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CATECHETICAL CENTRES OF INDIA

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Conclusion

“I join the Synod Fathers in proposing the establishment of lay formation centres to prepare the laity for their missionary work” John Paul II.¹

The truths revealed by God are vital to the life of God’s children... Revealed truth is soul-food; heresy is soul-poison... Each teacher of Christian doctrine should be given a thorough course in Catechetics.

Catechists are specialists, direct witnesses and irreplaceable evangelisers who represent the basic strength of Christian communities, especially in the young churches... their work is becoming more and more difficult and demanding as a result of ecclesial and cultural changes. What the Council suggested is still valid today: a more careful doctrinal and pedagogical training, continuing spiritual and apostolic renewal, and the need to provide a decent standard of living and social security for them.²

To become an expert in any field one needs training. It is not enough that one goes through self-learning or training but it is very important that one is trained under professionals or experts who are experienced in a particular field for best results. This same type of training can be applied in the field of catechesis. The training of catechists or catechism teachers is a must in order to ensure accuracy and efficacy in teaching. It is important that the catechists undergo training in order to equip themselves with knowledge, skills and competence with regard to teaching catechism. Thus, in catechesis, we cannot by pass this important principle.

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1. A brief sketch on the history of India

India is a tapestry of cultures, religions, languages and races. The roles of the Indian Church in this multifaceted nation are several. The population of India is ever on the rise. According to the 1991 census, the population was 846 million. But, the official web site of Census of India counts the population growth of India with 29

¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999, n. 45.

² JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Città del Vaticano, LEV, 1990, n.73.

³ JOHN PAUL, *Redemptoris Missio*, n.73.

persons added to the list of the population every minute. India already reached one billion mark on 11th May 2000. Out of this billion and more Indians, more than 80% of the population is Hindu. Christians come about 2.3% (23 million). The Catholics are about 15 million, and therefore represent 1.5% of the population. The total number of priests and religious come to 1,01,096: for every 150 lay Catholics, there is a priest or a religious sister in India. This proportion is quite high in comparison to the ratio of lay Catholics to priests and religious in the other so-called Catholic countries. The questions that can arise at this point will be, why should be a need for lay catechists when there are sufficient number of priests and religious for the ministry? What exactly are the specific identity and role of the Indian catechists today? Who are these Indian catechists? Their birth and growth? Their relevance today? These are some of my concerns in developing this topic.

Though all the baptised are called to be catechists, the identity, role and formation of catechists differ according to various factors. A broad division is made by *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) as it differentiates lay catechists from non-lay catechists.⁴ All the baptised (Bishops, priests, religious and laity), according to their specific ecclesial, hierarchical roles have a specific catechetical mission. In other words, all baptised are ‘catechists’ in the broad sense of the term.

The vocation of the *laity* to catechesis springs from the sacrament of Baptism.⁵ The Church acknowledges gratefully the innumerable lay people who are engaged in catechesis.⁶ To feel called to be a catechist and to receive this mission from the Church requires different levels of dedication in accordance with the particular characteristics of individuals and their roles. The Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia* recommends the pastors to ensure that the laity are formed as evangelisers. The synod also expressed the need for more women participation in the mission of the Church in Asia.⁷ To understand their identity and role, let me enumerate the different categories of catechists in the Church today.

The Catechists’ Training Centres originated as result of the missionary need of the region and catechetical renewal of the entire region. They were started before and after the Second Vatican Council. The first published information about the

⁴ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, Vatican City, LEV, 1997, part V, Chapter I.

⁵ Cf. GDC, 231.

⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in Our Time, Vatican City, LEV, 1979, n.66.

⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, November 6, 1999 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999) 124, n.45

Catechists' Training Schools in India was the publication of the book of Fr. Amolorpavadas in 1970. The book introduces the seven Catechists' Training Centres in India and their mode of functioning. Now two more centres have been added and so there are nine Catechists' Training Centres in India. They are listed below:

1. Catechists' Training School in Tindivanam, in the state of Tamil Nadu.
2. Catechists' Training School, Tonga in the state of Jharkhand.
3. St. Paul's Regional Catechetical Centre, Sunnapubati, Nellore, in the state of Andhra Pradesh.
4. Pastoral Training Centre, Sangaiprou, in the state of Manipur.
5. Jyoti Bhavan, Mokama in the state of Bihar.
6. Lum Jingshai Training Centre, Marbisu in the state of Meghalaya
7. Basic Training Institute, Pathalgaon, in the state of Chattisgar.
8. Catechists' Training Centre, Torai in the state of Jharkhand.
9. Uktal Jyoti Regional Pastoral Centre, Jharsuguda in the state of Orissa.

