

MINISTRY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ANDHRA PRADESH

The purpose of this Note is to provide a bird's eye view of the ministry of the Catholic Church in the State of Andhra Pradesh. Starting with a short description of its historical moorings, the Paper goes on to present a picture of the Andhra Pradesh Bishops' Council, its Regional Bodies / Commissions. The main forms of social services and developmental works under taken by the A.P. Church are listed in the third part of the Paper while the last part concludes with the mention of the challenges and opportunities faced by her in the present context.

1. Historical Growth of the A.P. Church

1.1. Christian Presence in the Ancient Period

Christian presence in Andhra Pradesh seemed to have continually existed almost from the beginning of Christianity in one form or another. In the first century, some Greek Christians from Alexandria settled in Masula presently known as Machilipatnam, a coastal port town. It was for long a trading post of Roman merchants. Even some Jews passed through it and made their settlement in the nearby trading towns like Guntur where a Synagogue was built. Armenian Christian merchants and migrants had their settlements in Macilipatnam and nearby locations.

As the tradition goes, an important event which could testify to the presence of Christians in Andhra Pradesh from the early centuries is the Council of Nicea held in 325 C.E. It is recorded that a delegation from "Divos" represented the Church in India in the Council. Some historians identify "Divos" as Diveeseema. It is also recorded that Arian emperor Constantius sent Theophilus who was originally an Indian to the island called "Divus" which was inhabited by Indian Christians in the 4th century. This island is identified differently by various historians while some feel that it could be Diveeseema.

Among the letters given by Pope XXII around 1330 to Bishop Jordan Catalani addressed to the Kings and the Christians in India, the historians report that there was one to be conveyed to the faithful at "Mausolipatinam" (Machilipatnam) along with the one for the Mylapore Christians. A Christian king named Solomon, ruled parts of Orissa and Andhra according to the Catalan Map dated 1375. Fr. H. Colli (+1962), an Indologist and Sanskrit scholar of renown, affirms that Christians (Nestorians or Catholics) were already present at Vijayanagar in 1442. He bases his conjecture on some report of Abdur Razack, Persian ambassador at the Vijayanagar Court, who mentions that the Prime Minister (*Vizier*) of Vijayanagar was a Christian.

1.2. Missionary Work in the Colonial Period

It appears most likely that the first recorded attempts to convert the native Telugus and plant the Church among them date back to the beginning of the 16th century to the period of arrival of the Portuguese in India in 1498 and the conquest of Goa by Affonso de Albuquerque in 1510. The missionaries who arrived in 1500 in the second Portuguese expedition spanned out to the Empire of Vijayanagar with the explicit support of King Krishnadeva Raya who had his base in the present Ananthapur district of Andhra Pradesh. In this period, the first conversions of among Telugus were made by the Franciscan pioneers though these Christian communities did not last long.

In 1598 two Jesuit Fathers were received by Venkatapathideva Rayalu, the last great prince of the Aravide dynasty, at Chandragiri near Tirupati. This first attempt by Madurai Mission did not result in the establishment of Christian communities though there were some individual conversions. Second attempt by them to sow the seeds of Christian faith in Andhra was around the year 1705 with the arrival of French Jesuit missionaries from Pondicherry under aegis of the Carnatic Mission. This was a successful mission as far as the rooting the Telugu Christian communities on the soil of Andhra Pradesh. Hence some historians consider this mission to be the seed bed of Christianity in A.P. Out of the original territory of the Carnatic Mission, from the ecclesiastical territory of the Diocese of Madras, in 1845 the Visakhapatnam Mission was separated and entrusted to the MSFS Society which became a Diocese in 1886. The Telugu area of the Diocese of Madras, up to the borders of the Krishna River, was given in 1875 to the St Joseph's Society better known as Mill Hill Missionaries (MHM) for evangelization after the Jesuits and MEP Societies had left the area. This territory was erected as the Diocese of Nellore in 1928.

As for the Hyderabad Mission is concerned, the first attempts at sowing the seeds of the Gospel go back to the Franciscans who came up to the Bijapur Kingdom in 1510s as held by the thesis of Msgr Solomon Thanugundla, *Structures of the Church in Andhra Pradesh* (Hyderabad, 1977). The Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, also known as Propaganda Fide, founded the Vicariate Apostolic of Idalkan (Bijapur) in 1637 and later extended it to Golconda. Hyderabad Mission was part of this territory until it was catered to by the Carnatic Mission from Pondicheckery. The origin of Hyderabad Mission had its humble beginnings in 1646. Many missionary societies rendered their service of spreading Gospel in the region.

