

Editorial:

The end of the year opens up for a new beginning: the joyful hope of Advent, the beginning of the new liturgical year as well as the beginning of the Jubilee Year 2025. As we bid 'good bye' to the passing year and prepare ourselves for the Celebration of our Savior's birth at Christmas, we also find ourselves in a greater auspicious moment of 2025th anniversary of Christ's coming to this world, the great Jubilee Year! Pope Francis has invoked us to be pilgrims of Hope, and we start this journey during this special time with joy and hope that the Jubilee enhances. Indeed, the actual jubilee was inaugurated with the first coming of Christ to this world, who, by the power of the Spirit of God, was sent to "to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Lk. 4:18-19).

In the Jubilee Year there will be many pilgrim-programs organized internationally for various groups of people. Likewise, all the dioceses will arrange different programs for the spiritual nourishment targeting different age groups, movements, societies and organizations and people of different vocations and professions.

As Bangladesh has started a new beginning as a nation, we also expectantly look forward to a country that is not about eating and drinking" (i.e. corruption and discrimination) but the reign of righteousness, peace and joy- the core values of the Kingdom of God. (cf. Rom. 14:17) The Bishops of Bangladesh have met Dr. Muhammad Yunus, the honorable Chief advisor of the government of Bangladesh and presented the concerns of the Catholic Church in Bangladesh. The Church is also dedicated to work with the government hand in hand for the cause of Justice, Peace and Development.

Let us reflect upon the themes of the Advent namely Hope, Peace, Joy and Love and rejoice in the Jubilee praying and working for the Reign of the Kingdom of God upon earth.



Bishops with the honorable Chief Advisor

CBCB Meeting held on 6-7th Nov. 2024

The Fourth CBCB Meeting of the year was held on 6-7th Nov. 2024 with the participation of all the Bishops of the CBCB. In addition to the Meeting there was the meeting of the CBCB with the Honorable Chief Advisor Dr. Muhammad Yunus that was held on 7th November at 5 PM. On 8th November the Bishops attended the Caritas Meeting. The Scheduled meeting of the Bishops with the Major Superiors on 7th November had to postpone due to the urgent call from the office of the Honorable Chief Advisor. The following are some of the important issues of the CBCB Meeting.

a) The meeting with the Chief Advisor

It was informed that the CBCB got the urgent appointment for the meeting with the Honorable Chief Advisor Dr. Muhammad Yunus to be held on 7th November at 5:30 PM at Jamuna Guest House. Bishops discussed on the important issues to be presented in that meeting: such as: a) to ensure the freedom of Religion in the constitution, b) dignity and rights of the *Adibashi* (indigenous people) of Bangladesh, c) the autonomous nature of the Church run educational institutions d) government holiday on Easter Sunday and extension of Christmas holiday being for two days (24-26 Dec.). Accordingly, an official letter was prepared by the CBCB to be handed over to the Honorable Chief Advisor. Later, it was informed that the meeting with the Chief Advisor was very effective. The Chief Advisor cordially welcomed the bishops in his office and spent sufficient time listening to the concerns of the Catholic Church in Bangladesh and assured his willingness to address the issues. **The Chief Adviser, Dr. Yunus accepted a cheque of Tk 2,500,000 (twenty five lac) offered by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh to help the flood affected people in Bangladesh.** He also appreciated the service rendered by the Catholic Church in Bangladesh as had been mentioned by the Bishops such as by Caritas, education Institutions, Sisters of Mother Teresa and medical help given by St. John Vianney Hospital.

b) 2nd Session of the Synod (October 2024): a presentation by the President of the CBCB:

Archbishop Bejoy N. D'Cruze, OMI who attended the 2nd Session, shared on its draft document as well as his experience. He noted that the Final Document of the Synod focuses on the need to promote synodal conversion in the Church. It calls for a growth in understanding and living the Synodality; to be more welcoming, inclusive, and listening Church; to make decision process more synodal; to establish channel for co-responsible leadership in all local churches; to put in place measures to promote transparency, accountability, evaluation; to promote the role of women in church leadership and ministry to exercise ordained ministry more synodally; to improve formation of laity, clergy and bishops and finally to strengthen bonds between local Churches.