Table of Catechists' Training Centres in India (General data)

Origin/Est	Place	No. of candidates	Trained Catechists	Administration	Region it serves
1921	Tindivanam	30	482	TNBC (Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council)	TamilNadu, Tamils in Kerala, Andhra, Karnataka, Sri Lanka, Malaysia
1923	Tongo	20 couples	700 couples	Jesuits	Chotanagpur Region, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orisa, West Bengal
1965	Nellore	10	90	Nellore Diocese	Andhra Pradesh
1966	Sangaiprou	20	200	Diocese of Imphal	Manipur, Nagaland
1973	Mokama	15	200	Diocese of Patna	Patna
1973	Marbisu	35	130	Archdiocese of Shillong	Khasis & Jaintias of Meghalaya
1975	Pathalgaon	30	No information	Jesuits	Dioceses of Ambikapur and Raigard
1976	Torai	20	250	Jesuits	Santhalis of Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal, Bangladesh
1977	Jharsuguda	30	150	OBRC (Orissa Bishops' Regional Council)	Orissa

A short description of each specify centre are given below:

2. The Catechists' Training Centre, National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre.

2.1 Origin

The centre has a long standing story that can be traced back to the times of St. Francis Xavier. It all began with the French missionary Fr. Thomas Gavan Duffy. He founded this centre for teacher-catechists at Tindivanam in 1921 and sought to set up a permanent organization for the training and maintenance of full time catechists. He introduced new catechetical programmes, which reflected the catechetical revival that was then in progress in Europe. In 1941 the Centre was temporarily closed down due to the premature death of its founder and the onset of World War II. It was re-opened in 1961 and with it changed its local face to a new regional face.

The next leading figure of the centre was Fr. Edmund Becker who founded the Pondicherry Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre in Tindivanam. With him at the helm, the Centre set in motion a catechetical revival in the whole of Tamil Nadu. The first batch consisted of 20 catechists who received their *Missio Canonica* in 1963. Each Bishops of Tamil Nadu sent four candidates every year. From 1970 onwards, the need for a special training on Mission Work was spelt out. Hence a Third-year of mission training was added by the Bishops of Tamil Nadu in Poonamallee. After two years of training in Tindivanam the candidate were sent for one year mission course in Poonamallee. However the course had to be condensed to three months course in 1994 onwards and now it is conducted in Tindivanam itself. The Tindivanam Catechetical Regional Centre was made into a Regional Biblical Catechetical & Liturgical Centre by the Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council in 1974. His Excellency, John Gorden, the Pro-nuncio solemnly blessed and started the Triple Commission Centre on 29th June, 1974 at Tindivanam.

The candidates hailed from all the dioceses of Tamil Nadu as well as Tamils from Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Now the region serves the 15 dioceses in Tamil Nadu, other Tamil speaking dioceses in Sri Lanka and Malaysia.

2.2. Staff and Administration

The centre has a well-trained staff, which makes it possible to realise the plans of the Regional Catechetical Commission. There are about twenty residential persons on the teaching staff. Priests, nuns, laymen and laywomen who are well qualified for this ministry. Along with the residential staff, a number of visiting

professors are also there for the programme. Most of the staff members, both lay and clerical are trained in India and abroad. In addition to the teaching staff, all the diocesan catechetical secretaries make the core-group of the commission for Catechetics. The centre has occasional contacts with National, Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC), *Lumen Vitae* (Belgium) and the Munich Catechetical Institute on matters of formation and catechetics. The Archbishop of Pondicherry is the *ex-officio* local patron of the Centre. The *Propaganda Fide* has financialised for the construction of the building. The centre now depends heavily upon the *Missio Aachen* for the maintenance of the Catechists.

2.3. Candidates

By the year 1999 October, the centre has trained 482 catechists. The selection of the candidates is done by their respective diocese. The latest innovation was the recruitment of women candidates in 1999. The first batch of women were twenty seven in number. To be admitted the candidate should have completed the higher secondary studies successfully and must be at least twenty years of age. Along with the lay catechists trainees, sometimes, candidates from the congregations such as the Salesians, the Capuchins, the Sacred Heart Brothers, the Carmelites and the Jesuits attend the training.

2.4. Formation Programme

The course consist of two-year programme of traditional course like ecology, dialogue, skit, etc. Along with this, another three months of Mission Course is provided for the groups. This is eliminated by the on-the –spot-mission experience in Tamil Nadu. It envisages an all-round training with stress on doctrine, Sacred Scripture, catechetics and anthropology. The spiritual formation consists of their daily practices of piety, monthly recollections and the spiritual guidance. The Centre also provides methodological courses of communication skills, pedagogical skills, music, etc. They are also given a driving license as an additional help for the ministry. At the end of the two and a half year training, the Archbishop of Pondicherry, the local Patron entrusts them the *Missio Canonica* – the mandate to go and preach the Gospel.

