

**GENDER POLICY OF  
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OF INDIA**



**Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society**

**GENDER POLICY OF  
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OF INDIA**



**CBCI Commission For Women  
Catholic Bishops' Conference of India  
2010**

# **GENDER POLICY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OF INDIA**

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***“God created man in his own image, in the image of  
God he created him; male and female He created them.”***

Genesis 1:27



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# **FOREWORD**

## **CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF INDIA (CBCI)**

It is with immense joy that I present the 'Gender Policy for the Catholic Church in India 2009', approved by the CBCI Standing Committee in September 2009. The Gender Policy was authorised by the CBCI Plenary Assembly held from the 13<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>st</sup> February 2008 which deliberated on the theme, "Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society".

The Gender Policy took shape from the earnest desire of the women and men of the country to bring equality and harmony to all. It is based on the mutual understanding that both male and female are created in the image and likeness of the divine. It rejects all types of discrimination against women as being contrary to God's intent and purpose (G.S., 29).

The process of the preparation of the Gender Policy began soon after the 28<sup>th</sup> CBCI Plenary Assembly 2008. All the thirteen Ecclesiastical Regions gathered in their respective Regions and prepared their Regional Gender Policies from April to August 2008. The Regional Gender Policies were later on passed by their Regional Bishops' Councils. From 18<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> April 2009, the Commission for Women compiled the Regional Gender Policies and prepared the CBCI Gender Policy. On 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2009, Most Rev. John Baptist Thakur SJ presented the Gender Policy at the CBCI Standing Committee Meeting. The Standing Committee welcomed the Policy and appointed a five member Bishop team who studied the Policy in detail.

The Gender Policy underlines that equality and dignity of all human persons form the basis of a just and humane society. The Policy maintains that Women's empowerment is central to achieving gender equality.

The Gender Policy addresses the following areas of women's

concern - Marriage and Family; Education; Health; Social Involvement such as Social Awareness, Promotion of women's participation in public life / State political structures, Women and Economic independence, Women for Peace & Religious Harmony, Women and Environment; Special Areas of concern namely Rights of Girl Child, Tribal and *Dalit* women, Women in difficult circumstances and Trafficking of women and Sexual abuse; and Areas within the Church such as Women and CBCI, Women and Diocesan Social Service Societies, Women's representation and participation in Church bodies and Formation of Consecrated Women & Seminarians. It also addresses Research, documentation and dissemination of information and Networking with the Implementation Mechanisms.

The Gender Policy aims to address the concerns of women, who are doubly marginalized and oppressed. As followers of Christ, we are challenged to create conditions for marginalized voices to be heard, to defend the defenseless, and to assess lifestyles, policies and social institutions in terms of their impact on women.

The Policy recognizes that violence and discrimination exist but it is the most unpunished of all crimes. The Policy promotes the egalitarian message of Jesus, with the vision of a collaborative Church with Gender Justice. It envisages a world where both women and men can enjoy total freedom and equality to grow in the image and likeness of God.

With an increasing onslaught on women through various means such as rape, abduction, domestic violence and dowry deaths, there is an ever more need for a Policy that will initiate and help sustain change. The Policy hopes that it will be a starting point of bringing equality and sustaining it.

I earnestly urge all the Dioceses, Religious Congregations, Educational Institutions, and all the persons who desire to work towards equality and justice to welcome this Policy wholeheartedly, study it with great care and explore ways for its effective implementation.

I hope the CBCI Gender Policy may inspire the Universal Church to

make a favourable situation for women that will create co-partnership in the family, society and the world.

Let us strive strenuously to bring about the required change of mindset and attitude through a proper understanding of the specific roles of both men and women in our homes and workplaces, in our human interactions and social relationships, in the Church and Society at large (E.A., 34).

*+ Varkey Vithayathil*

**+ Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil C. Ss.R**

President, Catholic Bishops Conference of India &

Major Archbishop, Ernakulam - Angamali

Solemnity of Blessed Virgin Mary, 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2009.

# Acknowledgements

CBCI Commission For Women is deeply grateful and indebted to the CBCI Standing Committee, Secretariat, Commissions and Institutions for the preparation and promulgation of the CBCI Gender Policy.

We would like to acknowledge the Regional Chairmen of the Commission For Women, Bishop Ignatius Menezes, Bishop Paul Maipan, Bishop Lucas Sirkar SDB, Bishop Mathew Anikuzhikattil, Bishop Edwin Colaco, Bishop Leo Cornelio, SVD, Bishop Thomasappa Anthony Swamy, Bishop John Baptist Thakur, SJ, Bishop Andrew R. Marak, Bishop Anil Joseph Thomas Couto, Bishop Yvon Ambroise, Bishop Alphonse Bilung, SVD and Bishop John Barwa, SVD for their commitment towards developing a Gender Policy for the Church in India.

We appreciate the committed efforts and hard work of the Regional Coordinators, Ms. Pansy Thomas, Sr. Bernard OSU, Sr. Mary Rita FC, Ms. Beena Sebastian, Ms. Teresa Irene Rodrigues, Ms. Sugantha Sathiyaraj, Sr. Daisy Athickal, Ms. Bernadette Pitchai, Sr. Mary Thomas RNDM, Ms. Albina Marak, Ms. Muriel Schooner and Ms. Angelina J. Brar.

The zeal, hard work, and expertise of the Drafting Team, Dr. Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, Dr. Rita Noronha, Ms. Lida Jacob IAS, Dr. Neena Joseph, Ms. Loy Maria George, and Sr. Lilly Francis SMMI, who made the Gender Policy possible. The CBCI Commission For Women is extremely indebted to the Team. We are especially grateful to Fr. John Desrochers CSC who graciously collaborated in this endeavor.

We appreciate the Advisory Members, Ms. Chinnamma Jacob, Ms. Mungreiphy Shimray, Ms. Rosakutty Abraham, Ms. Rita V. Chaya, Sr. Philomena D' Souza and Sr. Sreeja SND for their support.

We extend our Special thanks to Caritas India and Missio Munchen for their financial support and encouragement. We place on record the prayerful support, profound insights and encouragement of the Conference of Religious India, Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate, Streevani, and Vidyajyoti.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Christian understanding of gender equality is based on the biblical account of creation. Man and woman are both created in the image and likeness of God, expressing a “unity of the two” in a common humanity. The New Testament develops this ethos in Jesus’ invitation to women’s discipleship and St. Paul’s exhortation that “there is no male and female, for all are one in Jesus Christ” (Gal 3:28)

The equality and differentiation of women and men is based on their God given, natural, biological and specific personal constitution. Gender inequality is not a “women’s issue” but should concern and engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as human rights issue and as pre-condition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.' (*CBCI GP*)

The Bishops of India in 1974 promised that they would stand for the dignity and rights of women by providing education and empowerment and a proper formation for their mission, ensuring representation and even leadership roles in the Church organizations and helping create proper conditions conducive to this in the Church and society.

A solid and well defined policy was needed to make the above dream a reality. The Plenary meeting of the CBCI at Jamshedpur in February 2008 achieved this by issuing a historic statement “Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society.” The Bishops, further, committed themselves as a body to evolve within a period of one year a Gender Policy developed by each Regional Bishops’ Council with time-bound action plans for their region with monitoring mechanisms. Basing on these, the CBCI Gender Policy would emerge. The CBCI Commission for Women would give general guidance and norms for developing such a policy.

With much labour of love and dedication the Commission within a year, formulated and presented the draft of a Gender Policy to the Standing Committee of CBCI at its session in the month of September 2009 and it was gratefully accepted and graciously approved with some minor modifications.

A policy is a present decision for future action. If action does not follow, a policy remains a dead letter, however well-worded. This policy, therefore, presents some concrete guidelines to attain our goals. The responsibility to internalize and implement is a concern for all, men and women, commissions and communities, institutions and organizations. This Gender Policy, in fact, is addressed to Christians as well as all people of good will. That the Policy becomes a shared Vision and Mission of the whole community, it proposes a practical implementation mechanism grounded in local realities. It draws its strength from support of all who will recognize their fingerprints in this document that gives expression to some of our most cherished dreams.

In the process of formulating the Gender Policy, many have accompanied us and supported us. We are grateful to the Bishop Members of CBCI Commission For Women: Most Rev. Edward Colaco and Most Rev. Ignatius Menezes; Bishop members of review committee Most Rev. Thomas Dabre and Most Rev. Yvon Ambroise; members of its Advisory Body; Most Rev. Archbishops/Bishops with Secretaries of Regional Committees; CBCI Secretariat; various CBCI Commissions and many outstanding individual women and men. The entire journey has been animated by Sr. Lilly Francis, SMMI, Executive Secretary of CBCI Commission For Women who stirred the spirit continuously.

Gender equality is a burning issue of all times. It affects not only the fifty percent of women but all of humankind. Governments and authorities are taking note of gender inequality and the harm it has been doing to women and men and society. Much interest has been generated on this issue.

I am sure that the Christian community and the wider public will accept this Gender Policy as an expression of the sincere commitment of the Catholic Church of India, to build a world where all human persons are equal and free to grow in the image and likeness of God.

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and the name 'John Baptist Thakur' in a cursive script.

**Bishop John Baptist Thakur, S.J.**  
Chairperson, CBCI Commission For Women  
Solemnity of Blessed Virgin Mary, 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2009.

# PART I

## I. GENDER EQUALITY

The Christian understanding of gender equality is based on the biblical account of creation. Man and woman are both created in the image and likeness of God, expressing a “unity of the two” in a common humanity. This inter-personal communion mirrors the divine communion making it both a call and a task.<sup>1</sup> The New Testament develops this ethos in Jesus’ invitation to women’s discipleship and St. Paul’s exhortation that “there is no male and female, for all are one in Jesus Christ” (Gal 3:28).

The equality and differentiation of women and men is based on their God-given, natural, biological and specific personal constitution. Gender inequality is not a “women’s issue” but should concern and engage men as well as women.

Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a pre-condition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of man and woman being created equal by God, unfortunately, both in history and in today’s world there is gross discrimination against women. Still worse, justifications are given for discriminating between man and woman, boy and girl. Sometimes this is also done on the grounds of religious tradition.

