards. Though we have our educational institutions for the poorest in the locality, the diocese has asked and taken a part of the land (nearly one acre) in 2018, to build a School”. Another instance was shared, “In the remote parish of Xyz diocese in 1913, one of the parishioners donated 3 acres of land to Sisters to run a boarding for school children. After 100 years the parish priest divided the parish people and influenced the bishop to take away the land from the sisters. The bishop himself was present and demarcated the donation property to the sisters without any proper documents. The Superior General and Provincial Superior represented the matter to the bishop to settle it amicably but it’s of no use”. Even after 100 years the bishop claims that he has the authority to dispose of a property which was in effect given to the sisters, who have no legal document of that gift as often happened in those times.

There have been other ways that were used to forcefully acquire the land from the sisters such as demolishing a building constructed on the property and the weakening and destabilizing of the compound wall. In another case of influence, threats and manipulation of legal documents were used, for e.g. “In a particular Diocese, the then bishop had invited our Congregation to start a school. There was a clear agreement between the diocese and the congregation. The school has more than 3000 students and earned a name in that locality. The present bishop nullified the agreement and took away one acre of land in which the main gates of the sister’s convent, school block and hostel exist. The

provincial has met the bishop personally and requested him to do justice. All our efforts were in vain. We wanted to fight in civil court, but could not do so, because we did not want to dishonour and disrespect the Catholic Church. The parish priest felt jealous of the sisters' progress and wanted to take away the land. He created a false report of excess land in our property. The sisters submitted the correct report of the government surveyor. However, the bishop did not listen to us and threatened the Provincial that he will take away the entire property for the diocesan school. He himself marked out the school property and caused permanent injustice and inconvenience to the school as the front face of the school is now permanently closed. In this case, the parish priest's role is deplorable; he abused the sister with foul language, divided the parishioners and created a great damage to the local church."

The parties in question are the bishop, clergy and the sisters. The bishop and clergy seem to have the power to interfere, control and dispose of the land in the possession of women religious even though internal agreements exist and official documents existed to prove the contrary. At times any means were used to justify the end which brought division into the community, leaving the sisters feeling cheated and helpless as the property matters were not brought to a resolution. On this subject a respondent wrote, "The Property problems cannot be settled."

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESPONSES OF SISTERS ON PROPERTY MATTERS

It appears that the ownership of property is an important bone of contention between the hierarchy, clergy

and religious women. At the start of a foundation in a diocese or in a parish, the Bishop is happy to invite sisters to render a particular service of care (education, health, catechism or other such service) and promises facilities of residence or even a place for the work proposed. In years gone by, such arrangements were made without clear written terms and conditions, taking the sisters for granted. Documents have been retained by the bishop or clergy and when it is found that the sisters have developed a good functioning unit with further possibilities of growth and expansion, a rivalry breaks out between the clergy and the sisters and spokes are put in the wheel by the clergy mainly on the issue of land. The one who holds the documents of ownership has the visible and effective power which eclipses all the promises made as well as the toil and effort of religious sisters whose outreach and witness of service has been sustained for many years.

While it is true that sisters should now be more awakened regarding terms and conditions of land deals for their apostolic foundations in new areas, the situations that come through the questionnaire are those which have existed over the past fifty years and more, when sisters were not so well informed about such legal matters and were motivated more by the desire of rendering service with full confidence and trust in the assurances of the then hierarchy and clergy.

Today the land deal is of central importance in the dialogue, and on this point the male clergy has retained the documents which are a power in their hands. Our disputes today have to be solved by professional lawyers who charge exorbitantly as the wheels of justice turn slowly. Moreover,

sisters prefer to keep quiet and suffer injustice for fear of bringing scandal or dishonor to the Church in public.

The question of mission and its importance as witness to the kingdom of God, the recognition of services faithfully rendered by women religious seem to be ignored for considerations of prestige and monetary gain of the hierarchy. Sisters are being asked today after many years of apostolic commitment, to pay rent or buy the land at the rocketing cost of present day rates or to just leave the place.....

HARASSMENT OF SISTERS

Harassment can be viewed as 'troubling persons or wearing a person out negatively' in the fulfilment of their duties. Harassment in the context of the study was understood by the sisters as being 'troubled by a lack of understanding and concern on the part of the clergy whose demands are difficult to meet and the fear of repercussions if they do not conform to their expectation'. The expressions of harassment were noted by the repeated use of words like 'demands' and 'expectations. These demands were expressed in reference to Church maintenance, pastoral and apostolic engagement and attending to personal requirements of the priests. The respondents experience a sense of domination on the part of the clergy.

With regard to Church maintenance some of the demands imposed on the Sisters were, cleaning of church premises, decoration of the church, sacristy work, washing and ironing of church linen, menial jobs in the parish, "They demand that each convent decorate the whole church on a feast day at our expense." Another demand expressed was,

“Washing of the church clothes is a big burden for sisters, and clothes are given in bulk for washing and ironing”.

With regard to Pastoral and Apostolic Engagement, a large number of sisters have expressed harassment in the area of the work environment, hours of work, the type of work and the attitudes of the priests. In the work environment sisters have experienced a lack of freedom to function due to an environment of dependency which has been created by the priests. This dependency was expressed when permissions were not given to visit the villages, or to demand an account when they visit the village. Other instances of this dependency were when the TSR (Transfer of Service Rights) was withheld at the time of the transfer of sisters.

The demand regarding time, goes beyond the regular hours of work, “Sisters are expected to be always available around the church” or again, “Sisters should always be available for parish activity”. “They demand that sisters ring the church bell at 5.00 a.m. and also accompany them from 6.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. to visit the villages”. “Full time service is demanded in the parish”. “In pastoral engagements, priests expect sisters to do all the menial jobs in the parish that parishioners are ever willing to do”.

The sisters are not adequately reimbursed for expenses in the pastoral field, “Sisters appointed as Pastoral Sisters in a parish or even as a ‘Commission in Charge’ are given no remuneration, nor conveyance arrangements or facilities that are proper for the offices and ministry. But a priest in that position would have all that support”.