Bishops noted that the implication of synodality is challenging. However, the Church in Bangladesh must enter into the relationship inviting all especially who have never been called.

c) Encyclical Letter “*Dilexit Nos*”- (He loved us):

A summary of the encyclical was presented in the meeting. The fourth encyclical of Pope Francis marks the 350th anniversary of the first apparition of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and was promulgated on the eve of the Jubilee and in the final phase of the 2021-2024 Synod. It focuses on the human and divine love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ. Pope Francis believes that devotion to the Sacred Heart has the power to “illuminate the path of ecclesial renewal, but also to say something significant to a world that seems to have lost its heart.” It consists of five chapters: 1. The importance of the heart in the modern world; 2. The gestures and words of Christ's love; 3. The Church's reflection on the Heart of Jesus; 4. The re-reading of Sacred Scriptures 5. The communal and social dimension of devotion. The bishops emphasized on the necessity of the spread of the message to all.

d) Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2025

The Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity [DPCU] has provided the materials for the week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The theme is: “Do you believe this?” (Jn. 11:26). This year marks the 1,700th anniversary of the first Christian Ecumenical Council, held in Nicaea, near Constantinople in 325 AD. The Prayer offers an invitation to draw on this shared heritage and to enter more deeply into the faith that unites all Christians. It was noted that the EC-CUIRD will translate and circulate the Prayer and encourage all to join in prayers for Christian unity.

e) Government Honorarium for priests and pastors

The Ministry of Religious Affairs had issued a letter asking the chart of the priests and pastors of the Christian Churches with the aim of providing government honorarium. In response a meeting of United Forum of Churches, Bangladesh (UFCB) was called at the Archbishop's House and all the members anonymously agreed not to accept the Honorarium. Accordingly, a letter was issued on 16th September addressing the Ministry of Religious Affairs

stating that the Church being a separate entity and for theological and religious reasons, cannot accept the allowance. The CBCB too decided not to accept the government allowance for the priests. However, the Church would welcome contributions for causes of the Christian societies.

f) Uniformity in Bann writing form and the marriage certificate

The Bishops agreed to bring Uniformity in Bann writing form and the marriage certificate in all the dioceses of Bangladesh. Accordingly the form and the certificate have been finalized as per the corrections and direction. It was agreed that the dioceses would provide the requirements and these would be available by January 2025.

g) The Printing of the Jubilee Bible

It was informed that the Printing of the Jubilee Bible is in progress. Bishops checked and approved the font size and the dioceses would provide the requirements.

The Annual Retreat of the BDPF 2024



The Bangladesh Diocesan Priests' Fraternity (BDPF) organized the annual retreat of 2024 for its members at the Christa Jyoti Pastoral Center, Rajshahi. The retreat was held in two groups: four bishops and 100 priests joined the first group (16 to 20 September) while in the second group (23-27 September) there were two bishops and 104 priests.

Rev. Fr. Peter Rema, an elderly priest from Mymensingh conducted the retreat for both the groups, its theme being "The dignity, majesty and enchantment of Priesthood". In a subtle manner Fr. Peter Rema guided the priests to engross themselves into the depth of the theme with prayer, meditation and silence in solitude. After the retreat the priests expressed their spiritual joy and satisfaction and thanked the preacher and the organizers including Most Rev. Gervas Rozario who had welcomed all the priests and made the accommodation for this Retreat in his diocese.