Thus improvements in women’s status will require not only an analysis of the relations between men and women and the empowerment of women, but also the concurrence and cooperation of men. Accordingly current development policies seek to have both women and men participate, make decisions and share benefits. There is also an overt recognition that the participation and commitment of men is required to fundamentally alter the social and economic position of women.<sup>3</sup> Such an approach further recognizes the impact of gender inequality on men in terms of adverse effects on their psyche, behaviour,

interpersonal relations, lifestyles and health and the corresponding benefits that come with gender equality.

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is an essential step towards achieving gender equality. It is a “process of assessing the implication for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or program, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.”<sup>4</sup> Recognizing this, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India at its 28<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly, 2008, committed itself as a body to evolve a gender policy for the Church in India.

## **II. SITUATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA**

Although the socio-cultural situation of women is different among social classes and ethnic groups, women, irrespective of their culture and race, face systemic and structural discriminatory practices. In most socio-cultural communities in India, women’s human rights are limited by religious, cultural and traditional practices that are based on patriarchal norms. Issues of culture, religion, ethnic and other forms of identity have become highly politicised due to rising religious fundamentalism that reinforces control over women, keeps them confined to roles that perpetuate their subordination and prevents them from full enjoyment of their human rights.

We are happy to note that the Constitution of India provides specifically for human rights, gender equality, affirmative action, freedom and security of the person and socio-economic rights. It grants equality to women and empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. The State has passed many laws to prevent violation of the rights of women. Despite those efforts, overt and covert manifestations of gender inequality persist.

1. The sex ratio of India is 933 women per 1000 men (2001 census). Male preference leads to elimination of the female foetus and female infanticide. Total population of women in the country as per 2005 estimates, is 531.9 millions.<sup>5</sup>
2. Literacy rate of women is 65% as against 80% of men .<sup>6</sup>
3. Women's work is undervalued and unrecognised<sup>7</sup>. They work for longer hours and are paid less than men for the same work.
4. There are fewer women in the organised work force than men and there are more unemployed women than unemployed men. One indicator of the same is that only 41% females are economically active above the age of 15 vis-à-vis 86% Males<sup>8</sup>.
5. Women generally earn a far lower wage than men for doing the same work. They are paid only 75% of the wage of men.
6. Women are under represented in governance and decision-making positions. Only 9% of Parliament seats, less than 6% in Cabinet positions, less than 4% of seats in High Courts and the Supreme Court and less than 3% of administrative and managerial positions are with women. Women do get elected to positions of power in the grassroots governance institutions due largely to reservations, but are mostly proxy candidates and the husbands, sons or other elite men actually continue to perform as leaders.
7. The caste/class systems, cultural and traditional practices place women in lower status in all aspects<sup>9</sup>.
8. Denial of Rights/Entitlements to women is quite common.
9. Atrocities against women, domestic violence, trafficking, rape and dowry-related violence<sup>10</sup> are other visible oppressive trends against women.

The process of globalization and lop-sided developmental models within the country have increased the incidents of structural discrimination against women. Women bear the brunt of the structural adjustment policies and are burdened with the responsibility of meeting

the essential needs of the family in the face of increasing economic hardship and displacement from their lands and communities.

The high levels of militarization, as manifested in military and arms expenditure and the upsurge of armed conflicts, has made the socio-economic and political climate gravely insecure. Women are disproportionately affected by this situation.

Women from vulnerable groups such as *Dalits*, *Adivasis*, Tribal and Backward Castes face further discrimination based on their gender, caste and ethnicity.

Violence against women is the most universal and unpunished crime of all. It is linked to the status of women and perpetuated by systematic gender discrimination and societal norms that devalue women. Solving the problem of violence requires solving the problem of gender inequality. Thus elimination of violence against women demands coordinated and sustained effort at all levels.

The culture of domination, marginalization and exclusion which embody ideas, beliefs, values, traditions, rules, norms, perspectives (ideologies) that prefer males/sons has been styled in the culture of patriarchy. Through dominating social structures men own, control and manage financial, intellectual and ideological resources as well as the labour, fertility and sexuality of women, and thus perpetuate gender discrimination. Such a culture produces stereotyped notions of how a woman or man should behave (in words and actions), whereby they themselves become transmitters of the above value system. Consequently women also become both victims and victimizers. The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structures, which in turn are based on informal and formal norms and practices. For example, the process of globalization which is market-centered and profit-driven, leads to further exploitation of women as cheap labour resulting in their increasing pauperisation and increased human trafficking where again women become the most affected.

Fundamentalism and communalism reinforce the subjugation of women to men, suppress women's movements by dividing women

along religious lines and intensify violence against women.

### **III. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF GENDER EQUALITY**

In Gen 1:26 we are told that man and woman are created “in the image and likeness of God.” This concept is elaborated in the Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, which situates the “women’s rights” issue within the larger context of the rights of the human person (MD 6, 7, 10). The Letter emphasizes that woman is neither the property of man nor his extension but “another ‘I’ in a common humanity” (MD 6). Man and woman are both seen as human persons of equal dignity. Both are entrusted with responsible stewardship over the goods of the earth. Both are called to attain true personhood through the sincere gift of self. Within the family, husband and wife are seen as co-creators, and the child’s upbringing is seen as the responsibility of both. Man, however, is reminded that “he owes a special debt to the woman” [...who] “pays directly for the shared generation which literally absorbs the energies of her body and soul.” (MD 18)

Since the early 1960s, the Social Teaching of the Church (STC) has expressed ever more clearly the Church’s understanding of the vocation of Women in the Church and in Society. While denouncing the terrible and manifold oppressions of women, the STC highlights the positive contributions of women throughout the centuries. Considering the growing awareness of women as a “sign of the times” (PT, 41) and the process of women’s liberation as “substantially positive” (John Paul II, 1995 Letter to Women, 6), the Church has proclaimed the essential equality of all human beings. She recognizes women’s “equal rights to participate in cultural, economic, social and political life” (OA, 13) and welcomes their indispensable participation in the Church’s life.

The Church through its Social Teachings and interventions has revealed her commitment to the cause of empowerment of women. In documents such as *Pacem in Terris* 1963, *Gaudium et Spes* 1965, *Mulieris Dignitatem* 1988, various Papal letters and messages to women and men of the Church, and the Documents of the Synods of Bishops,

the Universal Church has reiterated the need to promote the dignity and equality of women in Church and society. The Church emphasizes that “since in our times women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the Church’s Apostolate” (*Gaudium et Spes* 1965).<sup>11</sup> In the Christian tradition the movement of women’s empowerment can be traced to Jesus for whom the empowerment of women and their liberation from all forms of bondage - poverty, suffering, disease, untouchability, sexual slavery and adultery - was a priority.

‘In a culture where women were seen only in relation to men, Christ not only liberated them from their oppressive traditions but upheld their dignity e.g. the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:7-42) and Mary and Martha (Jn 11:20-40). He used the life experiences of women as a paradigm of God’s love and Christian discipleship for all: woman and lost coin, woman and the dough and woman at birth pangs... Jesus entrusted women to announce the Good News of Resurrection to his disciples.’ (Statement of the 28<sup>th</sup> CBCI Plenary Assembly 2008)

#### **IV. VISION OF CHRIST**

“In all of Jesus’ teaching, as well as in His behaviour, one can find nothing which reflects the discrimination against women so prevalent in His day. On the contrary, His words and works always express the honour and respect due to women... [His] way of speaking to and about women, as well as His manner of treating them, clearly constitutes an “innovation” with respect to the prevailing custom at that time” (MD 13), and a “consistent protest against whatever offends the dignity of women” (MD 15). Thus in a male-centered society where women were ignored and discounted, Jesus heals them physically, emotionally and spiritually. Jesus’ relationship with women is to be seen in the context of his Messianic mission.

The early Church remained faithful to this legacy of the Master as can be seen in St. Paul’s letters about the ecclesial role of women. His fundamental principle is the equality of the baptized: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor

female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). His epistles describe women as playing active and significant roles in the early Church, (Acts 16:11-15, 40; Rom 16:5; Col 4:15; Philemon 1:2; Rom 16:7; Rom 16:1-2; Rom 16:6, 12a, 12b, 15; Phil 4:2).

## V. TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

The Church has also made numerous declarations on the equality of and relationship between women and men. Pope John XXIII reflected the concern of the Church for women in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, “Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as mere material instruments, but demand rights befitting a human person both in domestic and in public life.” And again, “Man and woman are called to work in a relationship of equality towards the attainment of universal good.”

The Second Vatican Council on various occasions swept aside the many layers of patriarchal dominance in the Church to come face to face with the egalitarian message of Jesus, with the vision of a collaborative Church with Gender Justice. In its Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes* (No. 29), it condemns any form of discrimination on the basis of sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion.

Pope John Paul II in his appeal to Ecclesial Communities, States and International Institutions, urged everyone to make every effort to ensure that women regain full respect for their dignity and role; to make effective and intelligent campaign for the promotion of women, concentrating on all areas of women’s life; to examine the past with courage, to work in a convincing manner so that the widest possible space be opened to women in the economy, politics and in the life of the Church. (Pope John Paul II, Letter to Women 6).

Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes that without the generous contribution of many women, the history of Christianity would have developed very differently.

## **VI. CBCI EMPOWERING CATHOLIC WOMEN**

The Catholic Community in India consists of 160 Dioceses with 3 ritual bodies: Latin, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara. Together they form the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI).

Every two years, a General Assembly of the Bishops is held on a relevant theme of the time. The Bishops work towards realizing the goals set at the Assembly for the betterment of society.

In its 1974 Statement, the Conference highlighted the unique contribution of women in the mission of the Church. The Bishops, moreover, promised that they will stand for the dignity and rights of women by providing education and empowerment and a proper formation for their mission, ensuring them representation and even leadership roles in the Church organisations, and helping create proper conditions conducive to this in the Church and society.