Policy changes regarding works in which sisters are involved, are often made without any communication or dialogue with them. In a case where the sisters are in charge of a Social Work Centre for 50 years, when they asked for the registration of the Centre in their name, they were told that the permission would have to be sought from the Vatican.

With regard to personal requirements, there were two responses concerning the supply of daily food and the washing of the clothes of priests. “Fathers demand food daily from the convent to provide for the parish priest. When sisters find it difficult to provide, the parish priests and bishops react badly.” Another demand made to the sisters was “to invite the priests as Chief Guest for school programs”.

A negative attitude towards the sisters was manifested in ignoring the contribution and hard work of the sisters, often humiliating them in front of staff, parents, public and constantly blaming them when things do not work out. “Even if sisters have years of service and experience, they are not listened to, they are appointed as fresh hands. They ignore the hard work and service of sisters to bring up the school in the initial stages and blame them for everything”.

IGNORING PERSONAL / PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE IN THE MISSION

Sisters today have access to higher education and to acquiring professional competence in various fields of operations that range from theological to secular professions. It is important to observe how their professional

competence is being utilized. Religious Congregations have provided opportunities for women religious to develop their capacities and thus enable them to make a significant contribution in various fields of the mission, alongside other professionals.

Sometimes the traditional church structure and the expected attitude of submissiveness to authorities, has not been conducive to enhance the professional contribution of women. It is important to know what sisters have to say about playing their role in the mission of the church.

Professional competence in the mission is not recognized when it comes to the sisters even if they hold a good position in the work field, as some responses show: “The competence of sisters is never recognized in the schools where they serve as Head Teachers or teachers”. “In collaborative ministries sisters are given lower positions in spite of their educational qualification, like the post of Principal is given to a priest who does not have the proper qualification but sisters who are well qualified are appointed as regular teachers with less salary”. Very often despite having the position, they are not given the required staff to function effectively, “When a sister is the principal of the school, they don’t provide sufficient teachers and other staff.”

Remuneration is not given according to their capabilities as noted by one of the respondents: “We are working in the diocesan schools in the Western Region. The sisters are well qualified and employed as teachers. They carry out the work of the teacher as well as principal though the priest is officially appointed as principal. They are not given their due remuneration. It is the same with pastoral work,

often they are expected to give free service". This shows that the professional competence of women religious, her ability to perform the duties confided to her, or to serve in a position of authority is not recognised equally with male religious. Her professional competence is often ignored in many other circumstances like "not including them on the consultative meetings, like Head Mistresses are not called for diocesan education board meetings".

REFUSAL OF SACRAMENTAL CELEBRATION

Under the above titles is understood "utilization of the power to administer the Sacraments as a way of obliging Sisters to conform to clergy demands". Refusal to celebrate Mass in the Chapel of sisters, assuring the Eucharistic Presence which would be greatly desired for their hour of prayer, taking away the sacred species (Blessed Sacrament from the Chapel), obtaining permission for the setting up of a chapel to pray are instances when priests use their authority arbitrarily.

If for some reason, sisters are not able to comply with the demands of the clergy, the displeasure felt by the clergy is expressed in various ways of refusal to render the services expected of priests through their sacerdotal profession.

Most of the sisters who responded have noted that priests refuse to celebrate Mass, "when sisters do not comply with their demand, mass is denied". The normal expectation is that priests would celebrate the Mass at least once a week; however there have been instances shared where the Eucharist was not celebrated even for months. "Due to some personal misunderstanding the priest did not

come for Mass for nearly a month in the year of 2002 in a diocese. The Bishop also did not take action though he was informed about it". In a particular diocese, "three parish priests did not allow the sisters to attend Mass and they did not distribute Holy Communion to one of our sisters at the Sunday Mass".

One of the sisters quoted an experience, "A priest was not celebrating mass for many days. The superior conducted a communion service and distributed Holy Communion to the members. The parish priest said that it was against the rule, so he locked the tabernacle and gave the key to Bishop".

Many of the sisters come from traditional churches where the sacramental celebration of the Eucharist is the most important part of the day and sisters look forward to this act of worship collectively. The withholding of the celebration of the sacrament speaks of a subtle form of power which keeps the sisters in a situation of subjugation and dependency. "One of the priests refused to give Holy Communion for not covering our heads".

VERBAL ABUSE

When speaking of abuse most sisters mentioned incidents of Verbal Abuse which was almost always in public. The manner of speech was not appreciated especially as the content was negative and at times over trivial matters. "The priest is rude and insults the sisters", "The parish priest talks whatever comes out of his mouth, always complaints and negativity, at times uses words which are not fit for religious decorum". "In one Diocese the parish priest would insult saying that the convent is a senior citizen's

home though all the pastoral needs are met by the senior sisters with the help of two junior sisters who were studying for the BA”.

The context of verbal abuse has been mostly prevalent in the work place i.e. the school, parish, sacristy and the pulpit. “Verbal abuse by priests is common when sisters are engaged with sacristy work”. In another instance “Due respect is not given, he humiliates in front of the staff, parents, parishioners and the public”. Again “Due to some grudge one of the priests insulted the sisters during the jubilee celebration”.

VERBAL ABUSE FROM THE PULPIT

The forum from where the verbal abuse occurs is a matter of grave concern because it is very often from the pulpit. The pulpit is a platform utilized for a particular purpose: to proclaim the word of God and encourage people in the practice of their faith and witness to Jesus Christ. However, this forum has been used for a different purpose, “Very often Priests use the pulpit to correct the sisters on matters related to sacristy work and other collaborative activities”.

What is the cause of this verbal abuse? “When the priests are unhappy with us, they make use of the pulpit to negatively criticize, humiliate and belittle the sisters in front of the faithful. It is the nature of individual priests. Therefore, we cannot blame the Diocese”. In another case, “When the parishioners recognize, respect and appreciate the service activities of the sisters the priest feels less important and becomes reactive and even scolds from the pulpit”. In yet another case, “When the priest has personal anger with the

sisters, he has abused from the pulpit". "When admission to a particular institution of ours is denied or when the contribution to the church doesn't satisfy the clergy they express from the pulpit".