Since 1921, the regional centre has been producing catechetical , both translations and original works, The Review, *Thozhan* (companion) has about 4000

subscribers today and is especially circulated in Tamil Nadu and in the Tamil speaking areas of Sri Lanka and Malaysia. The publication of the first catechism book based on the anthropological method in India was the Tamil catechism book prepared of XI standard in 1972. By 1980 catechism books for other classes were published. Apart from what is mentioned above, the few that draws our interests are as follows:-

1. A guide book to the catechists, entitled, *Arppana Pookal*, (Dedication flowers), published in 1998. This book was prepared and published by the Centre for the use of all those who are involved in Catechetical ministry and evangelization work.

2. A book for the spirituality of the catechist published in 1999, entitled, *Maraikeivialar Thedun Aanmeham*, (The spirituality that the catechist seeks). This book adapts the main ideas of the book, *The Life of the Christian Teacher*.

3. The Tamil translation of the book, *Guide for the Catechists*. It was made available for the catechists from 1999.

2.5. Retrospect and prospects

1. The Centre has a rather established infrastructure with regard to Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical resources.

2. The well-trained staff for imparting the knowledge needed for the course.

3. The various incompatible publications has added the reliability of the centre.

Certain areas need to be up-dated and improved.

1. The Centre seems to bring out more of ‘volunteer school teachers’ than ‘missionary lay catechists’. Though the Centre has given a lot of importance to missionary training, it has to look more deeply into the matter.

2. The future plan of the Centre is to revised and publish the school catechism books.

3. Though the full time catechists are paid well by the Centre, some are not satisfied with the salary. Some demand pension and the parish priests prefer to have volunteer catechists due to the financial problems.

4. Another problem can be said of the payment of the catechists which is to be revised from time to time, less and less number of Catechists are chosen these days. Naturally, volunteers catechists are preferred and many catechetical seminars are

given to school teachers so that they help by teaching catechism in schools and in parishes (Sunday Catechism).

5. An important aspect to be considered is the perseverance of the candidates. Not all persevere after the training. They look out for some better jobs and there are cases every years who leaves for some other jobs.

3. St. Paul's Regional Catechists' Training Centre, Nellore, Andhra Pradesh

3.1 Origin

The idea to start a catechists' training Centre for the first time in Andhra Pradesh was born in the mind of Bishop A. De Battista, the then Bishop of Vijayawada. He started the Training Centre in Vijayawada in 1958 but it had to be closed soon due to lack of funds and personnel. Subsequently the matter was raised to the Andhra Regional Bishops' Council (APRBC) in January 1965, while discussing about the implementation of the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, in the field of catechetics. Then dawned the idea of starting a Training Centre for the catechists but not on a diocesan level but on an inter-diocesan basis. This was materialised in January 1968. The Bishop of Vijayawada was asked to shoulder the responsibility of starting the Centre. Later the Centre was shifted to Subedarper in Nellore under the administration of the Nellore Diocese in 1990. Thus it became the centre of the whole of the Andhra region. There was a Centre already existing under the initiatives of Bishop P.C. Balaswamy, the Bishop of Nellore. Thus both the Centres were amalgamated and Fr. S. N. Louis took over the administration of the Centre. Then in 1997, this was again shifted to a new building in Sunnapubhati, in Nellore under the direction of Fr. C. V. Balraj. The former Centre was converted into a Regional Liturgical Centre.

3.2. Staff and administration

The staff members in this Centre are appointed by the Diocese of Nellore. *Missio* and Aachen help the centre financially. At present, the Centre is managed by a single staff member, the director with a regent brother to assist him. Due to the few number of candidates, the staff members are also reduces to a small number. The

Centre caters to the catechetical needs of the whole of Andhra Pradesh and is still under the administration of Nellore Diocese.

3.3 Candidates

In this centre there is no prescribed criteria for the selection of the candidates. The minimum qualification is 10th Standard. However the candidates with lower qualifications too are admitted. Both married and unmarried are accepted in the centre. So far the number who have passed after the translocation are 90 in number.

3.4. Formation Programme

The course lasts for two years. The Centre has a detailed programme for formation. It provides opportunities for developing skills in the catechetical ministry. A special training is given in the folk arts of Andhra. After the two years training the students are conferred the *Missio Canonica*. They are appointed by the respective bishops for the ministry. They are paid according to a pay scale fixed by the APRBC.

3.5. Prospects and Retrospect

The future of the Centre as it appears today is bleak. There are only nine candidates for the whole of the region. The reasons are many.