Women Leadership and Development Training for Lay People



'Episcopal Commission for the Laity' (EC-Laity) and 'Caritas Development Institute' (CDI) jointly have conducted a training on Women Leadership and Development successfully from 28 to 30 November, 2024 at CDI Conference Hall. The training aimed to enhance participants' knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards Women Leadership and development to foster positive behavioral change and create a gender-sensitive environment. Altogether, there were 47 participants (Men 21 and

Women 26). The course was facilitated by Most Rev. Shorot Francis Gomes, the Chairman of EC-Laity along with Ms. Najmun Nahar, Fr. Albert T. Rozario, Sr., Pushpo Gomes, CSC, Sr. Rita Godino, CSC, Ms. Rita Roselin Costa, Ms. Rebecca Quiah, Ms. Papia Rebeiro and Mr. Chayon Huber Rebeiro. The main content of the course were concept of 'Women in the teaching of Church', 'Man-Woman relationship and We', 'Role of Lay people in the building of non-violent Society', 'Women in the Bible', 'Impact of Patriarchal society in the life of Women', 'Women in the Christian Inheritance Law', 'Women Empowerment', 'Scope of Women for work in present situation and skills for implementation', 'Women as Missionaries in the Family', etc. The training was inaugurated on the 1st day by Mr. Theophil Nokrek, the Executive Secretary of the Laity Commission. The training used participatory, interactive methods like role-play, simulation games, brainstorming, demonstrations, and group

exercises to create an engaging learning environment. The participants' involvement in the sessions was very active, spontaneous and joyful. They noted that, training helped to change their knowledge, skills and attitude on gender and Women; "Our confidence has been increased and we are confident to implement the training learning in our personal and social life". According to the evaluation of the participants', the training course on Women Leadership and Development was interesting both for participants and for the facilitators. "Training helps to change our knowledge, skills and attitude", they maintained. Most Rev. Shorot Francis Gomes chaired the certificate awarding ceremony.

Annual Bible Workshop 2024



National Bible Workshop organized by Episcopal Commission for Biblical Apostolate (EC-BA) was held On 21 to 25 of October at Caritas Training Centre, Khulna. There were 42 participants from eight dioceses (18 women and 24 men) Bishop Emmanuel K. Rozario, the Chairman of the Commission inaugurated and gave the nice presentation on the main theme:

"Living in the word of God". Besides him Fr Shipon Reberio, Fr Tushar Gomes, Fr Monindra Chiran and Fr Manuel Hembrom made presentations on various Biblical themes including the presentations on the introduction of the Old and New Testament. At the evaluation, the participants expressed their joy and satisfaction as they felt that the workshop was very resourceful and enlightening. Moreover, the participants were excited with joy at the opportunity to visit the Sundarbans.

The workshop was concluded by a solemn Mass offered by Most Rev. Romen Boiragi, the Bishop of Khulna. This year the Bible Commission awarded certificates to all the participants at the successful completion of the workshop.

Justice and Peace Interreligious Seminar



On the 8th November, the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace organized an Interreligious seminar on Safeguarding and Ecological Conversion (*Laudato Si*) at the Fatima Rani Church, Bagerhut, Khulna diocese. There were 70 participants from Christian, Muslim and Hindu communities. The seminar begun by welcoming the leaders with flowers followed by opening prayer which included a reading from the Holy Bible, Holy Quran and the Holy Gita. Then Fr Dominic Haldar, the parish priest gave

the welcoming speech. Fr Liton H. Gomes, CSC gave a session on ecological conversion in the light of *Laudato Si*; it is about re-orientating ourselves and deliberately choosing to live the different values so that a more sustainable, just way of living in our 'common home' is possible. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis defines ecological conversion as the transformation of hearts and minds toward greater love of God, each other, and creation. After tea break, Mrs. Siuly Costa, the Rampal area coordinator of World Vision shared on the safeguarding and Sr. Mitu Gomes, RNDM gave input on the theme of bullying and its effect especially upon the children. Sr. Suporna Rozario, SMSM and Sr. Mitu Gomes, RNDM moderated the program. The participants interacted well and enjoyed the seminar. It ended with a shared lunch which was provided by the World Vision, Khulna.