The pulpit becomes just a one-way communication, and especially on Sundays, "the focus during the homily is on Sisters and to criticize and humiliate them in front of the Parishioners".

Verbal Abuse from the pulpit has far reaching effects as it negatively affects the esteem of the parishioners for the sisters. As a result, the sisters feel a sense of oppression and tearfully work in the mission. "Sisters are humiliated with negative criticism from the pulpit". "Parish Priest abused sisters from pulpit and harassed sisters for two years in two dioceses. It is a great punishment for sisters to work with such parish priests".

An aspect of Verbal Abuse which has not been highlighted is the utilization of language with sexual connotation noted by three respondents. This sexually laced verbal abuse is expressed in lighter conversations or as a joke. "Many also make dirty jokes, poking fun at sisters".

As observed from the above comments from the sisters, the Priest uses the pulpit which is an instrument to disseminate the Word of God, to attack sisters through negative comments which have a discouraging impact on the sisters and the parish as a whole. This also indicates how the priests use their power in a negative way, producing an effect contrary to their role as a leader who inspires the parish community.

DIALOGUE WITH HIERARCHY: CHALLENGES FACED



To the question as to what efforts the sisters had already made to represent their difficulties to the hierarchy of the diocese, and the perceived result of their efforts, there were responses that were positive, negative and mixed. The table below presents the quantitative findings of these respondents who answered on this point. It will be followed by a qualitative description based on the statements of sisters on the situations encountered.

Table 4: Outcome of efforts made to approach Hierarchy about the difficulties faced by sisters

Outcome of Efforts	Frequency	Percentage
Positive Outcome	17	14.9

Negative Outcome	56	46.3
Positive intervention – Negative Impact	2	25
Fear of Consequence	1	1.3

No response	44	36.4
Total	121	100

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

As a result of the efforts made to represent the difficulties faced by sisters, to the hierarchy, 17 respondents (14.9%) felt that some understanding was shown and positive steps were initiated to solve the problems faced. On the part of the Bishop an understanding of the problem and an assurance of action to do the needful was shown, “Bishop was understanding and apologized on behalf of the priest. Priest seems to be having psychological problems”. In yet another instance, “Bishop called the priest and warned him, at the end of the year the priest was transferred. In one case the priest was advised to cooperate with the sisters in the mission”.

The problems were rectified and there was improvement in the relations with one another. In a few cases the transfer of a priest was effected. With regard to property matters things taken up became clearer. With regard to wages,

there was an increment effected in the remuneration and allowances of the sisters after continuous pressure. When a misunderstanding occurred, sisters spoke immediately to the concerned persons either a priest or a parishioner to clarify and correct the situation. Hence some respondents felt that no big issues were pending. On the whole in the instances of positive outcomes the situation has changed for the better with greater consideration and collaboration on the part of those concerned.

NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

The negative outcome (46.3%) was that despite representations nothing changes effectively in the situations in question. Contracts are not renewed; there is silence or only listening without any explanation or visible action to improve the situation. The larger number of sisters feel discouraged at the futility of the representation to the authorities concerned. While some Bishops do give a sympathetic ear to the sisters, they are generally found to be rather self-defensive and defensive of their priests. In one instance a respondent recounts the following: "When I asked for a dignified salary for my sisters one bishop said, you ought to serve Christ who was crucified and suffering, hence do not expect high remunerations. The monthly salary paid to the sister in charge of the primary school, teaching, doing clerical and peon work was just Rs. 5000/. After my discussion, Rs. 500 was added". The incident speaks for itself.

Bishops face difficulties with priests while addressing the issues brought to them. The behaviour of priests often shows a refusal to listen to the Bishop or a reaction that

is negative and arrogant towards the sisters. At times the bishop becomes self-defensive and defends his priest by supporting him. The major superiors are afraid to take the matter up with the bishop as the possible reactions of the priests could worsen the situation. At times the sisters have to face a more negative reaction as a result of their representation.

It is found that the bishops try to deal with the situation in various ways. Some bishops have followed a process, that of attempting to pacify the aggrieved parties by appointing a committee, however, there was no positive outcome and sisters were not satisfied with the outcomes. "In one place there was no response for five years and when it came to a point that we may withdraw our service, the Bishop transferred the priest. In another place a three-member team was appointed for fact finding. Then there was no action".

The bishops understand and seem to want to help sisters but they are afraid of the reactions of the priests. "Bishop agreed to settle the issue involved. But the local priests and some parish council members are against giving away the church property to others. Bishop expressed his fear of reaction from the parish". Some of the priests react very arrogantly to the sisters as well as to the bishop. Some priests demand that sisters be available for parish activities even at the cost of their community life. Priests in one diocese demand that sisters provide daily food for them. If the sisters express their difficulty, the reaction of the bishop and the priests is very negative. This negative reaction makes sisters afraid to represent their difficulties to the bishop, as narrated in this instance,

“I have not been able to visit the Bishop during my visit to the communities due to the fear that our sisters will be penalized by the parish priest if I complained to him about the priest”.

Priests react negatively and Bishops hardly know how to correct them. In some cases, the attitude of the Bishop is that the priests are always right. Sisters feel the indifferent attitude of the Bishops expressed in maintaining silence and upholding the side of the priests. In a particular case, since the problems continued to persist “We withdrew our services from the school”.

The response given in some cases was partial for instance, “The sisters were permitted to sign the register, but with regard to installation of the Blessed Sacrament, and Mass in the convent, no rectification is done. After reporting many times to the higher authorities, TSR (Transfer of Service Rights) was handed over to the concerned sisters after 8 months”.