In the year 1979, the Bishops during their General Assembly at Ranchi acknowledged that “woman is still considered in many ways inferior to man”.<sup>12</sup>

At the General Assembly of the Bishops in Nagpur in February 1984, while citing the major challenges of contemporary society they said, “Women experience cumulative exploitation in the sense that, deprived and disadvantaged in one sphere, they are disadvantaged and deprived in every other sphere of life...Women experience discrimination in the family, employment and society and, as is reported frequently in the newspapers, violence against them is increasing. Rape, lewd advertising and pornographic films, bride burning because of dowry, indicate how extremely vulnerable women are in both rural and urban areas to sexual and commercial exploitation”.<sup>13</sup>

Eight years later, during the General Assembly of Bishops held in Pune 1992, the situation of women was taken up as one of the main topics for discussion. The Action Plan included the institution of a Women's Desk which was to represent the concerns of all women of the Church in India and to serve as a catalyst that promotes and supports all initiatives/women's associations that aim at the empowerment of

women irrespective of caste or creed.<sup>14</sup> In the Concluding Statement of this Assembly (1992) the Bishops said, “Discrimination against women seems to be embedded in the structure of our society, Violence (physical, sexual, psychological) that is practised against women is the result of inhuman attitudes. With a sense of sorrow we must admit that women feel discriminated (against) even in Church.” The Bishops further issued a Statement which was followed by a call to have a plan of action in each Region that would foster respect for human dignity irrespective of sex, promote the rights of women in the home and in society, and ensure adequate representation of women in decision-making bodies of the Church. Priests and religious were exhorted to focus their attention on this inequality in their own attitudes and practices, in their homilies, in their visits to families, and in their respectful collaboration with women religious in the mission of the Church.

At the 1996 General Assembly of Bishops, the Women’s Desk was raised to the status of a Commission “because of the specific problems related to women in our social, economic, cultural and political realities”.<sup>15</sup>

The Catholic Church in India has promoted the empowerment of women over the years and has made a noteworthy contribution towards women’s empowerment particularly in the field of education and health care. Worthy of mention is the pioneering work of the missionaries who were the first to promote girls’ education in India. The first ever girls’ school opened in India by the Missionaries was at Kottayam, Kerala in 1819. A year later another school was established in Alapuzha, Kerala. In North-east India, especially in the plains of Assam, education of women was practically unknown till the arrival of the Missionaries at the turn of the 20th century. There are a total of 14,539 Catholic Educational Institutions in the country. Among them 6556 Institutions (45.1%) are run by Dioceses and 7983 Institutions (54.9%) are run by Religious Congregations.<sup>16</sup>

The Church’s involvement in community health care dates back to the establishment of the ‘*Santa Casa de Misericordia*’ by the Portuguese missionaries around 1513 in Cochin and Goa.<sup>17</sup> Innovative services

initiated and sustained by the Church, especially by the religious and secular women's groups, for the welfare, development and promotion of health care among women have received public recognition both locally and globally. The Health Policy of Church in India, also clearly admits that women should be given special consideration in the matters of health.

In the Education Policy of the Church in India enunciated at the 27<sup>th</sup> CBCI General Body Meeting in the year 2006 it was stated that special preference should be shown for girl students particularly those from the marginalised sector.

Developmental interventions conducted by Church bodies have focused on promoting the organization of marginalized women and have facilitated their visibility and active role in tackling issues related to their economic deprivation and social marginalization. Church initiatives in various parts of India have contributed to active participation of marginalized women in local self-governance. Church leaders, both religious and lay (women and men), have also taken a stand against violation of human rights inclusive of women's rights, and have inspired many others to join this process.<sup>18</sup>

# PART II

## **VII. VISION**

Flowing from the vision of Jesus Christ, the Champion of the *anawim*, the oppressed, exploited and marginalized of society, and inspired by His love that makes no distinction between male and female, the Catholic Church in India is committed to building a world where all human persons are free to grow in the image and likeness of God.

## **VIII. MISSION**

1. To deepen among women and men a sense of their dignity as human beings created in the image and likeness of God. (Gen 1: 26-27)
2. To stimulate reflection in the Church on its mission to form a discipleship of equals. (Luke 22:26-27)
3. To contribute to the process of creating a gender just Church and society with a special focus on the marginalised. (Luke 4:18-19)
4. To make space for a spirituality that is shaped by women’s life experiences and creative expression. (Mark 14: 3-9)

## **IX. OBJECTIVES**

1. To facilitate change in the mindsets of women and men so that they relate to each other with respect and dignity.
2. To ensure fulfilment of the human rights of women especially of the marginalized groups.
3. To ensure that all Church ministries, policies, structures, procedures and programs are gender sensitive and gender balanced.
4. To make provisions for adequate human and material resources to achieve the objectives.

## **X. GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The CBCI Gender Policy is rooted in the following principles which also provide direction for its implementation:

1. **Equality and dignity of all human persons form the basis of a just and humane society.** Women's issues are social concerns that impact society at large. Commitment to and solidarity with the marginalized sections of society, especially women, is therefore essential.
2. **Human persons have the innate potential to transform themselves and their environment.** Such transformation, however, begins with a change in beliefs, attitudes, practices and patterns of relating to one another.
3. **Women's empowerment is central to achieving gender equality.** Through empowerment women become aware of unequal power relations, gain control over their lives and resources, as well as acquire a greater voice to overcome inequality in their homes, workplaces, community, church and society. The desired transformation will take place only when women are at the forefront for the cause of dignity and a rightful place for themselves in the Church and society.
4. **Gender equality is a cross-cutting issue that needs to be integrated in all the Commissions, Church bodies, institutions, policies and programs of the Church.** It pertains to women in education, social development, health, peace and justice, inter-religious dialogue, youth, SC/ST, labour, communication and media, liturgy (doctrine) and ecumenism.
5. **The experiences and wisdom of women are conducive for the growth and transformation of the Church and society.** Women's unique experiences and insights enrich deliberations and must influence agendas, policies and action programs.
6. **Achieving gender equality requires the recognition that every policy, program and project affects women and men differently.** This necessitates effectively designing and managing action plans that result in equality of outcome and impact.
7. **Gender just structures are imperative to facilitate the equality of opportunities and justice for all.** This requires the establishment of women inclusive, participatory, accountable, transparent,

efficient and sustainable structural mechanisms within the Church and society. Women must be a part of decision making and their contribution within the Church and society must be formally recognized. Women's skills and needs must be taken into account so as to promote familial, economic, social, political and religious equality.

8. **Gender equality can only be achieved through equal partnership among and between women and men.** Equal partnership goes beyond numbers. It involves women's equal right to articulate their needs and interests as well as their vision of society and the Church and to shape the decisions that affect their lives.<sup>19</sup>
9. **Networking and collaboration are crucial processes to mobilize collective action for social transformation.** Partnership with women's organizations and other groups working for gender equality is necessary to assist this process.<sup>20</sup>

*“We the Bishops of India seek to join hands with the Central and State governments, civil society organizations, and other religious groups to safeguard the rights and freedom of all, especially women, irrespective of caste, creed, and vocation. We desire to strengthen institutional mechanisms with adequate personnel and finances at all levels of the Church to inspire, motivate, coordinate and monitor the process and results of execution of the gender policy.” (Statement of the 28<sup>th</sup> CBCI Plenary Assembly 2008)*

# **PART III**

## **XI. AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION**

### **1. Women and Family**

The family is the most precious human institution and every couple has the important responsibility to safeguard it against the numerous forces that seek to destroy or weaken it. As the “domestic Church” forms the foundation of the Church, the family needs to be supported and nurtured.

#### **Policy**

Aware that the well-being of society and her own good are intimately tied to the well being of the family, the Church is committed to reinforcing the sanctity of the marriage covenant and the mutual self-giving of husband and wife.<sup>21</sup> It acknowledges and supports the pivotal position of the mother as the heart of the family and her role in the moulding of the future generations and the faith formation of the family.

#### **Strategies**

- Organise orientation programs to build mutual respect and equal partnership in the marriage relationship.
- Impart skills for effective parenting through family education programs and marriage preparation courses, keeping in mind the need to overcome the cultural bias against the girl child and sexual stereotypes.
- Actively advocate the equal rights of the daughter and the son over family property and strongly discourage demanding and offering of dowry. Discourage lavish wedding ceremonies and persuade the rich to offer financial support for the marriage of the poor.

- Promote a spirituality of sexual relationship perceived as an expression of mutual love and self-gift rather than an exercise of conjugal right (of the man) and duty (of the wife). Emphasise the sacramental nature of marriage to ensure the fidelity of both partners.
- Foster a culture of sharing in household chores among all the members of the family overcoming gender division of labour.
- Encourage family-oriented movements like ‘Marriage Encounter’, ‘Teams of Our Lady’, and ‘Couples for Christ’ to promote the fundamental equality of husband and wife as both a gift and a right deriving from God, the Creator.
- Accompany women, emotionally, financially and legally, through the painful processes of canonical annulment and civil divorce.
- Include in marriage preparation courses, education for a healthy, loving and reciprocal relationship in marriage with special emphasis on educating men in power sharing. Promote mutual responsibility, accountability and transparency in all decision-making processes.
- Advocate strongly and publicly zero tolerance to all forms of domestic violence (physical, verbal, emotional, sexual and economic).
- Promote stability in married life through effective ways of conflict resolution.
- Nurture a culture of respect and care for the elderly.
- Support a culture that promotes life at all stages and address the cultural and economic factors that lead to abortion, foeticide, suicide and homicide.
- Design faith-formation programs for catechists, children, youth, those in marriage preparation, couples and families to reorient them towards gender equity and mutuality in relationships, in their prayers, language, attitudes and actions. Church teachings on interpersonal dynamics across gender should be grounded in the gospel values of truth, love and justice.

## **2. Women and Education**

The Catholic Church recognises the fact that education can be a double-edged instrument which can be used to reinforce gender role stereotypes or to facilitate critical questioning of discriminatory forms of behaviour and practices. Hence, specifically designed educational interventions are required to facilitate change in mindset, behaviour and practices which will contribute to eliminating unjust gender relations.

### **Policy**

The Church commits herself to incorporate gender awareness as a cross-cutting issue in inputs in formal educational institutions and non-formal educational interventions. This will enable all members and leaders of the Church as well as those that the Church caters to through its various services (i.e. welfare, education, health, development, advocacy) to adopt forms of behaviour and practices that are gender sensitive. It also recognises the need to enhance the capabilities of women and men of the marginalised groups by providing them access on a priority basis, to all educational opportunities equitably at all levels.

