

Warnakulasuriya Pradeep Nishantha

Functioning of the National Catechetical Center in Sri Lanka

Official name	National Catechetical Educational and Bible Center
Director of the institute	Very Rev.Fr. Piyal Janaka Fernando
Legal holder of the institute	Bishop's Conference of Sri Lanka
Sponsor of the institute	Bishop,s Conference of Sri Lanka
Vision/Mission	Pave the way to bear witness to Christ to the Christians
Address	11Boralla cross Road,08,Colombo, Sri Lanka
Telephone	0094112685459
Main areas of work	To take main decision with regard to catechetical Bible study and education for the benefit of the whole island of Sri Lanka
Participants	Children , Youth, Adults
Year of foundation	9 th January, 1965
Organizational structure	Chairman Bishop/ National Director/Commission/ Diocesan Directors
Aims and goals of the institute	To guide the children, youth, adults and all those wish to know Christ. Offer a theological-pastoral foundation of the ministry of catechesis and promote persons trained and specialized in the field of catechesis.

Pastoral service	Conduct seminars for students both in Sinhala and in Tamil media. /Provide books and lessons for the students / Training of catechists/ Conduct postal study courses for students who are living far away and who cannot obtain catholic education.
Magazines, periodicals, books manuals work aids we publish	Daham maga/ A/L, O/L Guide books / Teachers Guide/ Past papers/ Visual aids
Difficulties and challengers we face	Financial difficulties, Lack of resource persons

- The national center is under the supervision of the Bishops 'conference in Sri Lanka
- It is linked with diocesan centers
- It is also linked with the international organization for religious education (OFIC),
FABC (ASIA)

Brief introduction

The national catechetical Biblical center in Sri Lanka is a National Center which functions under the directions of the catholic Bishops' conference of Sri Lanka in order to promote renewal of the life and the mission of the church in Sri Lanka in the light of Vatican II. It achieves the objective by the ministry of the word relating it to the context of Sri Lanka so that the community emerges as fully Sri Lankan and authentically Christian at the service of the society and humanity. The center caters to the needs of the people belonging to both Sinhala and Tamil language groups. Besides its original focus on Bible, catechetics and liturgy, it also conducts seminars, retreats, and workshops on social leadership, spiritual aspects and religious life. The National catechetical educational and bible center in Sri Lanka works very closely with the Christian ministry. It helps to receive the

government support for religious education, especially teaching of catholic religion in government schools. It is important to note that the diocesan centers are free to decide for their own depending on the requirement of the local church.

- As I have explained at the beginning the national center coordinates and supports the diocesan centers for their smooth running. In fact, the national center has no authority over any of the diocesan centers in Sri Lanka. It has only to help whenever they are in need.
- Therefore along with this line I would like to speak about the diocesan catechetical center of the diocese of Badulla to which I belong.
- The diocese of badulla in Sri Lanka is a small diocese and it has 19 parishes. Majority of the people are Buddhist and Catholics are minority live among Hindus and Islamic. Among Catholics there are Tamil speaking and Sinhala speaking people. The Catholics are spreader in three districts .Specially they live in a malty ethnic, malty religious and malty cultural background.
- The name of the institute for catechetics and evangelization is called UVA Biblical catechetical and pastoral center. The chairman is the Bishop of the diocese and there is a priest in charge who is called the catechetical director. He represent the diocese in the national meetings.

Functions of the institute

- Formation of the catechists.
Conducting classes, seminars, exams, for them. There are also catechists who work in the government schools as volentrory teachers due to the lack of catholic teacher's .They are paid by the catechetical center. They are trained and given on going formation by the center.
- Functioning of the Sunday school
The center has to organize all the programs for the Sunday school children in the diocese. Eg: conducting seminars, exams, Bible studies, competitions, etc....

Since there are not enough catholic teachers in the government schools, the center has the responsibility of preparing O/I, and A/L students for government exams. The center organizes weekend classes providing them with food and lodging.

Not only that the center has to pay their raveling also since most of them come from far away and rural areas. The center organizes life awareness programs for the children. Sometimes these programs are conducted in the government schools when the permission is granted.

We also distribute religious books, magazines, periodicals, manuals, work aids for the children and teachers in order to update their knowledge in Christian faith.

The center conducts postal study courses for the students who are living in far away, especially in rural areas.

Difficulties and challengers we face

- Financial difficulties.

Lack of resource persons. (Sins there are number of priests and religious in the diocese it is very difficult to get them for teaching or other services in the center).There are only few qualified lay teachers in the diocese

- Language inability.

Since there are Sinhalese and Tamil speaking people in the diocese, it is needed to conduct all the programs in both the languages.so it is hard to find capable personalities.

- Distance

Due to the distance and difficulties of traveling, we face problems when conducting programs.

When sending catechists for teaching especially in the government schools the distance issue affects a lot.

Due to this fact, the participation of the children for programs is very less.

- Government interference

Since we are living in dominantly Buddhist area, it is not easy at all to carry out the mission. It is very difficult to get the cooperation of the government officials when conducting programs especially in the schools.

Conclusion

According to the Sri Lankan context, the national catechetical center cannot influence the diocesan centers very much. All the dioceses are independent and catechetical centers operate according to the vision and the mission of the diocese. Since I have explained already about the function of the national catechetical center here, I have elaborated the work carried out by Badulla diocesan catechetical center in Sri Lanka.