The PIME missionary society of Milan was the main builder of Catholic mission of Hyderabad. Until May 11, 1851, the Hyderabad Mission was depending on the Madras Vicariate, which in its turn was officially under the jurisdiction of Goa (Padroado) until July 3, 1832. The Mission of Hyderabad was made an independent Vicariate in 1851. Declared as a Diocese in 1886, it flourished as a leading mission from 1920s. It was raised to the status of an Archdiocese in 1953. The Nizams of Hyderabad were close

collaborators of the Bishops in the works of mission and education. They provided land and gave donations to build churches and schools, and devotedly took part in the religious ceremonies particularly during the Christian festivals.

1.3. Formation of the Dioceses

The (Arch)diocese of Hyderabad through the untiring efforts of the PIME Missionaries gave birth to the dioceses Vijayawada (1937), Warangal (1952), Nalgonda (1976), and Khammam (1988). The Diocese of Nellore (1928), the base of Carnatic Mission, which was extended through the hard work of Mill Hill Missionaries, was divided into the dioceses of Guntur (1940), Kurnool (1967), and Cuddapah (1977). The diocese of Eluru was bifurcated from Vijayawada in 1977. The diocese of Srikakulam was bifurcated from the diocese of Visakhapatnam (1886) which was ministered mainly by the MSFS and was raised to the status of Archdiocese in 2001.

Thus, at present, in the region of Andhra Pradesh there are 2 Archdioceses and 11 other dioceses: the Archdiocese of Hyderabad has the suffragan dioceses of Warangal, Nalgonda, Khammam, Kurnool, Cuddapah and the diocese of Adilabad (1999) which belongs to the Syro-Malabar Rite. The Archdiocese of Visakhapatnam has the suffragan dioceses of Srikakulam, Eluru, Vijayawada, Guntur, and Nellore.

1.4. Consolidation of the Local Church

In the missionary period of 1930s up to 1960s there were mass conversions to Christianity all over Andhra Pradesh. After this period, though conversions continued they declined to a large extent. Between 1960s and 1980s, 5 new Dioceses were erected. Hence, the Church faced the task of consolidation of the communities that were earlier converted in groups. The period of consolidation included catechizing the new faithful, constructing the village chapels, training and sending the Catechists, and equipping the priests with necessary means. During this time, many parishes were established with new Churches and presbyteries and convents were opened along with the building educational and health care institutions. Efforts were made through the Regional Bodies like the Jyotirmai Society and APSSS to make the A.P. Church self-reliant through the animation programmes for increasing the Lay responsibility and local contribution. From 1990s, apart from the animation of the communities and training of leaders, the formation of the Basic Christian Communities (BCC) was taken up in some dioceses which are now spread all over the region. The BCCs are yet to be created in some of the parishes and in many parishes they are yet to assume their full role in the parish pastoral councils and other ecclesiastical structures.

It may be estimated that at present in the A.P. Catholic Church there are about 700 parishes, 6000 sub-stations and socio-pastoral localities, 1.6 million Catholic population, 1000 diocesan priests, 650 religious priests, 250 religious brothers, 5000

religious sisters, 3600 Catechists, 350 BCC animators and about 500 major and 500 minor seminarians. All the Dioceses have sufficient priests to cater to the pastoral needs of their faithful. Vocations abound in the region as many young people opt to join the religious congregations and dioceses. Some of these congregations and dioceses have become missionary by send out their priests and religious members to other countries for pastoral and evangelical work. The following table presents the statistical data of the Church in A.P. as per the *Catholic Directory of India 2005-06*:

A.P. CATHOLIC CHURCH DATA						
(as per the Catholics Directory of India 2005-06)						
Diocese	Parishes	Catholics	Priests	Nuns	Catechists	Animators
Adilabad	23	13,154	35	130		
Cuddapah	49	77,599	126	238	185	30
Eluru	99	275,000	155	545	578	30
Guntur	79	203,525	171	540	422	23
Hyderabad	81	93,288	242	807	158	30
Khammam	52	124,000	94	225	255	30
Kurnool	55	65,921	87	332	230	20
Nalgonda	55	66,997	112	260	185	30
Nellore	72	68,765	147	233	238	30
Srikakulam	24	55,890	40	95	150	30
Vijayawada	77	204,308	136	715	610	30
Visakapatnam	64	218,806	125	428	416	30
Warangal	51	63,499	107	489	83	30
<i>TOTAL</i>	781	1,530,752	1577	5037	3510	343

2. Andhra Pradesh Bishops’ Council (APBC)

2.1. Organizational Matters

The Andhra Pradesh Bishops’ Council (APBC) takes its origin from the “Regional Episcopal Council of Andhra Pradesh” which was set up on October 16, 1954 at the Archbishop’s House, Secunderabad, by Archbishop Mark Gopu, the first Metropolitan Archbishop of Hyderabad, with the objective of strengthening and developing the local Church in Andhra Pradesh. It was later also known as the “Andhra Pradesh Regional Bishops’ Council”. The revised Statues of APBC were approved by the members on October 15, 1987 when Archbishop Samineni Arulappa was the Chairman of APBC. Taking into consideration the changed context, the Statutes were further revised in the General Meeting held on September 05, 2008, under the chairmanship of Bishop Gali Bali.