Four Bangladeshi delegates in Signis Asia Assembly 2024

The SIGNIS ASIA Assembly 2024 (SAA2024), hosted in Tokyo, Japan, from September 23 to 27, gathered around 70 delegates from 12 countries to explore "Human Communication in the Digital World for a Culture of Peace." Organized by SIGNIS ASIA and host country SIGNIS Japan, the event highlighted the intersection of faith, technology, and peace-building in the digital age.



Bishop Paul Toshihiro Sakai, the keynote speaker, emphasized on the importance of truth in communication. “Communicate the truth,” he urged attendees. As the advisory bishop to SIGNIS Japan and head of communications for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, Bishop Sakai's address reflected on Japan's role in promoting human values and solidarity through digital tools.

Echoing Pope Francis's call for ethical regulations in artificial intelligence, Apostolic Nuncio Francisco Escalante Molina discussed the interconnectedness of human communication, the digital world, and the culture of peace. The involvement of laity in media and communication ministry in Japan is indeed praiseworthy. They are using their experiences on fostering peace in a digitally connected world. Screening films on peace of different countries and sharing of the country reports enhance participant's perspective towards communication. Signis Bangladesh President, Fr. Bulbul Augustine Rebeiro, RVA Bangla Service Co-coordinator Fr. Nikhil Gomes, diocesan communication directors namely Fr. Bablu Corraya (Rajshahi) and Fr. Placid Proshanto Rozario, CSC (Barishal) participated in the assembly.

Participation in the FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet



The 29th Annual FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet was held at the Bishops' Conference of Indonesia Building in Jakarta, Indonesia, from 25 to 29 November 2024. A total of 23 delegates from the Episcopal Commissions for Social Communication of the member-conferences and associate members of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), including Malaysia–Singapore–Brunei, Cambodia–Laos, India, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Vietnam, and Hong Kong were present in the meeting.

The theme of the meeting was "Communication for a Synodal Church in Asia," which served as the guiding focus for the reflections, discussions, and spiritual conversations throughout the event. 3 dimensions of communication, namely human, Christian and ecclesial were well delivered by Prof. Richardus Eko Indrajit, Cardinal Sebastian Francis and Fr. George Plathottam. Fr. Bulbul Augustine Rebeiro, the secretary of the Episcopal Commission for Social Communication participated in the meeting where he presented the media and communication scenario of Bangladesh.

Annual General Meeting of the Episcopal Commission for Youth



The Episcopal Commission for Youth (ECY) just completed its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 7 December 2024, Saturday at CBCB Centre, Dhaka. The meeting started with a short prayer and reflection on the season of Advent. The Most Rev. Subrato Boniface Gomes took the seat as a President and Fr. Bikash James Rebeiro, CSC, moderated the meeting. Around 26 members out of 28 were present in this meeting from the

eight Diocesan Youth Commissions and the Executive Commission. The President welcomed all the members by delivering his opening speech. The minutes were read by Sr. Chompa Rozario, MPdA, the office secretary of ECY and approved it by all the members after correction. In the agenda, first, the date and place for the next National Youth Days was finalized from 26 February to 2 March 2025 at the Don Bosco High School & College, Birishir, Netrokona under Mymensingh diocese. It was decided about the number of participants from each diocese, registrations fee, program schedule, accommodations, resource persons, security, day of village, and proposed some new ideas to implement it in the program. The moderator insisted all the diocesan coordinators and secretaries to instruct/orient to the selected youth before participate in the youth days and motivate them how to transform their lives from tourism to pilgrimage. Second, the date and name of the participants were finalized for the Youth Jubilee from 28 July to 6 August 2025 in Rome, Italy. The president instructed all the members about current issues of Jubilee in Bangladesh and proposed to request their bishops to be the grantor for their diocesan participants. The Commission already took some concrete initiatives about the assurances of the participants to come back Bangladesh after joining the jubilee in Rome. There were some other agendas were discussed such as committee members, accounts and reports of activities, vitalize the BCSM and YCS program, update of new strategic plan, yearly master plan, Youth retreat, arrange tournament in memory of late archbishop Moses Costa, training program for event host/anchoring and awareness and spiritual program for the migrants and garments/parlors youth. The meeting was brought to a close through the Holy Eucharist presided over by the Most Rev. Subrato B. Gomes. Then the moderator expressed his gratitude to all the members for their great contributions in whole year and gave them beautiful Christmas gifts. Finally, the meeting was reached a conclusion to celebrate the birthday of president and other members by wishing them with bouquet of flower and delicious cake cutting.