### **Strategies**

- Help in the implementation of the CBCI Education Policy with a special focus on women and girls.
- Allot at least 25% of seats in all Church run and Church related institutions to the first generation learners, especially women from SC and ST and backward communities.
- Prioritise compulsory and free education of girl children in Catholic schools, with special emphasis on reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education.
- Accept co-education as a norm for all Church run institutions as this is necessary to provide a conducive environment for the healthy development of girls and boys.

- Oppose child labour.
- Motivate girls to take up science and technology for higher education and take up special measures for their training in areas where they have special skills like communication and information technology.
- Produce, disseminate and use appropriate educational modules and materials to facilitate gender awareness among all members and partners of the church.
- Build a team of women and men animators in every diocese (lay and religious) to facilitate gender awareness programs. Such teams must include women & men scholars and feminist theologians.
- Establish a Gender Studies/Resource Centre in every Region of India and network with similar established secular Resource Centres on the subject (Universities, Government Agencies & NGOs).
- Make the pulpit available to appropriately trained lay and religious, women and men to share their knowledge, experiences, insights and interpretations.
- Educate clergy against the imposition of gender biased practices (i.e. covering the head with veil by women, while receiving Holy Communion, reading the gospel and at the time of adoration).
- Enable women to have wider career/job choices and promote sustainable livelihoods by organising capacity-building<sup>22</sup> programmes for women at the village, parish and diocesan levels. Make available the required infrastructural facilities in Church based institutions such as schools, colleges, vocational, technical, engineering, health and development centres.
- Educate women, and men especially the more disadvantaged, about their constitutional and legal rights.
- Actively partner with Govt ministries and agencies for various educational programs. (e.g. Service Support Analyst (SSA), National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS))

### **3. Women and Health**

The alarming statistics relating to survival, nutrition and morbidity of women in India make it imperative for the church and all civil society organisations to directly intervene in the health care delivery systems especially for the marginalised in the poorly served areas. The Church will endeavour to work with government agencies and NGOs to ensure effective implementation of the health and nutrition related programs.

#### **Policy**

The Church recognises its responsibility to study, analyse and address the root causes (such as violence) responsible for the serious physical and mental health concerns of women and men. It will launch community based interventions to meet the emerging challenges against the right to life and give priority to prevention over curative health care. It will give special attention to girls and women in health concerns related to their mental health, reproductive health, STDs, HIV/AIDS including rehabilitation of victims.

#### **Strategies**

- Implement the CBCI Health Policy and CBCI HIV/AIDS Policy with special focus on women and girl children.
- Allot at least 25% hospital beds in church based health institutions for patients from poor and disadvantaged groups at highly subsidised rates.
- Create and promote health awareness through all our Social Service Societies, educational and health institutions, Basic/Small Christian Communities and community-based groups.
- Build women-friendly, child-friendly, and differently abled-friendly facilities within the church premises and institutions (e.g. drinking water, toilets, ramps and personal space for breast-feeding).
- Ensure mass education to address the issues of intra-household imbalances in nutrition and the special needs of pregnant and lactating women.

- Promote maternity and paternity leave in all our institutions.
- Collaborate with government departments and agencies for effective and transparent preventive and curative health care delivery services.
- Develop capacities of women and men in community groups to ensure the health, security and violence-free life for women and the family.

## **4. Women and Social Involvement**

### **(i) Women and Social Awareness**

The Catholic Church acknowledges the fact that for the women to enjoy the fullness of life (Jn10:10) in the family and in the wider society, the active presence and interventions of gender sensitised women and men are required in the public spaces. Women have the social responsibility to reform and uplift society thereby contributing to its progress. The entry of women into the public sphere requires that they be equipped with the necessary capabilities and capacities.

### **Policy**

The Church recognises the right of the woman to work, to enter fully in the public spaces and society's progress, as well as her right to access the services provided in the public space. Her rights in the public and private spheres have to be preserved and protected and safety and security ensured at all times.

### **Strategies**

- To educate women and men regarding the need and relevance of social engagement of women.
- To facilitate women's social engagement by training and equipping them and also by ensuring the cooperation of family members especially men.

- Create an environment through positive, economic and social awareness for the overall development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- Change societal attitudes and community practices by encouraging the active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- Support women-friendly structures for working mothers.

## **(ii) Promotion of Women's Participation in Public Life/State Political Structures**

Women constitute slightly more than half of the world population. Their contribution to social and economic development of societies is also more than half as compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. Yet women's participation in formal political structures and processes, where decisions regarding use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant. Presently women's representation in legislatures around the world is hardly 18%.

### **Policy**

Equipping women with the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to qualitatively participate as members and leaders in governance structures is a must. Further, structures, rules and processes must be re-engineered to enable women to participate.

### **Strategies**

- Build knowledge, skills and attitudes of women to effectively participate in legislative, executive, judicial, corporate, statutory bodies, as also advisory Commissions, Committees, Boards and Trusts.
- Promote participation of women in the Governance structures of Public Life/State and Political structures as spelt out in the social teachings of the Church and the spirit of the international and national laws and policies

- Making governance structures and processes women friendly.
- Support the Bill for 33% reservation for women in Parliament and the State Assemblies.
- Facilitate political awareness among women at grassroots level - enhancing women's participation in political institutions like *Panchayati Raj*, (Local Self Government) State Assemblies and both Houses of Parliament.
- Promote spirituality in political participation.

### **(iii) Women and Economic Independence**

Though women contribute substantially to the socio-economic fabric of life, much of their work remains invisible and unrecognised. Women's work outside the home very often constitutes the major source of income for the family. The level of work participation of women is very low, coupled with discriminatory low wages and reduction of employment opportunities even in agriculture. This has adversely affected the economic situation of women and their families. The impact of globalisation has badly dented their earnings and their standard of living.

### **Policy**

The Church recognises the contribution of women to the socio-economic development of society. Attempts will be made to render visible and acknowledge the contribution of women as a nurturer of life as also a provider in the family. The economic independence of women is vital for upholding the rights of women and maintaining their dignity. The adverse impacts caused by the migration of women in search of employment overseas, especially the impact on the family they leave behind must be identified and dealt with.

### **Strategies**

- Address the needs and problems of poverty-stricken women, given the harsh realities of intra-household and social discrimination, through macroeconomic policies and poverty-eradication programs.

- Establish new and strengthen existing micro-credit mechanisms and micro-finance institutions to enhance women's access to credit for consumption and production.
- Promote just wages for women, including women religious and domestic workers, employed in Church institutions.
- Support equal pay for equal work.
- Advocate equal rights for women in family-owned land and property.
- Impart skill-based training for women using facilities in church based technical institutions.
- Encourage income-generation programs for women (e.g., through Self-Help Groups) and spread awareness of government schemes.
- Train women on agricultural-sector-related technology and create support systems for women to take up night shifts in the industrial and service sectors.
- Promote joint ownership and decision-making, among couples and equal access and control of income, as well as role sharing in family life.
- Promote and start gender budgeting in all health, educational and social institutions of the Church in India.

#### **(iv) Women for Peace**

Women are called to nurture peace as a way of life for non-violent social change. Practising peace does not indicate tolerance and acceptance of injustice and inequalities. To educate in the ways of peace means to open minds and hearts to embrace the values which Pope John XXIII indicates in *Pacem in Terris* as essential to a peaceful society where there is truth, justice, love and freedom. This calls for an educational peace program which involves every aspect of life and should be a continuous process. Women should be enabled to share their gift of peace with the whole community and also prepare the

younger generation to be promoters of peace and justice.

### **Policy**

The Church recognizes that women have the unique quality of bringing in peace which is essential for families and communities to develop and flourish. Women's role in conflict resolution will be acknowledged and supported.

### **Strategies**

- Develop capacities and skills in women to become peace-makers in disputes within the family, neighbourhood and in the larger community
- Promote non-violent means of conflict-resolution and mediation skills among men and women.
- Equip the Church bodies, institutions and organizations to promote a culture of peace and non-violence.
- Set up Peace Clubs in schools and other institutions of the Church.
- Encourage and support women financially to take up peace education programs.
- Celebrate 2<sup>nd</sup> October as the National Day of Peace (Ahimsa Day)

### **(v) Women and Religious Harmony**

The richness of Indian society lies in its different religious communities which are complementary to one another other. The cultural values and traditions of the religious groups comprising of various languages and customs have to be respected. Efforts should be made to promote a culture of understanding and harmony between the religious groups by acknowledging their different identities and perspectives.

The Church has a duty to promote inter-faith dialogue and discussions to ensure harmony among religious communities as a counter to the growing forces of fundamentalism. Women who are

the worse sufferers in incidents of religious and communal conflicts should take the lead in educating their families to live in harmony with other religious communities and to resolve tensions and conflicts in the Indian society.

## **Policy**

Drawing from Christ's words "May they all be one, as you Father are in me, I am in you" (John 17:21) the Church seeks to express the divine nature of God where there is communion in diversities. It seeks to respect the cultural values and traditions of all religious groups and promote a culture of understanding and harmony among all. Women as educators in the family must be encouraged to be active and committed agents of "harmony of faith" in society.

## **Strategies**

- Promote inter-faith dialogue and discussions in all the Church community and capacity building programmes.
- Make harmony and peace-initiatives an all-out campaign geared towards humane ways of life.
- Teach the laity the principles of inter-religious dialogue.
- Engage different cultural and religious groups in initiatives of justice and peace.
- Facilitate mutual enrichment between cultures and religions through inter-religious discourses.
- Evolve and/or join network of secular forces to counter religious fundamentalism

## **(vi) Women and Environment**

Women are considered the primary users of natural resources (land, forest, and water), because they are the ones responsible for gathering food, fuel, and fodder. Hence they are directly affected by environmental degradation caused by deforestation, wanton destruction

of natural resources for industrialisation, construction of hydro-electric plants, depletion of water, mining and excessive use of toxic chemicals and pesticides in agriculture.

## **Policy**

The Church acknowledges women as the primary users of natural resources and recognizes the adverse impact on women caused by the exploitation of these resources in the name of development. It will therefore uphold and champion the cause of women's participation in environment-related matters. It will lobby and advocate for protection of women's rights in the context of environmental degradation.