1. Some of the dioceses are not interested in having any more catechists because they find it difficult to pay them.

2. The centre lacks a proper follow-up of the students during the period of formation. The practical experiences are not evaluated much in the Centre.

3. The local clergy do not recognise the importance of the role of catechists because they found that the catechists called themselves pastors and act above the clergy position.

4. The clergy feel the pinch of paying the catechists and so they prefer to have voluntary, local, untrained catechists, because they can be paid less.

5. As it stands, there is a great need to renew the whole formative process of catechists in Andhra Pradesh.

4. Basic Training Institute, Pathalgaon, Chhattisgar

4.1. Origin

The institute was established in 1975 by the Jesuits. It is situated at the western end of Madhya Pradesh, close to the new capital, Raipur of the new born state, Chhattisgar (2001). The Institute was started by Bishop Patras Minj S.J, bishop of Ambikapur. It was set up to serve the needs of the diocese. After the bifurcation of of Ambikapur, the Institute serves the two dioceses of Ambikapur and Raigard.

4.2. Staff and the administration

The centre has always been under the direction of the Jesuits. The director of the Institute at present is Fr. Nazarius. In 1976, Fr. Van Emmerick S.J. was the director of the institute. The German Missiological Institute, *Missio*, finances the Institute and it solely depends on their financial support.

4.3. Candidates

The candidates are chosen by the parish priests after consulting the local community, regarding their suitability and fitness. Both men and women get the opportunity to have this training. The Institute has not kept an educational qualification norm for the candidates. Some illiterate too joined at times and in the process of the training picked up to read and write. Most of the candidates joined of their own will. Very few cases are there who joined due to employment crisis. There are about thirty candidates each batch.

4.4. Formation Programme

The whole programme consists of a three-months residential course. It begins from September and concludes in January. Instructions are given in the biblical and doctrinal teachings of the Church. Along with the doctrines, liturgical training are also given. On Sundays they are given practical experience in the parish ministry. The main duties as catechists consists in organising the Christian community in the villages, visiting families, the sick and Sunday service animation in the absence of the priests. The ambient is conducive to the courses with the indigenous infrastructure with the natural setting and all the instruments for instructions are of the local origin. The ministry of the catechists after the training depends upon the parish priest. He is directly in charge of them and they can be full-time or part-time employed and are remunerated accordingly.

4.5. Retrospect and Prospects

The Institute faces acute problems of lack of personnel, lack of audio-visual materials and lack of funds. The duration being three months and it does not provide sufficient time to reflect and study the matter. There is no sufficient time for experience too. But the problems arises also from the candidates. The married men who entered the Institute is not willing to stay for a long period of time. Most of them are alcoholics and the parish priests of the place where they are sent for their Sunday practical experience often complain about them. The faith life is feeble and also the moral behaviour needs to be improved. The educational qualification as we have mentioned too is very low as many joined as illiterates. There are also cases where the catechists have some personal problems with the clergy in the parish. This calls for a catechetical training even in the seminaries so as to cope up with the demanding challenges of building healthy relationships.

5. Utkal Jyoti Regional Pastoral Centre, Jharsuguda, Orissa

5.1. Origin

The centre had a humble beginning in 1977, as an institution for the diocesan renewal. Two years later the Orissa Episcopal Council raised it to the status of Regional Pastoral Centre. From 1979 onwards, Utkal Jyoti began to cater to the catechetical development of the region through the publication of catechism texts called, *God-with-us* series. There was no building then for the training. Responding to the need and to the requests, bishop of Orissa started a residential course for catechists' training in 1984 at Kharsuguda.

5.2. Staff and administration

The staff members consists of two priests and two religious sisters. One of the sisters is the administrator of the Centre while the other sister hep the director in teaching. There are also visiting professors. The expense is met by Orissa Bishops' Regional Council (OBRC). Though the course is free for the candidates, the parish priests pay a small amount as a minimal contribution.

5.3. Candidates

The candidates hail from the diocese of Orissa region, who work as a catechist in the parish. They have some catechetical experience before they enter the centre as it is obligatory to have at least one year of experience. The candidates are selected by the parish priests with the official recommendation of the bishop. The age limit is kept between 25-45 years, preferably married men and women. The academic qualification is very low even though the Centre insists on matriculation as the basic qualification. For the practical purpose and the requirements of the mission area, those who know the language are preferred to the trained ones as they have to need to communicate to the people. The centre admits thirty candidates for a batch.