At times, the Bishop’s attitude is seen as dictatorial, curtailing the freedom of sisters and even becoming exploitative: “The way of handling the problem by the hierarchy needs to be more realistic and equal in approach”. One Sister said: “The Bishop considers that the parishes and parish priests are the church of God. We are treated as the parallel church”.

The dynamics between the Bishops and priests and the resultant reactions leave the sisters feeling frustrated, especially when no answer is given. However out of respect for the church a moderate approach was taken, “We could go legally and we are sure to win the case. But we belong

to the church and our legal fight among ourselves may be a scandal in the local church. We are trying to settle working out patiently and amicably”.

Sisters have been introspective about their own role too and have looked at their role in the problem situation as also contributing to the solution. “I believe that if the sisters are treated indiscriminately by the hierarchy or the priests, we the sisters are to be blamed”. The Sisters realised that they too have a role to play in such situations; “We need to learn to exert ourselves and educate ourselves on our rights and duties. Nobody can force us to be subservient”.

CAUSES FOR THE LACK OF CONSIDERATION OF CLERGY / COLLABORATORS

The questionnaire sought to understand the perception of the Sisters with regard to the underlying attitudes of the hierarchy and clergy.

Table 5(a): Causes for attitudes manifested by Hierarchy and Clergy

Attitudes perceived by sisters	Frequency
A sense of male superiority and patriarchal control	97
Acquisition of money	43
Prestige	44
Abuse of religious power	65
Total	249

(Multiple Response, N = 121)

Of the 4 categories in the table above, items 1 and 3 could be considered together as the sense of male superiority and prestige are closely linked. Actually, there

are two factors which emerge from the table: the sense of power and the desire for financial gains which are perceived as dominant motives on the part of hierarchy in dealing with the sisters.

Table 5(b): Causes for attitudes manifested by sisters

Attitudes manifested by sisters	Frequency
Silence/passivity	72
Easy acceptance of patriarchal attitudes and clericalism	60
Formation in maintaining subservient attitudes	45
Fear of being criticized in the community	47
Total	224

(Multiple Response, N = 121)

This table points to the attitude of silence and passivity that characterize the behavior of a large number of sisters. The items that follow spell the reasons for this silence or passivity: social conditioning; formation in religious life; the fear of being criticized within their community.

Table 6: Sisters who speak up are silenced, suppressed and marginalized in their congregations

Agree	Frequency	Percent
Yes	37	30.6
No	68	56.2
No response	16	13.2
Total	121	100

The fact that major superiors have filled the questionnaire may account for a greater number of those in the 'No' category. However, the qualitative responses explain why sisters are deterred from expressing themselves.

Table 7: Reasons for marginalization of sisters in their congregations

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Fear of Authority & Consequences	34	79.1
Inner Dynamics of communities	2	4.7
Submissive Attitude	5	11.6
Devaluation of Women	2	4.7
Total	43	100

The replies of the major superiors show that they choose to please the Bishops or the Priests i.e. the authority in the church. "Sometimes when the superior has questioned parish priests, or managers other senior sisters in the community would go to him in private and pacify the priest and accuse the superior or the sisters". The attitude of pleasing the authority within the Congregation is seen as contributing to peaceful co-existence and keeping the status quo of the community.

Socialization practices could also contribute to perpetuating the culture of silence and submission to authority, "Our prejudices are deep rooted in caste, rites, class and language. We need to go a long way in these aspects". "In many cases women's work in the church is more servitude than true service... We live a culture that

doesn't seem to value the true gifts that women bring to our culture – motherhood, gentleness, patience, intuition, sensitivity, attention, warmth and the list goes on... These qualities are now seen in a negative light, more as a weakness.”

The threat to power was experienced by the hierarchy who see sisters speaking up, as a questioning of their authority. Those who speak up and challenge the status quo meet with aggressive reactions from the hierarchy, who shoot questions like: “Who are you to interfere? Why make a mess? Live and let live!”

It is taken for granted “that as religious we are supposed to be obedient and submissive”. “Many fear to be or lack the courage to be assertive as they will ‘Be labelled to be bold’ in a negative sense, and ‘not a good religious’”. The younger sisters’ voices are not heard as, “certain superiors and seniors do not want our name to be spoiled if younger ones raise their voices! These suffer passively and expect the younger generation to remain passive to the subtle exploitation”.

At times sisters who speak up are silenced or suppressed as change is threatening and one does not want to move out from the comfort zone, “because nobody wants to take risk. Superiors fear losing their personal as well as the fair name of the congregation”.

The challenge is greater when the male power structure is questioned. Female authority which toes the line of male authority is also threatened and can cause suppression within the congregation as some of the examples have shown. The threat to power is prevalent in every level of

society, however when it comes to women religious the power is aggravated by gender relations and the code of expected religious behaviour. “We need to stop this male domination in the church, we are equals and we need to stand together for our rights. We must be respected as human beings; we need to keep up our dignity as women religious” – is a strong answer given by one of the respondents.

TIME TO SPEAK OUT !



If we look at the Church as one, the contribution of women religious is equally important and needs to be recognized in the struggle for the triumph of and love of truth. “The church in India commits herself to be a dialogical church, a prophetic church, a communion church and a participatory church. When one section that is the women religious are not treated as equals, the church fails to attain its goals”. Therefore, in the true spirit of dialogue, “It’s time to speak up” as a united group of women religious for their rightful place and role in the Church” was the feeling expressed by a majority of women religious i.e. 105 participants (87%) who emphasized and reiterated the urgency citing various reasons in their responses. A small minority of sisters i.e. 9 participants (7%) expressed a sense of despondency “I do not think that there will be any change in the stand

of the church, it was male dominated and it will be male dominated”.

The sense of urgency was expressed in the “need to fight” for their equal standing in the church, where they felt it was their “fundamental right to be considered and treated as equals”. They could thus “contribute to the church and society.” They expressed the need to “speak about their needs” and “express equality and justice irrespective of gender. This transformation is necessary for the Indian Church to be a counter witness to the patriarchal and hierarchical (structures) social evils”.