## **Strategies**

- Involve women and integrate their perspectives and indigenous knowledge in the policies and programs of environmental conservation and restoration.
- Impart education on the impact of environmental factors on women's livelihoods in our institutions and local government bodies by networking with community based organisations and NGOs
- Train women particularly SC/ST and Dalit women in taking up leadership roles for campaigning against displacement and inadequate and delayed rehabilitation packages
- Ensure preservation and protection of the eco-system including bio-diversity and facilitate the formation of water-users' groups to regulate and conserve water sources and water bodies.
- Promote the use of non-conventional and non-commercial sources of energy such as solar energy, bio-gas, smokeless *chullahs*, (Stoves) animal dung, crop waste and fuel wood.

## **5. Special Areas of Concern**

### **(i) Rights of the Girl Child**

According to the Economic Survey 2001, the worrying problem

in India is the missing women of the country. These missing millions of females were either never born or died of chronic malnutrition or because of lack of medical attention. Other indicators of neglect and discrimination against the girl child include lack of attention, lack of education and less share of food.

## **Policy**

The Church's love for children stems from Christ's teachings and example. Children hold the hope for the future and must be nurtured. They form one of the largest vulnerable groups in society and hence the Constitution of India has laid special emphasis on their well being and protection.

Among children, the girl child is particularly vulnerable. In recognition of this, international and national communities have special provisions for the development of the girl child and adolescent girls, particularly with regard to their survival, health, nutrition, education, protection and participation in family and society. The Church supports and commits herself to these ideals.

## **Strategies**

- All forms of discrimination and violation of the rights of the girl child need to be eliminated, within and outside the family.
- Strictly enforce laws against prenatal sex selection, female foeticide, female infanticide, child marriage, child abuse, child prostitution, child trafficking and child labour.
- Promote girl child's right to life, education, nutrition, health and development.
- Protect the girl child from discriminatory neglect and all forms of abuse including sexual abuse.
- Project a positive image of the girl child among girls themselves, boys, parents, teachers and society at large.
- Church institution should avoid gender stereotyping in extra-curricular

activities, and provide training in skills, use of playgrounds, choice of optional subjects, handling of sexual harassment/abuse issues, gender profile of decision-making bodies including parent-teacher associations.

- Promote awareness about the government schemes for the girl child through homilies, dispensaries, hospitals, health centers, grass-root social and educational institutions and catechism classes.

## **(ii) Tribal and Dalit Women**

Historically *dalits* and tribals have been and continue to be the most oppressed and exploited sections of society in various regions of India. Mega projects and forces of economic liberalization and privatization have taken control over their natural resources displacing/alienating them from their lands and traditional sources of livelihoods and distinctive cultures. *Dalit* women are thrice oppressed by caste/class/gender forcing many of them into sex abuse/prostitution and slavery. Christian *dalit* and tribal women are vulnerable in the present context of communal resurgence.

### **Policy**

The Church recognises its responsibility to opt to work in solidarity with the *dalits* and tribals especially women in their struggle for liberation from all forms of dehumanisation.

The Church commits itself to understand and honour the diversity of the social and cultural heritage of the *dalits* and tribals and use their life situations to spread the message of Christ's love and liberation.

## Strategies

- Work towards the development of tribal, *dalit* and disadvantaged women, with respect to their education and opportunities for employment especially through Church institutions.
- The language and imagery used by the clergy and the religious in their discourses with the tribal and *dalits* should be laced with respect and sensitivity to their unique cultures, and care should be taken to avoid derogatory words and phrases.
- Establish Resource Centres for women; design development programs involving tribal and *dalit* women. Tribal customary laws and rights must be studied and incorporated in these programs.
- Strengthen the Gender Study Centres at national and regional levels in order to function as guiding forces for planning, designing and implementing specific programs for tribal women.
- Network and train tribal/*dalit* women leaders to fight for social justice and dignity.
- Sensitize the clergy/religious and laity by commissioning a situational study and analysis of tribal/*dalit* women and their families. The study reports should be made available in all vernacular languages.
- Develop an integrated development program for tribal/ *dalit* women, in order to eradicate poverty by allocating a special budget to social service centres.
- The *dalit* and tribal women should be made aware of the various welfare schemes provided by the government.
- The Church will partner with government and NGOs to effectively implement developmental schemes and also be involved in the monitoring and lobbying for more productive programs for their benefit.

### (iii) Violence against Women

The right of women to live in security and in dignity is enshrined in the Constitution of India and the Directive Principles of the

State policy and related legislation like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005. The various Conventions under the aegis of United Nations, such as CEDAW, also require all governments to work towards removing all forms of violence and discrimination against women.

## **Policy**

The Church will work towards elimination of all forms of violence against women and advocate zero tolerance to any act of violence against women and children. The Church will establish institutionalised mechanisms to end gender related violence in all arenas of social and religious life.

## **Strategies**

- Spread awareness about the provisions of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 and actively work for their implementation.
- Set up structures and evolve mechanisms for effectively combating violence and sexual harassment against women in families, workplaces and Church Institutions.
- Condemn domestic violence through church documents, pastoral letters and homilies and formulate vigilance and grievance cells in Church institutions especially in rural areas.
- Build and strengthen partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations to enhance women's perceptions about their role and worth in society.
- Uphold the dignity of women through mass media and censor the negative projection of women's image.
- Portray the positive image of women through the use of print and electronic media through write-ups, films, documentaries and articles.
- Create mechanisms to increase women's access to media and communication technology and support the training of media personnel to eliminate gender bias in reporting.

#### **(iv) Women in Difficult Circumstances**

Women across the country, face discrimination on the basis of their religion, region and socio-economic conditions, and are placed in situations that are discriminatory, difficult and inhuman.

#### **Policy**

The Catholic Church recognises the circumstances of women's situation in India and their vulnerability to physical, sexual and mental abuse, and aims to work towards restoring woman's dignity and safeguarding her human rights.

#### **Strategies**

- Recognize and acknowledge the agony of women in difficult circumstances. These include, women afflicted by destitution, women affected by natural calamities, women with disabilities, unwed mothers, widows, dependent single women, women heads of marginalised households, women displaced from employment, migrants, victims of marital/domestic violence, trafficked women, HIV/AIDS victims, sexually abused women and prostitutes.
- Establish residential and non-residential facilities and services, such as counselling centres, grievance redressal cells, short-stay homes and rehabilitation and training centres for women in difficult circumstances.
- Motivate and support women and men, both religious and lay, for canonical and legal studies so as to assist women in difficult circumstances and to fight injustice against women.
- Provide training and guidance for employment to widows in need and facilitate their remarriage wherever possible.
- Organise support groups for various categories of women in difficult circumstances and network with governmental and non-governmental agencies for facilitating grants, loans, stipends and pensions etc.
- Ensure just wages and promote upward mobility to domestic workers.

- Assist domestic workers in attaining dignity and justice through awareness campaigns and advocacy.
- Impart awareness to domestic workers on the existing service systems in society such as education, health centres, civil supplies and legal systems.

### **(v) Trafficking and Sexual Abuse**

The deplorable practice of trafficking of women, girls and boys in several regions of our country is a terrible blot on the social structures. Large numbers of victims from poor and deprived families and tribal areas are lured or forcibly transported to cities and towns for exploitation called as ‘sex work’ and ‘cheap labour’. The Church as a symbol of human liberation has a definite role and responsibility to take strong measures to end these extreme forms of violence against women and children.

#### **Policy**

The Church is committed to making concerted efforts against human trafficking and sexual abuse of women and children through awareness building, prevention measures and institutionalized rehabilitation programme. It will actively partner with government and non governmental agencies to stop human trafficking.

#### **Strategies**

- Condemn sexual abuse of women and children through Church documents, pastoral letters and homilies.
- Take concrete steps to address the needs of migrants and domestic workers and keep addressing the issue of trafficking of women and children through various forums available.
- Combat human trafficking in source areas, destination areas and disturbed areas through prevention, protection, rescue, rehabilitation, reintegration and repatriation.

- Establish institutions for secure stay, training, counseling, rehabilitation and employment of victims and those vulnerable to human trafficking.
- Partner with government, NGOs and civil society organisations in working with and for vulnerable groups.

## **6. Within the Church**

### **(i) Women and CBCI**

Aware of the “feminine genius” of women, every effort will be made to ensure that women regain full respect for their dignity and role. Such respect must first and foremost be won through effective and intelligent campaign for the promotion of women. The CBCI will promote the work in their field of apostolate, to inspire existing agencies and to stimulate the whole Church in India to render to the modern world the service of sound orientation, discernment, encouragement and critical evaluation.

### **Policy**

According to the Guidelines approved by the Standing Committee in May 1987, the CBCI Commissions are the chief organs for the CBCI in the attainment of its objectives. They are required to inspire and animate the Dioceses and the whole Christian Community towards a deeper Christian commitment and more effective society.<sup>23</sup> Gender mainstreaming should form an integral part of the structure and functioning of all CBCI Commissions.

### **Strategies**

- Secretaries of various Commissions should be drawn from religious and lay, men and women with the required talents and qualifications. Adequate representation of men and women should be ensured.
- Institute a gender cell/gender advisory committee to incorporate gender perspectives in all CBCI Commissions.
- Institutionalise gender auditing and gender budgeting in the Commissions.
- Make gender sensitisation an imperative in all the CBCI Commissions.

- Have representation from CBCI Women's Commission in all the CBCI Commissions to ensure collaboration on cross-cutting issues.

## **(ii) Women and Diocesan Social Service Societies (DSSS)**

The Diocesan Social Service Society takes care of the social concerns of the Diocese. It could deal with the concerns of women especially the marginalised women. To ensure inclusiveness of women and men and facilitate gender mainstreaming, the Directors of these societies could also be women.

### **Policy**

The Diocesan Social Service Societies need to be reorganized to include women adequately in policy formulation and decision-making. The social services provided must prioritize women's concerns, include women's perspectives of issues through gender mainstreaming,<sup>24</sup> gender auditing<sup>25</sup> and gender budgeting<sup>26</sup>.

### **Strategies**

- Identify and train women to assume leadership roles in the social service societies within the Church and society.
- Take affirmative action and reserve leadership positions for women. The Directors and/or Secretaries should include religious and lay women.
- Build Gender auditing and gender budgeting into the structures, processes and programmes of DSSS.
- Identify and address effectively gender issues and problems.
- Make gender sensitisation an imperative for all members of DSSS.