5.4. Formation Programme

The training programme is divided into four phases in four years for the entire curriculum. One phase consists of ten to twelve weeks. The content of the course is Scripture, doctrine, liturgy, evangelisation, catechetical, socio-economic evangelisation and liturgical music. After the ten weeks, they go back to their respective parishes for the practical experiences. They come back with reports as the priests will have a chance to verify the quality of the to be catechists. In the final phase of the fourth year, the centre calls the wives and children of the candidates and conducts courses on “married life”, “family spirituality” and “family catechesis” for them. After the four years course, they are given the diploma certificate and mission cross during the ceremony of commitment to work as a catechists. They all go back to their parishes and the parish priests can give them transfers according to the need. The spiritual life too is taken care with monthly recollection and annual retreats. Occasionally the centre conducts refresher programmes for the trained catechists.

5.5. Retrospect and prospect

The uniqueness of the Centre is the spaced out formation programme. There is sufficient time for reflection and to assess the candidate. The centre is aware of the practical problems the catechist faced in the actual ministry. The Centre has a huge amount of expenses for the course and so is not in favour of training extra catechists. There is a great need for more courses in communicating skills and building relationship skills. Very often a well-planned programme with the parish priest is lacking as they too can avail themselves to work together in the villages. This at times evoke conflicts and misunderstandings among the two.

6. Catechists ‘ Training School, Tongo, Jharkhand

6.1 Origin

This Centre is the oldest Catechists’ Training Centre in North India and the second oldest in India. The Centre began in 1923. This is the only centre that trains the families for the catechetical ministry. In the flourishing mission of Chotonagpur, the need for trained catechists was felt since the end of the nineteenth century. This led to the establishment of a training school at Tongo, an important and fervent parish in the north west of Ranchi. The ambience is spacy and the training Centre has a conducive atmosphere for prayer and study.

Fr. Stanislaus Carbery S.J. was the first director and continued his office till his death in 1931. The second director was Fr. Joseph Staquet S. J who took over the charge in 1933. The Centre trained married catechists. Amidst many difficulties, many families were trained from the whole diocese. The duration of the course is for two years. Due to the enrolment in the army during the Second World War, the Centre was stopped in 1943. Ten years later, it was re-opened with Fr. J. Staquet as its director. Although he and the trainees suffered much privation, yet the work went ahead with perseverance. After a constant approach to the *missio* Aachan, in 1963 he was able to obtain scholarship for the candidates. In 1964 Fr. Pillen S.J. took over the directorship and with the generous help of the German benefactors, 28 new houses were built. In 1970, an Ursuline religious sister was appointed as full-time directress of the catechists wives. This was mainly to train women to be models for the Christian families in the society. In April 1999, Fr. Pillen laid down his office due to illness. In the same month Fr. Ignatius Xalxo was appointed director.

6.2. Staff and the administration

The Centre is run by the Jesuits. The Jesuit Provincial of Ranchi is responsible person at the Centre. Along with him there are lay teachers and a religious sister to take care of the wives of the catechists. There are also occasional visiting professors. The trained catechists at times acts as resource persons as they come and share their lives experiences. The Centre is sustained by *Missio*, some benefactors and other funds.

6.3. Candidates

The Centre sends out to the bishops through a prospectus and they in turn send it to the parishes of the diocese. Usually the parish priests send those who are already in service without being trained. With the consultation of the parish council the parish priest selects and sends to the Centre for training. They are usually married couples. The candidate must be proficient in Hindi and must be residing in one of the dioceses of North India. A probationary period of six months is required before entering the Centre. The age limit is between 20-35 years of age. The wife too has to accompany him. The candidate has to pass at least 8th standard. The Centre has trained 700 couples so far and each batch consists of a maximum number of 20 couples.

6.4. Formation Programme

The programme consists of a two-year course. Usually it begins in February and ends in December on the feast of St. Francis Xavier. Since the Centre underlines character formation as the most important, great stress is laid on it. Doctrinal formation through the basic content of faith is taught, liturgy, music, singing, exercise in preaching, explanation of their personal duties, country medicine, agriculture and the explanation of the laws in the afternoon. They also help in the neighbouring parishes and villages as the need may arise. The Centre keeps in touch with the catechists through the tri-monthly bulletin, yearly meetings, and yearly retreats. There is a union of catechists – “*Tongo Trained Pracharak Sangh*”. They gather every year after Easter.

6.5. Retrospect and prospects

The uniqueness of the Centre is that it trains the catechists and their families together. The Centre faces many problems with regard to the maintenance of the catechists. Some of them are supported by the parish while others by the bishop. The difficulty to work in close collaboration with the parish priest too is a block to this work. The relational problems most of it springs from the salary. Importance must be given to Scripture classes and some skills training too. The Centre lacks good infrastructure, equipment of the modern techniques, audio-visual aid, etc. The intellectual level is very low and so much has to be done to improve in this matter too.