Special General Meeting of Caritas held

Caritas General Body (GB) convened its 111 th Special General Meeting on November 8, 2024, at Caritas Central Office. A total of 23 members attended the meeting, including the Bishops of the CBCB. The meeting was chaired by Most Rev. James Romen Boiragi, Bishop of Khulna Diocese & President of Caritas Bangladesh (CB). Among other regular issues, the meeting endorsed Caritas Annual Report for FY 2023-2024, and approved two policies; i) Policy on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and ii) Disability Inclusion Policy.

The General Body serves as the highest policy-making entity of CB, representing the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB), dioceses, and regional offices. It includes individuals from diverse backgrounds, including professionals and social workers. The GB is responsible for formulating organizational policies, approving the annual budget and audit reports, appointing auditors, electing the Executive Board, and appointing executive office bearers.

Caritas observes Season of Creation



Caritas Bangladesh celebrated Season of Creation on 22 September 2024 with the theme "To Hope and to Act with Creation" a global movement inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical '*Laudato si'*' and the symbol "The First Fruits of Hope," inspired by Romans 8:19-25. The observance featured special prayers, videos, songs, speeches, seed distribution, tree-plantation, and sharing personal reflections across Caritas central, regional, and upazila offices.

Together against GBV: Caritas Bangladesh launches 16 Days of Activism

Caritas Bangladesh launches the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign on 25 & 26 November 2024 in its different offices. Special events were organized under the **Safeguarding and Gender Mainstreaming Project**. The launch program included various events such as spontaneous rally, sharing sessions, cultural performances, making personal commitment by signing a board, and interactive discussions. The programs emphasized the organization's commitment to raising awareness about gender-based violence and empowering communities to work toward its elimination at all levels.

Programs of Episcopal Commission for Family and Life



EC-Family and Life organized program in three dioceses: Khulna diocese program was for the couples on September 6-7, 2024. Participants were from different parishes. Topic was Marriage and Family Life and Teachings of the Church.

Chattogram Archdiocesan program was on October 4, 2024. Participants were from different parishes. Topic was “Marriage life and Teachings of the Church”.

Mymensingh Diocese program was in Baluchora Parish. Number of participants were 98. Topic was “Present realities of the family”. Participants were parish council members and parents.

National Seminar on leadership and spiritual development for BCNG's members



EC- Health Care organized a National Seminar on leadership and spiritual development for Bangladesh Catholic Nurses Guild (BCNG) members from 14-15 November 2024 at the CBCB Centre. The seminar gathered 105 nurses' sisters and brothers from Dhaka, Dinajpur, Jashore, Mymensingh and Kumudini.

The seminar started on 14 November at 5:00 PM with registration, prayers, Introduction of the participants. In the following day the program started with the Holy Mass offered by Bp. Theotonious Gomes. The main focus of the program was to introduce the New Charter for Health Care Workers on Procreating, Living and Death. These sessions were conducted by Lily Anthania Gomes, Dr. Edward Pallab Rozario and Dr. Father Lintu Francis Costa. The seminar also focused on Nurses Views about Nursing, develop leadership skills of Health Care Workers, Increase of spirituality through nursing and group work. The facilitator of the sessions was Professor Mabel D' Rozario, Fr. Bablu Sarker and Fr. James Cruze. Participants brought how they can increase coordination with the local church, identify barriers and way forward through their group works.