## **(iii) Women's Representation and Participation in Church Bodies**

The Code (1983) of Canon Law has framed many areas where women together with laymen can participate in the life of the Church. The new ecclesiastical understanding perceives women as equal in dignity with men, redeemed by Christ as those who enjoy competence to take initiatives and responsibilities for social and ecclesiastical endeavours along with men.

## **Policy**

The integration of the voices of women is imperative to ensure the wholeness of the Church. Non-representation of women will result in the exclusion of the perspectives, experiences, strengths and needs of half the Church.

## **Strategies**

- The distinctive roles of women and men in the ministry should always be honoured.
- Doors should be open to women in governance and administration wherever it is suitable according to the norms of the Church.
- In accordance with the special charisms of women, suitable openings and opportunities for ministry, governance and administration should be provided to them.
- Ensure adequate representation of women as office-bearers and members in Parish/Diocesan councils and financial committees, marriage tribunals, the Church's Commissions at all levels, and the Diocesan Social Service Societies and Regional Forums.
- Create avenues for women to participate in the decision-making processes of the Church at all levels.
- Provide adequate training to women to enable them to assume leadership roles in the Church.
- Generate positive attitudes and role sharing in the family that will promote and facilitate women's active participation in the Church.
- Use women-friendly timings, safe commuting and lodging arrangements and child care facilities to enable women's participation in governance systems.
- Foster positive attitudes among the clergy and the laity towards women's participation and leadership.
- Make gender sensitisation an imperative for all members of Church bodies.

#### **(iv) Formation of Consecrated Women and Seminarians**

The consecrated life (Religious/Secular), deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to His Church through the Holy Spirit. Consecrated Women (Religious/Secular) and Seminarians could be formed and trained with gender perspective. A dignified position of women will be projected.

#### **Policy**

Gender sensitivity is not a woman question; it is a human question and a spiritual question. The formation of consecrated women and seminarians must therefore work towards creating men and women who are committed to the establishment of a ‘new heaven and a new earth’ where women and men live and work with mutual respect and dignity.

#### **Strategies**

- Include gender sensitivity courses and feminist theology among the main subjects in seminaries and as ongoing formation of bishops, major superiors, formators and priests.
- Provide scholarships, to lay and religious women for theological, biblical and canonical studies that promote gender justice and an ecclesiology of partnership.
- Affirm the pastoral work of women, lay and religious, as catechists, lectors, animators of Basic/Small Christian Communities, liturgists and community workers through the recognition of these as ministries.
- Recognise that by their own prophetic call, women religious have a special mission to make a significant contribution for the promotion of women in the Church and society with their special resources and potential. They can work for the dignity and rights of women in their own institutions.
- Religious are called to join hands with other women’s movements to safeguard the rights and dignity of women in society.
- Articulate and express the *Feminine Genius* during SCC/BCC meetings, recollections, retreats, conventions, Para-liturgies and worship.

## **7. Research, Documentation and Dissemination of Information**

Research facilitates deeper understanding of gender realities in various socio-political regions of India. It assists in prioritizing and developing relevant models and interventions that are area and issues-specific. It will also contribute to the advancement of knowledge and promote practical application of such knowledge. Research findings will give a credible basis for policy formulation and change as well as for innovative programme design and implementation.

Documentation of the work undertaken in relation to gender is necessary for creation of data banks, continuous learning, upgrading standards of performance, evidence building and information dissemination.

### **Policy**

The Church shall encourage, support and establish necessary facilities for research, documentation and dissemination of information at all levels - national, regional and diocesan.

### **Strategies**

- Launch web-sites on Gender Studies.
- Incorporate research and documentation as a part of Gender Resource Centres at regional and national levels.
- Collect, prepare and disseminate gender sensitization resource materials through Gender Resource Centers
- CBCI Commission for Women to support and fund at least one Action Research study per year by each of the Regional Resource Centers
- Organise workshops/seminars to present and deliberate on research findings and develop action plans thereon.
- Translate and disseminate the social teachings of the Church on women and gender relations.

## **8. Networking**

There are several movements at the local, national and global level to end gender discrimination. Models and best practices have emerged through deeper reflection and praxis on this subject. Immense knowledge and skills have been generated through these efforts and movements. Current communication/digital technologies are available to facilitate the sharing of experiences and the building of broad based networks essential for altering unjust relations based on gender.

### **Policy**

Altering deep rooted gender inequalities is a collaborative and sustained process requiring a social movement based approach. This has to be imbued with the spirit of communion and freedom upheld by the teachings of Jesus.

### **Strategies**

- Identify various Church based, Church related and other secular civil society groups and social movements engaged in promoting gender justice.
- Identify gender related issues which are connected to Church life and address the same through networking of women and like-minded men within the Church structures and institutions.
- Engage in identifying and tackling gender issues at the societal levels through collaborative and participatory approach at local, regional and national level.
- Promote movement-based lay leadership with required competencies for networking and advocacy.
- Collect, document, disseminate knowledge, best practices and case studies for reflection and learning from various sources (regions and countries)

## **XII. IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISM**

- Inter-sectoral collaboration between different Institutions and Commissions of CBCI such as National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, National Vocation Service Center, Caritas India, St. John's National Academy of Health Sciences, Clergy and Religious, Doctrine, Education and Culture, Health, Labour, Justice, Peace and Development, SC/ST/OBC, Social Communication, Media, Laity, Labour, Inter Religious Dialogue and Desk for Ecumenism, Women and Youth, will be ensured to implement this Gender Policy
- A budget for implementing the various action plans in the Gender Policy will be prepared and adequate resources set apart by CBCI to enable the Commission for Women to support and monitor the progress of implementation at the National and Regional levels.
- According to the directives of the CBCI, all Dioceses will establish and strengthen their respective Women's Commission. Regional Bishops' Councils will take the lead role in the dissemination and implementation of the Gender Policy with the support of Regional and Diocesan Women's Commissions, Diocesan Social Service Societies, Pastors in Parishes and Religious Congregations.
- Awareness and publicity regarding the Policy will be promoted at all levels from the parish upwards and Implementation Cells constituted for monitoring the progress of implementation.
- The CBCI Commission for Women will network with associations of women organizations such as Conference of Religious of India, Gender Department of Caritas India, various Catholic Women Associations/Organizations and Women Centres across the country.
- Ecumenical networking with other Christian denominations and people of other faith-based organizations will be initiated and strengthened.
- The Women's Commission during its meetings will review the implementation process and progress periodically. A Committee will be formed that would visit Regions to review policy implementation. Report of the review will be published every six months.

### **XIII. CONCLUSION**

The dignity and the vocation of women has been a subject of serious reflection in the Church in India in recent times. In the divine plan of salvation, women's contribution in the mission of the Church is of immense significance. We observe too the continuing rise in the self consciousness of women within the Church and society. Women are able to make a decisive contribution to the mission of the church in contemporary society. The wider society also stands to gain immensely by the rightful place of women in society. However, we are also aware that despite this progress, both in the Church and in society much more needs to be done to foster mutual respect and the equal dignity of woman and man so as to restore the likeness of the God in whose image we are created. It has thus been a pastoral imperative and a social need to formulate the Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India.

We are grateful to the CBCI Commission For Women and all their collaborators for the drafting of this Gender Policy. It was indeed the Holy Spirit that was guiding the entire process of the 28th CBCI Plenary Assembly with the theme, "Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society" which led to the preparation of the Gender Policy. We continue to invoke the grace of the Spirit in the implementation of this Policy and look forward to the collaboration and commitment of all in the Church and society to translate this Policy into reality.

We conclude with our thoughts centered on the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church. The Church sees in her the highest expression of the "feminine genius" and finds in her a constant source of inspiration. In her we find the perfect realisation of the personal dignity of women. May Mary, our model and guide, lead us to be authentic disciples of her Son as we realize his mission of salvation in our beloved Motherland, India.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Acts.	Acts of the Apostles, Holy Bible
AIDS	Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
BCC	Basic Christian Communities
CBCI	Catholic Bishops' Conference of India
CCI	Catholic Council of India
CCWI	Council of Catholic Women of India
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
Col.	St Paul's Letter to Colossians, Holy Bible.
CRI	Conference of Religious of India
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DALIT	Scheduled Caste
DSSS	Diocesan Social Service Society
Gal	St Paul's Letter to Galatians, Holy Bible
Gen.	Genesis, Holy Bible
GS	Gaudium et Spes
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Service
Jn.	St John's Gospel, Holy Bible
Lk.	St Luke's Gospel, Holy Bible
MD	Mulieris Dignitatem
Mk.	St Mark' Gospel, Holy Bible
NCERT	National Council for Educational Research and Training
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
OA	Octagesima Advenins May 4,1971 (the eighth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum) Octagessimo Anno Adveniente
OBC	Other Backward Castes
Phil.	St Paul's Letter to Philippians, Holy Bible
Phm.	St Paul's Letter to Philemon, Holy Bible
PT	Pacem in Terris
Rom	St Paul's Letter to Romans
SC	Scheduled Castes
SCC	Small Christian Communities
SSA	Service Support Analyst
ST	Scheduled Tribes
STC	Social Teaching of the Church
STD	Sexually Transmitted Diseases

## **APPENDIX - I**

### **STATEMENT OF 28TH CBCI PLENARY ASSEMBLY 'EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY'**

**Venue: XLRI, Jamshedpur, Jharkhand State, India  
13th -20th February, 2008**

#### **Preamble**

As the Universal Church celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II , *'Mulieris Dignitatem'* , on the Dignity of Women, we, 160 Bishops, belonging to the 3 Individual *sui juris* Churches of the Catholic Communion in India, are gathered at XLRI in Jamshedpur, from 13th to 20th February 2008, for the 28th Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. The theme was the *Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society*. There were 40 lay and religious women and 7 lay men representing all the 12 ecclesiastical regions of the country as invitees for the meeting.