7. Catechists' Training Centre , Torai, Jharkhand

7.1. Origin

In 1976, the centre was opened for the first batch of lay catechists for the India's largest tribe, the Santhals, who are scattered in many dioceses of Northeast India, Nepal and Bangladesh. The Santhals Catholics are faithful believers and they gather together in communities animated by the leaders. Since they didn't have the local pastors, they decided to train the local people. Torai is a semi-town with an easy access to communication and being also one of the oldest parishes in the diocese, it suited for the Centre. The candidate hailed from Orissa, Assam, Bengal, Nepal and Bangladesh. There are also some other tribes who join the Centre.

7.2. Staff and administration

The centre has three priests as permanent staff: the director, the assistant director and one more priest. There are a good number of visiting professors. The first director was Fr. Aquilina, who served the office for a long period of twenty years followed by Fr. S. Lourdu who served for three and a half years. The present director Fr. Periyankam took charge of the Centre in 2000.

7.3. Candidates

The majority of candidates are Santhals. The requisites is to have a good knowledge of the Santhali language. Religious sisters too joined for the course for their future apostolate. Language courses are offered to those from outside. Right motivation for the catechetical ministry is the criteria to be admitted in the Centre. The parish priests selects the candidates in collaboration with their bishops. Over one thousand are trained already in this Centre. A few female catechists are also trained.

7.4. Formation Programme

The course is divided into two: Long term for the full-time catechists and Short term course for the part-time catechists. The duration is for three years which is divided into three parts. In between the course the catechists goes back to his parish for practical experience. The centre gives spiritual, doctrinal and pastoral formation and a special stress on the Gospel is given too. There is also a renewal course of a short duration of just ten days. It is offered to those who are involved in the ministry.

7.5. Retrospect and prospects

The outstanding features of the Centre is the training in local language and the cultural affinity in formation. But this Centre too is not free from financial problems. Diffiucly to work with certain parish priest and vice-versa too. There is a need to update the syllabus and the need to stress on the mission oriented.

8. Jyoti Bhavan, Mokama, Bihar

The Patna diocese started the work for the evangelisation of the *harijans* (low caste) in 1936. The demanding task of ministry among these people called for a renewal of the catechetical work. At the Patna Diocesan Meet in 1972, the participants expressed their strongly felt desires to have a catechetical centre. This was rethought in the meeting of the Catechetical Diocesan Commission on 15th May 1973, the members unanimously agreed to begin a centre for training the catechists, well-adapted to the cultural background of the people. Thus, on the experiential basis the Mokama Centre for Catechists began on 1st September 1973. The first director was Fr. Mathew Uzthuthal. With his transfer in 1984, the centre came to a standstill until in 1986, he returned to continue his directorship with the newly constructed building. In 1988, with the blessing of the new building, the centre was Christened “Jyoti Bhavan”. The following directors were Fr. Jose Chirackal in 1992 and Fr. James Amakatt from 1997 onwards.

8.2. Staff and the administration

Three priests and a religious sister form the staff members. A band of visiting professors are there to help the centre. The bishop of Patna is the president of the organising body. There is an efficient mobile team of trained personals added efficiency in the centre. The systematic and continued formation of village catechists and renewal courses and seminars offered by the Centre.

8.3. Candidates

The Centre admits only a practising catholic, having a high school certificate, having a right motives and the ability to relate maturely, leadership quality and who have at least a year of experience in the catechetical field.

8.4. Formation programme

The programme is set for three months' session over three consecutive years. Each group stay for three months and goes back to their mission station for nine months and to be back for the second session. The third year they will receive the diploma and are officially commissioned as catechists. The Centre stress on the four areas of spiritual growth and faith education. Training for Christian living and spirituality, doctrinal formation based on the Sacred Scripture and liturgy, training in modern catechetical pedagogy and method, formation in proclamation and catechesis through actual practice under supervision. Some other courses are also offered for various groups and religious.

8.5. Retrospect and prospects

The salient feature of the Centre is the well-planned practical experience. It help the staff and the parish priests to assess the candidate well. A personal follow up is another point to be appreciated. The subjects taught includes exegesis and hermeneutics of the Bible to help them prepare the Sunday services. The family catechesis has to be developed which should include the marriage preparatory course, family spirituality course, etc. There is a need for more personals for the work and a better lodges for the catechists during their training. More emphasis should be made to interreligious dialogues and catechesis for all.

9. Lum Jingshai Training Centre, Marbisu, Meghalaya

9.1 Origin

The Centre began in 1973 and functioned as part of Bishop's house in Tura to cater to the whole archdiocese of Shillong viz, Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In the same year it was shifted to Marbishu and was christened as "*Lum Jingshai*" which means "Lighted Mount". The Centre has been always an important for the well-being of the missionary work as catechesis and evangelization is mainly done by the lay catechists. At present there are 130 full-time employed catechists in the archdiocese.