The patriarchal mindset does not look at the service that women religious contribute to the church but rather as servitude owed to the powers that be. It reinforces a relationship between the one who decides and commands and the one who executes and has no part in the decision making. This fear is expressed by the women religious in the words of a respondent “it’s time to respect, recognize, network, enrich the Church, value the female dimension, before it’s too late; the time is ripe, or else we will become slaves to the clergy”.

The reaction of women religious is directed more towards the patriarchal mindset of the church. They felt that “power is concentrated with bishops” and “authority cannot be misused”.

“We need to speak out to create an egalitarian society where consecrated women and men are treated equally”. The “Church has failed to accept the feminine face of God and treat women as equals, co-creators in the plan of God’s creation”. “The clergy and sisters need to stand united for

the growth of the church and uphold the dignity of the religious in order to make their collaborative ministries better, smooth and effective”.

The process envisioned by the sisters would be to primarily “become aware of their role”, and the “need to conscientize our Sisters”, as it is high time that they “speak up boldly, end discrimination and gender bias that is deeply rooted in the church and maintain the principle of equality”. The sisters expressed that as part of the process, bishops and priests also need to be conscientized.

The sisters expressed a “need to assert (themselves) together and exercise their role, at national and local levels such as that of the CBCI, CRI and inter congregational meetings”.

- 6 -

SEEKING AVENUES OF CHANGE: FORMATION



The Formation of sisters in the aspect of Gender Equality has been elaborately spelt out through the responses of the sisters. The suggestions for formation in various areas ranged from the formation of the formators, formees in the initial levels of formation, exploring the possible opportunities for higher education, to suggestions on content, methodology and environment for formation.

The suggestions cover two broad areas: who are to be formed and what the content, methodology and environment for formation should be.

Table 8: Suggested areas for formation

Suggested areas for formation	Frequency	Percent
Formators	5	3.6
Those in Initial Formation	9	6.4
Opportunities for Higher Education	4	2.9
Content for Formation	43	30.7
Methodology of Formation	29	20.7
Environment for Formation	50	35.7
Total	140	100

The role of the Formator is seen as a key to the quality formation of the formees. They need to be equipped with efficient skills to help formees tackle problems they face without fear. They need to have knowledge on the Gender Policy, Gender Rights and cultivate an attitude of Gender Equality within oneself in order to practice the same while interacting with others.

The conscientization of formees was seen as an integral part of formation along with building awareness about their dignity as women and their inherent right to equal treatment as men. The perspective of Gender Equality, Gender Sensitivity and the application of Gender Policy would enable them to develop their personality, self-confidence and maturity. To further empower sisters, opportunities for higher education in the fields of theology, academics and professional skills could be provided.

The content for formation as suggested by the participants should incorporate the aspect of 'Integrated Spirituality and Human Development' as understood in the context of Gender Equality.

Table 9: Suggested content for academic input

Themes	Topics
Gender Equality and Rights	“Rights of Women, Religious Women, Women Empowerment, Male Female Psychology”
Law	“Legal Rights, Human Rights”
Human Development	“Personality Development - Self Image, Self Confidence, Self Esteem, Maturity, Self-Awareness, Communication, Relationship Skills, Leadership”
Theology	“Doctrines, Feminine Theology, Prophetic Call and Mission, Charism, relevant Documents of the Church”
Spirituality	“Divine Plan, Emerging Trends in Religious Life, Interpretation of Charism, Bible”
Administrative Functioning	“Policies – Gender Policy”
Socio-Anthropology	“Cultural Biases”

The immediate social setting, the members with whom one interacts, and the ways in which they interact, contribute to the formation. This environment or setting for formation provides an opportunity to enable the person in formation to grow with values in an acceptable ambience promoting healthy relationships with one another and with organizational support.

These environments as suggested by the participants need to be nourished with the values and support as stated below:

Table 10: Suggestions for a Healthy Environment in Formation

Environment	Suggestions – Expressed in the words of the respondents
Integral Growth	“Awareness, Acceptance of one’s Gender, Limitations, Be enlightened & empowered, Self-Respect, Leadership, Responsibility, Healing emotional blocks & woundedness, Discernment, Happy about womanhood and vocation”
Personal & Human Values	“Stand for dignity and rights, Equality, Ability to Share, Respect, Empowered to appreciate and uphold the power of women”
External – Ambiance	“Freedom/Courage to Speak up, Seniors should not suppress younger ones, Space for Assertiveness, Opportunities for interaction with the opposite sex”
Healthy Relationships & Interactions	“With both sexes, not allowing submissive exploitation, Motivation and Encouragement, interact maturely with males understanding their psychology, Space for emerging feminine characteristics without male comparisons”
Practical	“Empowered and Equipped in interested ministries according to the charism, training that make sisters competent in their tasks, Opportunities in decision making, for varied Trainings, Ensuring equality through signed contracts”
Structural Support	“Support from authority, Equal treatment of Major Superiors and Bishops (Hierarchical Order of Women and Men Religious)”

Providing a healthy environment during formation helps the formees to be free and creative to make a significant contribution to Church and society.

“A weak methodology leads to a weak result”; therefore, during the period of formation due care is to be taken to choose methods and techniques that are conducive to the formation of formees. The interactive methodology process of ‘conscientization’ through ‘dialogue, critical thinking, open discussions, seminars, field-oriented exposures, workshops, and outreach programmes’ were suggested. The formation should be mediated through a ‘capable team with inputs from experts’. The aim of formation should be to enable the sisters to discover their own potential, build their own convictions and express themselves confidently with a sense of responsibility and respect for others.

BUILDING A GENDER PERSPECTIVE FOR SEMINARIANS IN THEIR FORMATION

To break patriarchal biases and have a gender just society, an attitudinal change and a genuine respect for both the sexes is needed. The sisters through their encounters with seminarians have expressed that they first need to be “aware of both sexes”, “to consider and respect women as equals” which reveals the need of a “mindset change”. It is essential for them to be “taught to respect all women especially consecrated women”, that they are not in competition with women religious for power while working in the mission but towards the pursuit of common goals for the kingdom of God.