Training for Diocesan Health Care Commission members and the AGM of EC-HC



EC- Health Care organized a training for Diocesan Health Care Commission's members and Annual General Meeting held on 16 November 2024 at the CBCB Centre. A total of 36 members participated in training and AGM actively. The objectives of the training were to capacity building of Diocesan

Health Committee members. The topics of the training were Reflection on Spirituality of a Health Care Workers, Natural Family Planning activities at diocesan level, Health and Laudato SI' (Why the Climate Emergency is a Health Emergency? Laudato SI' and the Health Imperative), Counselling with the Patients and Rebuilding the Peace, Identifying actions for Diocesan Health Care Commission. The training sessions were conducted by Bishop Ponon Paul Kubi, CSC, Chairman, EC-HC, Lily Anthania Gomes, Secretary, EC-HC, Fr. Bablu Sarker, Administrative Director, Fatima Hospital, Dr. Fr. Lintu Francis Costa, Executive Director, St. Vianny Hospital, and Dr. Edward Pallab Rozario, President, ABCD.

National Training on Christian Unity held



A 5 day National Training on Christian Unity (Ecumenism) was held at the CBCB Centre, Dhaka from 6 to 10 October 2024 with about 50 participants from eight dioceses having the theme: **“May They Be One.”** The main goal of the training was to prepare the participants to promote Christian unity.

The program commenced on October 6 in the afternoon with the Sunday Mass. The participants were welcomed by Most Rev. Archbishop Lawrence S. Hawlader, CSC, the Chairman of the EC-CUIRD and by the words of welcome by Fr. Patrick Gomes, the Secretary of the Commission.

There were sessions on various important topics such as Basic notion of Christian Unity (Ecumenism) and its reality in Bangladesh; Historical background of Schism in the Church; Historical Movement of Christian Unity among the Churches; Christian Unity Movement (*Redintegratio*) according to VAT. II; topics on Liturgy, Sacraments, Canon law etc. presented by renowned scholars. The training also included Life Sharing and panel Session.

Ecumenical Prayer Service: As a part of this national Training, there held an Ecumenical Prayer Service at St. Andrew's Church at Mirpur on 8 October evening. Besides Catholic participants there were Bishops, Pastors and Faithful from other Churches. While the Priest in-charge Rev. Adhir Gathia of CoB welcomed all to St. Andrew's Parish, Fr. Luke Kakon Corraya moderated the prayer service.

On 9th October, the Training Program was concluded by the evening Mass presided over by Archbishop Lawrence, CSC. The Apostolic Nuncio Most Rev. Kevin Randall who was the chief guest of the concluding program, delivered the homily on “Our Father”. He noted, “To have the Kingdom of God realized we must have good relationship with God and with our neighbor.” After the evaluation of the program the Commission Chairman thanked all the participants present and their respective Bishops along with the Commission Secretary, the diocesan coordinators and the CBCB Centre management.

Honorable Nuncio's Speech: Soon after the concelebrated Mass the honorable Apostolic Nuncio was greeted by the Archbishop Lawrence Subrato Howlader, CSC with a flower bouquet. The apostolic Nuncio then expressed his appreciation to the Archbishop and the Commission for implementing this very meaningful service for Christian Unity and Interreligious Dialogue, a field so essential for Bangladesh, a multi-religious country. He highlighted in his prepared speech his pastoral responsibility to visit the brethren of other Christian Denominations. He encouraged the participants saying that the expected fruit of the movement of Christian unity and interreligious dialogue; human rights and duties; freedom of religion; life security in Bangladesh. On the 10th October all departed for their respective destinations.

Dates of the CBCB Meetings 2025

1st Meeting: March 5-6;

Annual Assembly of the Episcopal Bodies on March 7;

2nd Meeting: May 23; **Caritas Meeting: May 24.**

3rd Meeting: Aug 20-21

4th Meeting: Nov. 5-6; **Caritas Meeting: 7 Nov.**

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