9.2. Staff and the administration

Though it is under the archdiocese, the Centre is managed by the parish priest of Marbisu. The first director was Fr. Joseph Suiemlieh and was replaced by Fr. Sylvanus Nongkynrih in 1997 who is still the director of the centre. There are also religious nuns, a cleric and three lay teachers as staff members. The administrative body consists of the President (the Archbishop), the Secretary (Director of the Centre), and the members who are residential staff from the parish of Marbisu.

9.3 Candidates

The candidates are sent by their respective parish priests. Personal life counts a lot in the selection and the active participation in the parish activities. The candidates are both married and unmarried men and women. The minimum educational qualifications is 10th standard. The number usually remains 30 for each batch.

9.4. Formation Programme

The course lasts a year. The main topics dealt with are Scriptures, the CCC and the basic elements of faith and Liturgy. The medium of instruction is Khasi and also English. The intense course consists of theology and philosophy too. At the end of the course the Archbishop confers to the candidates the *Missio Canonica* by which they are made public official bearers of God's Word.

9.5. Retrospect and prospects

The centre has a large number of candidates who are young both of men and women. The Centre lacks full time director. This has affected the overall formation of the candidates, as he has to take care of the parish too. The financial crisis with the low salary of the catechists made it unattractive for the work. Worst is that the trained catechists look for some other jobs and many joined the teaching work in the schools as their payment is higher. They feel great to be teacher than to be an ordinary catechists.

10. Pastoral Training Centre, Songaiprou, Manipur

10.1 Origin

The Centre was started in Dibrugarh in 1966 with Rev. Fr. Larrea SDB as the first director. This centre was to train the whole of Northeast region. Before the

opening of this centre many attempts were made to begin the centre; in 1953 in Naharkatya, but due to the complexity of the people, language and culture, it could not come true. Finally with the approval of Archbishop Hubert D' Rosario, SDB, the centre began. The first batch were 34 in number hailing from Nagaland and Manipur from various language backgrounds. Therefore the medium of instruction is English. In 1971, the Centre was shifted to Imphal, the capital of Manipur state. The first director was Fr. Shenoy S.J, succeeded by Fr. Mathew Planthottam. The present director is Fr. Louis Pallickunnel.

10.2 Staff and administration

There are three permanent members: two priests and a regent brother. A lay teacher too is employed for teaching. It is supported by *Missio* Germany financially. There are also visiting professors both lay and clerics.

10.3. Candidates

The candidates at present are mainly from Manipur state but they belong to different tribes. In 1999 there were fourteen men from eight tribes. The age group are from 20-37 years. Most of them are intellectually poor. The parish priest recruits candidates with a minimum educational qualification of VIII standard, a working knowledge of English and a character certificate from the parish priest.

10.4. Formation programme

The period of formation is two years which is divided into four phases or in modern terms semesters. Two semesters for each year. The centre aims at formation of spiritual and intellectual aspects of the formees. Course in audio-visuals are also in the curriculum. Practical mission experience is also included in the curriculum. At the end of the course they are given the mission mandate and a mission cross and the Bible. The bishop confer them the *Missio* Canonica wherein they become official catechists of the diocese.

10.5 Retrospect and prospects

The main drawback is the medium of instruction. Due to the low IQ of the candidates, they find it difficult to grasp the lessons. As there are so many dialects in Northeast, one local dialect cannot be used as a medium as there is no one common

language. The lack of priests who are well versed in these dialects and so there are no materials translated in the local dialects. The situation in the parishes have also changed as time passed and the parish cannot pay the catechists except a few of them. Most of them try to get the teaching jobs in mission schools. Lack of funds to run the Centre too is a big drawback for the work.

11. A SPECIFIC STUDY ON THE NATIONAL BIBLICAL CATECHETICAL AND LITURGICAL CENTRE OF INDIA (NBCLC).

The National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC) is a National centre which functions under the auspices of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) to promote renewal of the life and the mission of the Church in India as inspired by Vatican II. It achieves the objective by the Ministry of the Word relating it to the context of India so that the community emerges as fully Indian and authentically Christian at the service of the society and humanity. The centre caters to the needs of the people belonging to different rites of the Catholic Church, different denominations, religious and cultures, priests, religious, laity, youth and parents are involved in the activities of the centre. Besides its original focus on Bible, Catechetics and Liturgy, it conducts seminars, retreats, workshops on social, leadership, spiritual aspects and religious life. Thus, the centre is vibrant to make the Church in India energetic and significant with the guidance of the CBCI.