An effort needs to be made to ensure that Gender Equality and Feminist Theology form part of the syllabus for seminarians. It is important for them to have an understanding and exposure to “Women Religious in the

context of their history, their different religious charisms, contribution and role in the Church". An interactive methodology where there is a space for a greater sharing of ideas, knowledge, experience and joint exposure programmes is encouraged. It was suggested that women religious and women theologians be on the faculty of Seminaries thereby contributing to building a much needed perspective of Gender Equality and Equity for the Seminarians.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE TO IMPROVE WORKING RELATIONS WITH THE HIERARCHY



ATTITUDE OF RESPECT TOWARDS SISTERS

The most important attitude that has been highlighted repeatedly is that of “respect and equal dignity”. Sisters are strong on the point that they want to be treated on the basis of their equality as persons made in the image of God. This sense of equality manifests itself in relationships that are accepting, welcoming, growth oriented and mission centred. They do not want to be treated “like lower rung employees who are at the beck and call of Bishops and priests who can call on their services at any time, expect services of various kinds without a proper understanding of

a contract of service”, rather, sisters would like to know that their presence is valued and their contribution appreciated. In a ‘give and take spirit’, one can see both the progress of the mission as well as the aspect of limitations and short falls but in a constructive perspective.

STOP THE VERBAL ABUSE OF SISTERS

Sisters have also felt that unrealistic expectations are made on them. If these expectations are not met, there are aggressive reactions from priests and bishops which results in verbal abuse, negative comments about the sisters from the pulpit and public humiliation in front of parishioners or other lay people. The reputation of sisters being put down in public cannot encourage people to esteem the mission of the sisters and draw vocations. Such treatment of sisters cannot be tolerated, “Stop the threat of the hierarchy to quit mission as a result of disagreement”.

DIALOGUE, COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP

The words ‘collaboration’, ‘co-operation’, ‘partnership’, came up repeatedly among the suggestions offered by the respondents. Sisters wish to be engaged not so much as working for the hierarchy and clergy but as working with them for a higher purpose and mission. Their services should not be taken for granted but should have a place in the creative thinking, planning, evaluation and progress of the mission. “Sisters are not slaves to be ruled over”. Good collaboration is a sign of God’s presence at work in a mission.

IMPROVE WORKING CONDITIONS

The question of fair and just wages has been mentioned by several respondents at different points in their responses. The matter concerns the remuneration given to sisters, their qualifications and competence, hours of work to be put in, the expectations of tasks to be carried out, and adjustments with their community and religious life. It has been noted that when there is a clear contract of work drawn up between the superior and the bishop before the foundation, there is a greater smoothness in working, less occasions of conflict and a better witness of unity.

OPEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING BODIES OF THE CHURCH

Sisters value the freedom and trust shown to them in the execution of their mission. They are inspired to take initiatives to respond creatively in the service of people and feel encouraged when these initiatives are facilitated even with resources by those in charge. There should be scope for sisters to educate themselves and acquire professional skills in the areas of their competence. Sisters could thus be helped to play their role with confidence and vision in decision making bodies of the Church.

- 8 -

AN ANALYTICAL REFLECTION



THE CONSTANT APPEAL OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS TO BE TREATED WITH RESPECT AND DIGNITY AS CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

This appeal comes from the order traditionally established, where the authority of the hierarchy is considered as final without necessarily having a process of dialogue and consultation.

The history of the Church shows that with the declaration of Christianity as a state religion, the hierarchy acquired more power even in the civic, economic and political domains. Clerics were men appointed as official functionaries for church/spiritual ministries. Their number grew and they became increasingly important unto themselves, rejecting accountability to the laity. The Church

was seen primarily as a hierarchical Church. It was only during the Second Vatican Council barely 60 years ago, when the self-understanding of the Church, enriched by Scripture and the communitarian aspect of her call, saw the Church become the “people of God” in which all the baptized are included in the functioning of the Church, not just the ordained.

One of the consequences of centuries of clericalism in the Church has been to foster attitudes among the hierarchy and clergy such as, “We know it all”, “Who are you to question?” “I am not accountable to you.” These attitudes have led to the tendency to dominate and to favour those who accept the status quo while seeing as troublesome those who question the existing order even if it is a prophetic search for relevance in a changing world. The continued use of medieval titles such as “My Lord”, “Your Lordship” “Your Excellency” together with special head dress and robes, only emphasise the institutional attachment to a by-gone era, obscuring the Christ-like attitude of service.

The community of disciples as envisioned by Jesus was to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. By characterizing authority as service, Jesus sought to take away the sting of power that corrupts and legitimizes processes of opposition and violence under religious, juridical or cultural garbs.

Such exercise of power makes for an atmosphere of fear, suppression or defiance, rather than an atmosphere conducive to growth in creative freedom, born of a conviction and commitment to a cause. What is desired is

to bring out the inner strength and God given talents of people joyfully co-operating in the here and now of mission.

How can we work towards an attitude of greater trust and confidence in one another so as to live a spirit of dialogue and collaboration which is the inner strength of the mission?

It is not a question of using a technique for success. It is a basic response to the order willed by God for humanity when He created man and woman in His own likeness, confiding to them the responsibility of the continued work of creation, participating fully and freely for the common good.

RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION

The attitude of respect towards women leads to respectful communication, valuing their potential and contribution, thus facilitating their participation in the mission of the Church.

It is a matter of great regret that “verbal abuse” in public is still used as a means of brow-beating women into submissiveness over issues that should be solved with mutual understanding and confidence rather than by a display of power.

The study shows that women ask for, and justifiably, a greater sense of equality as persons endowed with the freedom to express their desires and convictions in the interest of the mission and so work unitedly with the clergy in service to the Lord.