The APBC was constituted under the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) to cater to the special needs and conditions of the State of Andhra Pradesh. The nature of APBC is to exercise jointly the pastoral office of the Bishops to solve common problems and promote unity of action (cfr. CD 37; CCL 447 - 459). Hence, the APBC is an association in which the Bishops of Andhra Pradesh, conscious of their unity and solidarity in the Episcopate, jointly exercise their pastoral office by way of promoting common programmes which cater to the needs of the region.

The Andhra Pradesh Bishops' Council (APBC) holds two meetings in a year; generally the ordinary meeting is held in Feb. / March and the extraordinary meeting is held in Aug. / Sept. From 2008 onwards, Most Rev. Dr Gali Bali, Bishop of Guntur, is the President of the APBC and in March 2011, Most Rev. Dr Prakash Mallavarapu, Bishop of Vijayawada, was elected as Vice-President. Most Rev. Dr M. D. Prakasam, Bishop of Nellore, became the APBC Secretary in March 2011 while Fr Dr Anthoniraj Thumma, Professor in Contextual Theology, continues to be the Deputy Secretary from 2007.

In the year 1980 through the generous contribution of the benefactors send by the Propaganda Fide, the APBC purchased about 2.50 acres (in fact now it is about 3.0 acres) of land in Sikh Village, Secunderabad Cantonment, about 3km from the Railway Station and the old Airport. This piece of valuable land right in the middle of the City was bought by the APBC for the future use regional apostolate like those of the Amruthavani Communications Centre and other Regional Bodies and Commissions. This plot was registered with the Secunderabad Cantonment Board in the name of Amruthavani Communications Centre.

In this plot of land, a block for Vani Press, now re-named Jeevan Institute of Printing, was the first one to be constructed in 1982. The priests working in the Regional Bodies resided in the First Floor of the same building. For the residence of the nuns who work in the Regional Bodies, Sisters Quarters was built soon after. In the same Campus, the A.P. Jyotirmai Society built its own administrative office block in 1990 and constructed the extension in 2004 for meeting facilities. A separate residence block for the priests called Fathers Quarters was got ready by 1997. The Andhra Pradesh Social Service Society (APSSS) made use of the First Floor of the Press Building vacated by the Priests, for its training purposes until 2008, when the APBC took it for the temporary use of the APBC Secretariat.

A Sub-Committee of the APBC was constituted in 2008, called *Committee for Animation and Training*, to make recommendations for setting up the APBC Center and for the effective functioning of the APBC Regional Bodies / Commissions in order to promote social development in the region. The present Convener of this APBC Committee, Most Rev. Dr Thumma Bala, Archbishop of Hyderabad, and its Members Most Rev. Dr Prakash Mallavarapu, Bishop of Vijayawada, and Most Rev. Dr M. D. Prakasam,

Bishop of Nellore, envisage a separate institution and structure for animation and training to be located within the APBC Center.

2.2. APBC Center / Secretariat

From 1990s, some new Commissions were started by the APBC that gained strength gradually. At present, there are 20 Regional Bodies / Commissions with a Bishop-Chairman and a Regional Secretary who is a priest, nun or a lay person. Among them 10 are more active with diocesan secretaries / directors who carry on the policies and programmes of the Commissions at the local level with diocesan committees. However, they require capacity building training in their respective subjects and in the organizational matters in order to set up parish level committees and animate them.

When the APBC revised its *Statutes* in 2007 in order to update and make it relevant to the present context, it was included in the *Statutes* to set up a Secretariat that would coordinate the functioning of all the APBC Regional Bodies and Commissions for rendering better service. The APBC appointed a full time Deputy Secretary in 2007 and set up a full-fledged office in 2008, which is first of its kind in India. In 2009, the existing campus at Secunderabad was renamed as the *APBC Center*. This campus belonging to the APBC contains some of the facilities of the APBC Regional Bodies mentioned above including the Jeevan Institute of Printing.

The APBC Secretariat also contains the offices of the APBC Commissions for Education, Youth, Laity, Family, Ecumenism and Interfaith Dialogue. The offices of other Commissions also need to be brought under the APBC Secretariat for their effective functioning, coordination and training. Keeping these factors in mind, the APBC formulated a set of *Directives and Guidelines* for the functioning of the Secretariat and the Commissions which was formally approved in its meeting held in March 2010.