Objectives of NBCLC :-

The main objective is to be at the service of the Church in India particularly in the areas of Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Apostolate.

1. To promote and coordinate renewal of the Church in India through the contextualized ministry of the Word encouraging inculturation in all aspects of life.
2. To undertake this ministry of the Word in mutual understanding and cooperation with the three rituals Churches in India
3. To promote the ministry of the Word through a triple dialogue: with the poor, with cultures and with religions.

Official name	National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC)
Country / Continent	India / Asia
Director of the institute	Fr. Sagaya John
Legal holder of the institute	Fr. Cleophas D. Fernandes
Sponsor of the institute	Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI)
Year of foundation	1967
Number of staff (employees, freelancers, volunteers)	25
Staff members of the institute	3 Priests, 2 Brothers, 3 Sisters, 3 Lay men, 14 Lay women. We have on our staff Catholics, Hindus and Muslims.
Contact	Post Bag 8426, Hutchins Road, 2nd Cross Bangalore – 560 084 India Tel: (080) 25 47 23 69 (o) 25 46 67 16 (p) Fax: 25 46 01 94 (o) Mobile: 09 00 89 99 236 dirnbclc@yahoo.com www.nbclc.org.in

Publications of NBCLC

- God-with-us series Catechism Books
- 4-volume Liturgy of the Hours (Breviary)
- A Quarterly Magazine covering Pastoral Themes offers both Theological and scriptural insights with an emphasis on a pastoral slant.

The booklets published and available are:

1. The Sources of Social Commitment Fr. John C. D'Mello
2. Vision and Values for a New Society : Fr. M. Amaladoss SJ
3. Towards a Just Economic and Order : Dr. John Mohan Razu

4. Development, Consumerism and Environment: Fr. Robert Athicka SJ
5. Promoting Tribal Rights and Culture: Fr. Agapit Tirkey SJ
6. Peace, Justice and Anti-Terrorismo: Fr. Jerry Rosario SJ
7. The Promotion of Human Rights : Fr. Allwyn D'Silva
8. Communal Harmony, Secularism and Nation-Building: Fr. S.M. Michael
9. Political Consciousness and Responsible Governance: Fr. L. Jeyaseelan

Mission Statement of NBCLC:

The NBCLS seeks: *To promote and coordinate renewal of the Church in India through the contextualized ministry of the Word encouraging inculturation in all aspects of life. To be at the service of the Church in India particularly in the areas of Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Apostolate. To undertake this Ministry of the Word in mutual understanding and cooperation with the three individual Churches in India. To promote this Ministry of the Word through a triple dialogue: with the poor, with the cultures and with the religions.*

Main areas of work

Bible, Catechetics, Liturgy, Inculturation, Inter-religious dialogue, Indian Spirituality, Socio-Pastoral issues, Women empowerment, Eco-spirituality.

The challenges:-

The institute face the challenge of offering something new and fresh from the National Centre which is uniquely different from the other centres of formation in the country. They also face the challenge of getting the involvement and participation of all the three Ritual Churches they are called to serve. The tendency of each of the Ritual Churches is to function on their own and independently. They could establish greater collaboration and cooperation. While the liturgical life of the Churches is different they could collaborate in the other ministries of the Centres. They have meetings of the National Secretaries of the Ritual Churches of India.

The Directors of the Centre right from its inception:

1. Fr. D.S. Amalorpavadass (late) (Founder & First Director) February

1967-September 1982

2. Fr. Paul Puthanangady, SDB September 1982 - May 1991
3. Fr. Jacob Theckanath June 1991 – October 2001
4. Fr. Thomas D'Suza November 2001 – June 2008
5. Fr. Cleophas D. Fernandes July 2008 – June 2014
6. Fr. Sagaya John July 2014 onwards.

Problems of Indian Catechists today

- Low Economic condition: remuneration, family maintenance, from the lower rung of the society
- Low intellectual standard: problem of uneducated 'good will' catechists in a competitive world.
- Emerging indigenous clergy and religious: overflow of Indian priests and religious, preferring religious sisters to catechists
- Emergence of lay apostolate: Charismatic movements and lay apostolate, preferring voluntary lay people to full-trained (paid) catechists
- Identity crisis: no proper distinction among catechists and sacristans, lack of specific roles.

Conclusion – relevance and need

- Need for inculcating the Gospel through laity
- India is still a missionary land. Laity have a great role to play in the evangelisation
- Need for well-trained catechists, competent, professional catechists
- The person of the catechist to be given greater importance to other catechetical tools, texts (AG n.17)
- He/she is an 'apostle ever relevant' in the Church. (*Guide for Catechists*).