ENCOURAGE CREATIVE CONDITIONS OF SERVICE, NOT SUBSERVIENCE

It has been seen in the study that religious sisters are often underpaid while working in Church controlled institutions. This is a matter of justice which needs to be looked into by those who hold responsibility for the functioning of the diocesan or parish mission. Practical expectations and demands on the part of the clergy and the sisters need to be faced and cleared before a foundation is laid and commitments are made. It has been noted that when there are written documents regarding policies to be followed, there is less room for conflict and discontentment. Harmonious working does so much good for the atmosphere and witness of the mission.

As the context of life necessarily undergoes change, a periodic review of contracts made helps to update our experience in the light of contemporary reality. While the improvement of working conditions contributes to a better service, we must always keep in mind that it is the spirit of the Lord that must guide our participation in mission.

ENCOURAGE THE GROWTH OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS FROM DEPENDENCY TO RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP

Women religious are not to be seen as a ready “corps for domestic service” in Church institutions. Binding them for such engagement by religious vows is actually enslaving them in the pursuit of duties conveniently planned by the hierarchy under titles such as the dedicated accomplishment of God’s will. One respondent

has even written that bishops and priests should stop founding congregations for women as the women have no freedom and this can lead to exploitation. This may be borne out especially in diocesan congregations where the bishop becomes an “absolute leader”, often with a group of young women who lack the resources to challenge authority when necessary. The religious charism is a gift of the Spirit to animate the life of the Church. Bishops and priests are asked to recognize religious life not as an area for them to organise but as a space where religious congregations can legitimately take decisions by themselves.

The plea of women religious is that the Church spell out the apostolic goal and vision while planning for the mission, envisage the role of the sisters, provide for the periodic evaluation of the particular work and not just leave all decision making power to the clergy. In a God-centred vision, there is a place of respect for everyone; there is a time for dialogue and mutual understanding; there is space for collaborative action.

It is when a mission can witness to collaborative action on the part of bishops, clergy, women religious and parishioners that the kingdom of God has a greater opportunity to flourish and witness to the living presence of God-with-us.

The contribution of religious women in the Church must not be seen as a mere appendage to male experts but as persons with their in-built capacity to think, to plan, to evaluate and innovate, and be leaders in the mission of the Church.

Sometimes, women religious place boundaries to their own growth by following the beaten track of occupations generally pursued by women; at times they fit in with social expectations in the Church concerning women and since they are used to play a subservient role to the male powers, they are content to play a secondary role which brings them greater acceptance and appreciation.

This tendency to follow the beaten track and not pose even pertinent questions to existing male leadership in the Church induces a dependency and a passivity which dulls the creative spark of initiative and the ability to break new ground in the field of mission. Women religious must be emancipated from a childish dependency to become mature, adult women able to make their way among the contemporary women of their time. Already they do a marvellous job especially in areas of challenge like rural and tribal areas, hence they feel frustrated in the face of a clergy that sees but does not recognise their contribution, as the study amply indicates.

The study has brought out very clearly the insistence of sisters to come together and speak with one voice on issues of gender sensitivity and gender justice. It is necessary that sisters take up leadership roles and collaborate so that organisations like the CRI may be alert and active to take up relevant issues at a regional, national and even international level. Things will not change within the Church unless women inform themselves and speak up strongly and unitedly for their place in the Church.

Sisters have highlighted their need to be treated with respect and the sense of equality as made in God's image.

This sense of equality manifests itself in relationships that are welcoming, growth-oriented and mission-centred. This sense of respect and equality should characterise the relationships with all who work as a team in the mission: clergy, sisters, parishioners, and other collaborators, thus building up and witnessing to a Church of the people.

It is important that sisters empower themselves with knowledge and competence, build up a team of professional consultants to help them deal with the do's and don'ts of the bureaucracy in the Church and in the government. Every human person has the fundamental right to seek justice and if it is to be found outside the visible confines of the Church, the persons in question can do the needful to obtain it.

Women need to organise and participate in formation programmes such as indicated in the study. They need to discover the wonder of God's gifts both in them as well as in others. Thus, can they be promoters of life, of earnest striving, of harmony in relationships, channels through which the Spirit of God may lead the movement of the mission.

FORMATION

One of the most important areas that needs urgent attention is the content and form of formation of priests and religious in India. Subjects and topics that deal with gender equity and gender sensitivity should become an integral part of the curriculum in formation houses on an urgent basis. Initiatives have already been taken in this direction in some parts of India. They need to reach everywhere and

such subjects are to be seen as important and not marginal to the curriculum. Exegesis of the Bible from the women's point of view and feminist theology need to find space in the curriculum of our theologates as core subjects, not as options and electives.

- 9 -

AN ACTION PLAN FOR AN EFFECTIVE FOLLOW-UP OF THE STUDY



DIALOGUE AND RECONCILIATION AMONG BISHOPS, CLERGY, WOMEN RELIGIOUS

One :

Creation of a forum for dialogue and reconciliation to offset the unequal balance of power in relationships between the Bishops, clergy and religious women which underlies the difficulties of working together. The purpose of such a forum is to create a space for both sides to look at problem situations with an objective understanding and a sense of the goal of our mission. This space needs to be created from the grassroots levels of functioning to higher

administrative levels in the governance of the mission. Regular meetings need to be scheduled once or twice a year, and according to the needs of the situation.

Two :

The working out of a written contract between the Bishop, clergy and the religious institute before a formal entry into the actual mission situation, is necessary in order to spell out clearly the goals and expectations on both sides, especially in terms of working conditions, area of responsibility, remuneration, the spirit and witness of the particular mission. The Bishops and religious of the Western Region are presently working on the formulation of a written contract.

Three :

The CRI Western Region is in the process of working together with the Bishops of the same region to set up a Regional Committee for Collaboration and Reconciliation comprising representatives of the Hierarchy as well as major superiors who have their congregations working in the area and a representative of the CRI Executive. The first step in the process is a dialogue between the bishop and the major superior of the concerned institute regarding the problem situation. In case it is not possible to find a solution, the matter may be taken up with the representatives of the wider group e.g. the parish or the diocese in order to make every effort to settle matters at a local level. Only if there is a real need, the matter in question could be taken up at the regional level.