Already in 1984, there was a CBCI initiated Consultation on Women held in Mumbai, on the "Role of Women in the Church and Society". In 1992, the concerns of women were taken up again at the Plenary Assembly of the CBCI in Pune and consequently a Women's Desk was instituted with the appointment of the first Woman Secretary to the Office of the CBCI. In 1996, the Women's Desk was raised to the status of a Commission. While the Church and society undergo rapid changes, women are being marginalised and continue to suffer and since their concerns are not adequately addressed both in the Church and in society the Bishops thought it opportune to discuss this theme.

#### **1. Situation of Women in the Church and Society in India**

The socio-cultural situation of women should not be understood in the same way among all social classes and ethnic groups especially among the marginalised and the oppressed. It has its lights and its shadows. Though we have examples of empowered women in

leadership positions and role-models like Blessed Mother Theresa and Blessed Alphonsa, nevertheless the reality of women of all sections reveals instances of domestic and societal violence on young girls and women. Depending on the regions, female feticide, infanticide, rape, molestation, kidnapping, abduction, battering, dowry deaths, murdering, trafficking for sex and slavery exist even today.

Women of the marginalized groups such as dalits, tribals, backward castes and minorities suffer much due to poverty, ill-health, lack of access to literacy and appropriate knowledge and lack of hygiene and potable water. In addition, they are being displaced from their lands and livelihoods. They suffer systemic and structural violence that enslave them and dehumanize them economically, socio-politically and religio-culturally.

Gender discrimination has negative effects on boys and men as well. It damages their psyche and increases the incidence of morbidity and crime among them. Relations of distrust, conflict, competition and many forms of subtle abuse emerge instead of those rooted in values of caring, sharing, compassion, mutual respect, collaboration and partnership. Such discrimination thus has negative consequences on human relations.

It was noticed that the structures which facilitate collaborative partnership between women and men as well as clergy and laity needs improvement. In 1992, the CBCI General Assembly stated, “with a sense of sorrow we must admit that the women feel discriminated against, even in the Church”. In the decision-making and the consultative structures like the Parish Pastoral Council, Diocesan Pastoral Council, Diocesan Finance Committee which are canonically advocated structures in the Church, the presence of women is inadequate.

In spite of the great contribution of lay women in spheres of education, health care, etc., their potentials are yet to be sufficiently tapped in the administrative and executive roles, as well as theological, liturgical, pastoral and missionary apostolates of the Church.

## **2. An Analysis of the Causes**

The culture of domination, marginalization and exclusion which embodies ideas, beliefs, values, traditions, rules, norms, perspectives (ideologies) that prefer males/sons has been styled the culture of patriarchy. Through dominating social structures men own, control and manage financial, intellectual and ideological resources as well as the labor, fertility and sexuality of women, and thus perpetuate gender discrimination. Such a culture produces stereotyped notions of how a woman or man should behave (in words and actions), whereby they themselves become transmitters of the above value system. Consequently women also become both victims and victimizers.

The process of globalization which is market-centered and profit-driven, leads to further exploitation of women as cheap labour resulting in the increasing pauperization of women.

Fundamentalism and communalism reinforce the subjugation of women to men, suppress women's movements by dividing women along religious lines and intensify violence against women.

Lack of development and articulation of a spirituality rooted in women's experiences and insights into God, Mission, the Sacraments and the Scriptures have impoverished the Church. The interiority of women and the capacity to endure suffering are the areas that are not adequately capitalized in the building up of the Kingdom. (*Letter to Women by John Paul II, 29th June, 1995*)

## **3. Signs of Hope**

In the midst of this distressing situation there are signs of hope. The Church has been spearheading several initiatives to bring about positive changes in the life situation of women and girls. From the time of the early Christian missionaries who placed emphasis on the education of both girls and boys, through its multiple interventions in the fields of welfare, education, health and the empowerment process to organize women, the Catholic Church has played a prominent role to improve the status of women.

Besides the Church and ecumenical bodies, government and non-governmental organizations, trade unions and social movements have played a significant role in facilitating change. Through its policies, for example, the National Policy on the Empowerment of Women, and legislative measures, the Government has contributed to the cause of women. By signing international declarations and conventions such as Human Rights, Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Violence against Women, the Government of India has taken a stand in favour of gender justice.

As a result, many women leaders both lay and religious are emerging in the public sphere such as local governance and political leadership. The process of generation of counter-cultural literature and media material, and the revival of subjugated memories of resistance by women against oppression and exploitation are influencing change in mindsets of people to a greater or lesser extent across space and culture. The promotion of appropriate ecclesiastical ministries among women in the Church is another sign of their participation in the mission of the Church.

#### **4. Vision of Christ**

Situating the teachings and actions of Christ in the context of Palestinian Judaism, we see how the evangelists not only highlight Jesus' concern for women, but also his radical re-defining of their place and role in their society. In a culture where women were seen only in relation to men, Christ not only liberated them from their oppressive traditions but upheld their dignity e.g. the Samaritan woman (Jn.4:7-42) and Mary and Martha (Jn.11:20-40 ). He used the life-experiences of women as a paradigm of God's love and Christian discipleship for all: woman and lost coin, woman and the dough and woman at birth pangs. Even at his death and burial, women were among those who bore testimony. Jesus entrusted to the women that they announce the Good News of Resurrection to his disciples.

St. Paul reiterates the equality of men and women (Gal.3:28) and continues to refer to many exemplary women. The early Christian

Community was sustained by the deep faith of women who shared in the apostolic ministry e.g. Priscilla, Lydia, Phoebe, etc.

In her teaching, the Church continues to uphold the dignity of women, uniqueness of motherhood (*Letter to Women, 2*), and the complementarity and reciprocity between men and women. To this day, the Church continues to witness the heroic character of women in their testimony to their faith even at the moment of persecution as in the cases of Sr. Rani Maria in Madhya Pradesh, Mrs. Graham Steins in Orissa, as well as the women and men of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Chattisgarh and now again in Orissa.

## **5. Commitment to Action**

Taking into consideration all the recommendations arrived at during the process of discussion at the Plenary Assembly, it is necessary to mobilise our collective efforts towards elimination of the root causes of discrimination against women. Accordingly we commit ourselves as a body to evolve within a period of one year from now, a gender policy developed by each Regional Bishops' Conference with time bound action plans for their region with monitoring mechanisms. Basing on these, the CBCI Gender Policy will emerge. The Women's Commission of CBCI will give general guidance and norms for developing such policy.

The following areas call for our immediate action:

- i. Impart skills for effective parenting through Family Education programmes and Marriage Preparation Courses, keeping in mind the need to overcome the cultural bias against the girl child and sexual stereotypes.
- ii. Encourage family-oriented movements like 'Marriage Encounter', 'Teams of Our Lady', and 'Couples for Christ' to promote the fundamental equality of husband and wife as both a gift and a right deriving from God, the Creator

- iii. Incorporate a gender perspective in all the Commissions of the Church and foster networking to further the goal of a gender-just Church and society;
- iv. Provide theological, biblical and canonical studies that promote gender justice and an ecclesiology of partnership;
- v. Provide scholarships and part-time courses for women for theological, biblical and canonical studies.
- vi. Provide opportunities for theologically-trained women to contribute as pastoral workers, researchers, faith formators, professors in theologates and spiritual counsellors.
- vii. Prepare audio- visual material as an effective tool for gender sensitisation.
- viii. Offer at least 35% (moving towards an ideal of 50%) representation of women as office-bearers and members on parish and diocesan pastoral councils, and finance committees and in the ecclesial bodies at the local and national levels.
- ix. Affirm the pastoral work of women—lay and religious- as catechists, lectors, and animators of Basic/Small Christian Communities, counsellors, liturgists and community workers through the recognition of these as ministries.
- x. Work towards a commitment for the uplift of the tribal, dalit and disadvantaged women, including their education and opportunities for employment in Church institutions.
- xi. Take concerted efforts to address the needs of migrants and domestic workers, and keep fighting against the trafficking of women and children.
- xii. Help women emotionally and legally through the canonical processes of separation of bed and board and annulment.
- xiii. Support women in their process of political leadership for Panchayat, Legislative Assembly and Parliament

Towards this end, we seek to join hands with the Central and State governments, civil society organizations, and other religious groups to

safeguard the rights and freedom of all, especially women, irrespective of caste, creed, and vocation. We desire to strengthen institutional mechanisms with adequate personnel and finances at all levels of the Church to inspire, motivate, coordinate and monitor the process and results of execution of the gender policy.

## **6. Conclusion**

The Church, as the sacrament of Christ, has been entrusted with the mission of proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. This she has consistently done in the face of the concrete challenges with which she has been confronted. One such challenge has been the issue of the dignity and role of women in the Church and society.

We conclude this Statement with our thoughts centred on the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our mother; “therefore the fullness of grace that was granted, with a view to the fact that she would become Theotokos, also signifies the fullness of the perfection of ‘what is characteristic of woman’, of ‘what is feminine’. Here we find ourselves, in a sense, at the culminating point, the archetype, of the personal dignity of women.” (MD 5). May Mary, our Mother, model and guide, lead us to be authentic disciples of her Son, in realizing His Kingdom in the context of our beloved motherland India.

## APPENDIX - II

### THE PROCESS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE CBCI GENDER POLICY

<b>Phase 1</b> <b>Selection of theme on ‘WOMEN’ for the</b> <b>28th CBCI Plenary Assembly</b>
<b>April 2007</b>
At the CBCI Standing Committee meeting, Bishop John Baptist Thakur SJ, Chairperson, CBCI Commission For Women, proposed a theme on ‘WOMEN’ for their 28th Plenary Assembly. The Standing Committee approved the theme: “Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society” and appointed a committee of Bishops for the preparation of the Plenary Assembly. The Committee members consisted of Bishop John Baptist Thakur SJ as Coordinator, and Bishop Yvon Ambrose and Bishop Peter Remigius as members.
<b>May - July 2007</b>
The Preparatory Committee requested the CBCI Commission For Women to draw up a road map leading to the 28th Plenary Assembly. The Commission put forward the following plan:- 1) Development of a Concept Paper 2) A National Consultation 3) 12 Regional Consultations with the Regional Bishops and women secretaries of the Commission For Women 4) Consolidation of the Regional Reports 5) Conduction of an all India Survey to assess the Church’s impact on the empowerment of women and recommend a way forward 6) Publication of a book with articles written by bishops, women and men on the theme of ‘Empowerment of Women’ 7) Design a ‘Logo’ to be used at the 28th CBCI Plenary Assembly and its related activities and publications 8) Participation of lay and Religious women in the Plenary Assembly.
<b>18 July 2007</b>
The Preparatory Committee of the Bishops met with Secretaries of the CBCI Commissions, resource persons and the CRI Executives at CBCI Centre and studied the plan made by the Commission For Women.
<b>24 July 2007</b>
The Executive Secretaries of CBCI Commissions and the local Resource Team met at CBCI Centre for further study of the plan and conceptual clarity of the theme for the 28th CBCI Plenary Assembly.

<b>June – August 2007</b>
Preparation of the All India Survey Questionnaire by the CBCI Commission For Women together with the Indian Social Institute and Catholic Relief Services.
<b>13 August 2007</b>
A meeting was held of the CBCI Commission For Women with the local Core Team and Caritas Gender Department to discuss the logistics of the 28th CBCI Plenary Assembly.
<b>14 August 2007</b>
The Preparatory Committee met at CBCI Centre with the resource team for the preparation of Concept Paper.
<b>29 August 2007</b>
CBCI Commission For Women inclusive of its 3 Bishops, Regional Coordinators, Advisory members and Editorial team of Magnificat were consulted on the preparation for the Plenary Assembly. The venue was CRI and Sadbhavana. Dates were finalized for the 12 Regional consultations, consolidation of the reports, selection of the logo. conduction of the All India survey, publication of the books with the articles on women, women's participation in the Plenary Assembly and identification of the resource persons to address the General Assembly.
<b>30 August 2007</b>
A National Consultation for the preparation of Plenary Assembly was arranged by the Commission For Women at CRI - Sadbhavana, New Delhi. Representatives of CBCI, CRI, CCI, CCWI, CRS and Streevani, as well as the Regional Coordinators, Advisory Members of the Commission For Women, women and men Religious and Gender experts participated. In all they were 65 participants. The consultation discussed possible topics for the Plenary Assembly and Regional Consultations, a one year campaign for Gender awareness building, the Concept paper, a Gender Policy, the participation of women in the Plenary Assembly and the need to develop Women's Spirituality.
<b>13 September. 2007</b>
The Preparatory Committee Bishops met with the CBCI Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General, Director, Caritas India, Executive Secretary, CBCI Commission For Women and the Coordinator, Gender Department, Caritas, for the implementation of the plan and revision of the concept paper.

<b>14-15 September. 2007</b>
Experts met at Indian Social Institute, New Delhi to prepare the second draft of the Concept Paper.
<b>September 2007</b>
The All India Survey Questionnaire was sent out by the CBCI Commission For Women to all 160 Dioceses, Religious Congregations of women and men, Diocesan Social Service Societies and Women's Organizations.
<b>September – November 2007</b>
The All India Survey Questionnaire was collected and a four member team tabulated the responses.
<b>17-18 November 2007</b>
A National Consolidation on the Regional reports was held at CRI/Sadhavana, New Delhi. 15 members participated and consolidated the Regional Reports
<b>August – December 2007</b>
12 Regional Consultations were coordinated by the CBCI Commission For Women. The Regional Consultations were attended by Bishops, Diocesan Secretaries of the Commission For Women, DSSS, Regional CRI women and men, women's organizations and women activists from the Region. In all they were 571 Participants. The venue for the Regional Consultations were at the Regional Pastoral Centers.
Selection of Resource Persons to address the Plenary Assembly and finalisation of the programs:1) Introduction of the theme with results of the 'All India Survey' to assess the Church's impact on the empowerment of women and recommendation for a 'way forward'
2) Keynote address, 3) Response to the Keynote address, 4) The Scriptural and theological foundation for women's empowerment, 5) The situation of Dalit women today and the Church's response, 6) Contemporary tribal women's reality and our prophetic involvement.
<b>Phase II</b> <b>28th CBCI Plenary Assembly</b>
<b>13 -20 February 2008</b>
At the 28th CBCI Plenary Assembly 6 resource women presented papers on 'Empowerment of the Women in the Church and Society.' 20 Religious Women,

<p>20 Lay Women and 7 men participated in the Plenary Assembly. This meeting marked the beginning of a new era in the Catholic Church.</p>
<p><b>20 February 2008</b></p>
<p>The Statement of the 28th CBCI Plenary Assembly was released which called for 12 Regional Gender Policies and a CBCI Gender Policy based on these to be submitted by the next biennial Plenary Assembly. A landmark in the history of the Church - a Gender policy for the Church in India!</p>
<p><b>Phase III</b> <b>Preparation of Regional Gender Polices and CBCI Gender Policy</b></p>
<p><b>March - April 2008</b></p>
<p>The CBCI Commission For Women studied various Gender Policies of National and International Agencies and documents of the Church for the ‘out line’ and the preparation of Schema for the Regional Gender Policies.</p>
<p><b>18-20 April 2008</b></p>
<p>Biannual meeting of the CBCI Commission For Women was held to introduce and explain the concept of the Regional Gender Policies. It was held at St. Pius X College, Mumbai.</p>
<p><b>20 April 2008</b></p>
<p>A Poster of the 28th CBCI Plenary Assembly was released by Bishop Edwin Colaco during the meeting of the Commission for the dissemination of information about the Gender Policy. A core team for the drafting of the Gender Policy was constituted. An out line and model of a Regional Gender Policy was drafted and given to all the 12 Regional Coordinators and 12 Regional Chairman Bishops in order to prepare their Regional Gender Policies.</p>
<p><b>April – September 2008</b></p>
<p>12 Regional Gender Policies were drafted in the Regions at the Regional Pastoral Centers and Diocesan Pastoral Centers. The policies were given to the Regional Bishops’ Council for their approval. 228 persons participated including Bishops, Lay and Religious Women, Priests and Lay Men.</p>

<b>6 September 2008</b>
CBCI Gender Policy Drafting Committee Meeting, Sarvodaya, Mumbai.
<b>21-22 September 2008</b>
Biennial meeting of the CBCI Commission For Women was held at Christian Workers Centre, Bangalore to amalgamate the Regional Gender Policies and formulate a draft of the CBCI Gender Policy. 17 Gender experts from different parts of India participated.
<b>22 September 2008</b>
Release of the book “Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society” edited by the Commission For Women ,at the CBCI Standing Committee Meeting held at St. John’s Medical College, Bangalore. The book serves as a ‘guide book’ to the CBCI Gender Policy.
<b>October 2008</b>
Release of the book “In Search of Space” by the CBCI Commission For Women at the 10th Convention of Syro-Malabar Church, New Delhi. It is a collection of articles on ‘The Empowerment of Women’ written by Bishops, women and men, both Religious and lay.
<b>3 December 2008</b>
CBCI Gender Policy Drafting Committee Meeting, St Pius X College, Mumbai
<b>6 January 2009</b>
CBCI Gender Policy Drafting Committee Meeting, St Pius X College, Mumbai
<b>December 2008 - April 2009</b>
Circulation of the Draft of the CBCI Gender Policy to experts for a feed back.
<b>24 April 2009</b>
The Draft CBCI Gender Policy was introduced by Bishop JB Thakur SJ, Chairperson, CBCI Commission For Women at the CBCI Standing Committee Meeting.

A Bishops' Committee was appointed for detailed reading of the Gender Policy and preparation of the final draft. The committee consisted of Bishop John Baptist Thakur SJ, Bishop Yvon Ambrose, Bishop Thomas Dabre, Bishop Ignatius Menezes and Bishop Edwin Colaco.
<b>May – July 2009</b>
The Draft CBCI Gender Policy was circulated to elicit comments and suggestions from experts, both Religious and lay.
<b>14 July 2009</b>
The Bishops' Committee met at CBCI Centre, Delhi, to finalise draft of the CBCI Gender Policy.
<b>August 2009</b>
The final Draft of the CBCI Gender Policy was included in the agenda of the CBCI Standing Committee meeting of September 2009
<b>13 August 2009</b>
Results of the All India Survey to assess the Church's impact on the empowerment of women and recommend a way forward conducted in 2007-2008 in preparation for the 28th CBCI General Assembly was released on the occasion of the 'Women's Convention' held in the Archdiocese of Delhi. The Report was entitled "Empowerment of Women and Church in India".
<b>Phase IV</b> <b>Implementation of the CBCI Gender Policy</b>
<b>17 – 19 September 2009</b>
CBCI Commission For Women organised a National Training for the implementation of the CBCI Gender Policy. Gender experts from the CBCI Commissions, Institute of Management, Kakkanad; Sangat; Vithajyothe, Streevani, Sadbhavana and Executive Secretary of the CBCI Commission For Women comprised the resource team and panelists. The training led to the formulation of an action plan for an effective implementation of Gender Policy.
<b>19 – 20 September 2009</b>
<b>A Mechanism for the implementation of Gender Policy</b> was outlined at the Meeting of the CBCI Commission For Women.
The formation of the following committees was recommended: <b>1) Steering Committee</b> – Responsible for setting the agenda, providing strategic direction and problem solving.

- 2) **Planning Committee** - Responsible for drawing up a concrete, time-bound plan.
- 3) **Implementation Committee** - Responsible for implementation of the plan.
- 4) **Monitoring Committee** - Responsible for monitoring time bound progress.
- 5) **Expert Committee** - Responsible for providing training and guidance about the concept of Gender.
- 6) **Resource Team** - Responsible for dissemination of scriptural and theological understanding of Gender and Social Teachings of the Church in relation to the Gender Policy.

**Functioning of the Committees:**

All the six committees will function at 4 levels:

1. National Level
2. Regional Level
3. Diocesan Level
4. Parish Level

At all levels and in all the committees, consultation with gender experts needs to be made mandatory. The criteria for selection of the Gender experts and the scope of their involvement would have to be worked out in consultation with the Bishops.

**Training:**

National level, Regional level , Diocesan level and Parish level .

**Resource Material :**

- 1) Training Material/hand-outs
- 2) Compact Discs
- 3) Printed Literature

The contents of the resource material will be vetted by Commission For Women

**First phase of the implementation:**

1. Preparation/collection of resource material.
2. Dissemination of information/training.

**23 September 2009**

CBCI Gender Policy was passed by the CBCI Standing Committee.