It is to be understood that the role of such bodies is not to focus only on problems, but to promote a positive understanding of our calling before God and our joint mission to be true and faithful witnesses in the context of our times. Hence sessions of inputs, reflection and exchange on themes relevant to the contemporary role and mission of the Church need to be organised periodically for all engaged in the mission.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CRI WOMEN'S SECTION TO TAKE NECESSARY STEPS IN THE FOLLOW-UP ACTION

One :

Having agreed by a collective voice of major superiors of the CRI Women's Section, to undertake such a study in order to see more clearly the lines of action for women religious in the future, it would be necessary for the Women's Executive to set up a body for follow up action and formulate a plan of action to help religious institutes develop a greater awareness of gender justice and a fuller participation in the mission of the Church. The collaboration of the hierarchy and clergy is absolutely necessary to facilitate such growth in the Church.

Two :

One of the most important areas through which change can be effected, is that of Formation which has been highlighted in the study. It is desirable that the CRI Executive select and appoint a core committee to plan the outreach and content of formation in Gender Justice and Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India for sisters, priests in formation as well as other concerned groups.

The ideal would be that the core committee be able to co-opt male participation as well so that we may learn to work together, keeping the vision of the Church as a "Light to the Nations" foremost in view. The Institute Mater Dei could serve as the nucleus for the formation programme given its long experience and its vast outreach to a large number of sisters who attend the courses regularly. One could also enlist the support of personnel in other formation houses for women, situated in other parts of the country. The appointment of a core team would mark the beginning of the follow-up action.

Three :

The CRI Women's Section could also envisage the setting up of an investigation team in situations of sexual abuse concerning religious sisters. These are delicate areas of intervention and the general tendency is to keep a "discreet silence" while sweeping matters under the carpet. The CRI Executive, Women's Section, in a spirit of interest and concern for the sisters, could confidentially appoint a small team (not more than three) of competent sisters to ascertain facts as objectively as possible, see what could be done to follow right procedures of communication to the competent authorities both in the congregation as well as in the Church without unnecessary delay. The report of such an enquiry should be submitted with the utmost confidentiality at each step as described above and must be taken into consideration along with other Church investigations that may need to be done.

Four :

It is very important that women religious also play their part in nation-building by participating in promotional activities with other professional women and with the government, in the fields of education, health, skill - training for employment, nutrition, counselling, justice for women, inter-religious dialogue, human development to mention some of the possible areas. Such participation helps to broaden our own vision and to strengthen the core values of the Constitution in the context of the country to which we belong.

CONCLUSION



A deeper awareness and understanding of the functioning of patriarchy and clericalism helps us to see how they lead to a hierarchical functioning and an inequality in the minds and personalities of women such that it is difficult for them to envisage an alternative way to the existing set of social structures. The danger is greater in the Church where decision-making is exclusively in the hands of an all-male clergy. It is only when there is a true understanding of the structures which lead to excesses in the exercise of roles of men and women in the Church that we can be awakened to desire a change that sees authority as service and the Church as a community of equal disciples after the mind of Christ.

The present study is a humble contribution towards this end. The sisters who participated in the study, under

the guidance of the Holy Spirit have spelt out for the Church the areas that need attention or affirmation at the present time. The report contains a comprehensive analysis of the different problem areas, the initiatives taken by women religious to deal with the issues of concern, a range of responses from the clergy and concrete suggestions for the way ahead to bring about the full flowering of the whole Church. This is the witness the Church is called to give: that all her members express in joy and freedom, God's gifts of nature and grace for the happiness of all humanity.

The following quotation sums up the integration of gender relations in the mission of the Church while also providing a long-term vision of the mission to which the Church is called:

“Jesus’ radical vision of the Kingdom of God in which everyone would sit together at the same table became the Church’s mission to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Discipleship is a life of continuous expansion of our personal borders to welcome people who are different from us. The courage to do this is the wisdom that leads us to God whose life defies all borders and distinctions and makes us all chosen people.” *(From Pat Marrin’s article “Look Beyond” published in National Catholic Reporter, July 2019).*

“ In May 2018, the National Assembly of the CRI (Women’s Section) accepted to take up a study on Gender Justice in the Indian Church and I was happy to be part of that august Assembly. If the suggestions and recommendations in this document are read with an open mind, heart and will, change towards gender equality will become a reality in our church. ”

-Sr. Sabina Pathrose, Former Province Leader, Religious of the Good Shepherd

“ This book is a result of the breaking of the silence by representatives of the 1,30,000 Indian women religious belonging to nearly 300 Congregations... who are ready to face the consequences and are hoping for change. ”

-Sr. Inigo SSA, Former Superior General, Society of the Sisters of St. Anne

“ For many of us who have been aware of this situation for a while now, there is little that is new. I have heard such stories from Sisters over the years and gone through the whole gamut of emotions from anger to disbelief at male arrogance, to frustration, sorrow and shame... Enough! Its High Time... This is now the call for action. ”

-Br. Philip Pinto, cfc, Former Superior General, Congregation of Christian Brothers

“ This book is a vital step towards implementation of the CBCI Gender Policy. By telling it as it is, women religious are finally gaining control over their lives. ”

-Dr Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, Member, Drafting Committee, CBCI Gender Policy

“ A must read for every congregation of Women Religious in our country. Once we realise that clericalism and patriarchal conditioning impacts us all in similar ways, we can work collectively for change. ”

-Dr Ananda Amritmahal RSCJ, Principal, Sophia College for Women, Mumbai

“ Most of the findings from this research are very relevant and confirm many of our beliefs on the status of women religious in the Church. Failing to recognise the competence of women religious, engaging in property powerplays, denigrating them in the pulpit, or expecting them to be satisfied with meagre wages, is unacceptable... The consciousness gained by shame at the existing situation should spur us to act and change for the better. ”

-Bishop Allwyn D’Silva