The APBC Secretariat is meant to energize the Church in A.P. to become an effective instrument in bringing about the Divine Reign of Peace and Justice by its evangelical witness and loving service to all, especially to the poorest of the poor. The APBC Secretariat is to be the power house of the Church in A.P. to plan and execute its policies and programs for the benefit of the marginalized, to proactively respond to the social concerns of the Church and Society, to keep in constant touch with the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) and other national bodies, and to improve the public relations and liaise with the Government and other ecumenical, interfaith and civil society organizations.

2.3. Regional Seminaries

The APBC runs 3 Regional Seminaries to impart contextual formation to the future priests to serve in the local Church. The Bishop-delegate Bp M.D. Prakasam pays regular visits to them and offers his guidance. They are listed below:

- *St Paul's Regional Seminary* located at Nuzvid in Vijayawada Dioceses is managed by the Salesians of Don Bosco conducts the formation programme of the spiritual orientation course for 40 students from 7 dioceses of the region.
- *St John's Regional Seminary* located at Kondadaba in Visakhapatnam Archdiocese is the regional Philosophate managed by the Salesians of Don Bosco. There are 87 seminarians from 9 dioceses undergoing the course here.
- *St John's Regional Seminary* located at Hyderabad is the regional Theologate managed by the diocesan priests. Total number of seminarians here is 133 of which 10 students belong to the Mill Hill Society.

2.4. Regional Bodies / Commissions

Given below is the list of the APBC Regional Bodies / Commissions with their Bishop-Chairman and the Regional Secretary / Director. A brief mention of their main functions follows the list:

No.	Regional Bodies / Commissions	Chairman	Secretary / Director
1	Amruthavani Communications (Com. for Soc.Communications)	Abp. Thumma Bala	Fr. Nakka David Raju
2	A. P. Social Service Society	Bp. M. Prakash	Mr. D. Abraham
3	A. P. Jyotirmai Society (Commission for Proclamation)	Bp. Govindu Joji	Fr. Dusi Devaraj
4	Commission for Education	Bp. Kunnath Joseph	Br. G. Showreddy SG
5	Commission for Bible	Bp. Gali Bali	Fr. Kunduru Joji SJ
6	Com. for Doctrine & Theology	Bp. Gali Bali	
7	Com for Ecumenism & Dialogue	Bp. Gali Bali	Fr. Anthoniraj Thumma
8	Commission for Canon Law	Abp. K. Mariadas	
9	Commission for Vocations	Bp. A.C. Innayya	Fr. Bogi Balapushparaj
10	Com. for Clergy, Religious & Seminaries	Bp. M. D. Prakasam	Fr. M. Sunder Rao
11	Commission for SC, ST & BC	Bp. M. D. Prakasam	Fr. A.X. John Bosco SJ
12	Com. for Justice, Peace & Dev. (A.P. Social Forum)	Bp. M. D. Prakasam	Fr. Maddu Bala Swamy

13	Commission for Health	Abp. Thumma Bala	
14	Commission for Family	Bp. Maipan Paul	Fr. A. Vincent
15	Commission for Laity	Bp. Maipan Paul	Fr. A. Vincent
16	Commission for Women	Bp. Maipan Paul	Sr. Daisy Athickal MSI
17	Commission for Youth	Bp. Poola Anthony	Fr. Mummadi Praveen
18	Commission for Labour (Domestic Workers Movement)	Bp. Kunnath Joseph	Sr. Lissy Joseph SCCG
19	Commission for Liturgy	Bp. Gallela Prasad	Fr. Vemula Lourdu
20	Commission for Catechetics	Bp. Gallela Prasad	Fr. A. Thainese

- ***A.P. Jyotirmai Society***, a pastoral agency of the APBC founded in 1969, animates about 1500 BCCs in the 12 dioceses of the region with about 300 animators. Its quarterly news bulletin titled *Velugu* is released regularly. Jyotirmai conducts *Gnana Jyothi* Bible Exam attended by about 33,000 students and others from all over the State. It distributes about 30 lakh rupees each for higher education and primary education to the students in the region. The Commission for Evangelization / Proclamation is located here.
- ***Andhra Pradesh Social Service Society (APSSS)***, beginning from 1977, promotes *Jana Nirmanam* (People's Organisation) whose membership increased to 1,91,773 in 2483 sangams / villages with 16,126 groups. Training programmes are organized covering special subjects like: Livelihood, Community Health, Environmental Protection, Panchayati Raj, Gender Justice and Human Rights.
- ***Amruthavani Communications Center***, started in 1973, telecasts weekly Telugu programme on the *Subhavartha* Channel. It broadcasts radio programmes through Radio Verities Asia, Manila. Telugu Bible Diaries, Liturgical Calendars, and *Bharatamitram*, the regional Telugu fortnightly, are published and distributed. The Commission for Social Communications has its office here.
- ***The Commission for Education and the Association of Catholic Education Institutions in Andhra Pradesh (ACEIAP)*** have their new office functioning from the APBC Secretariat.
- ***The Commission for Health*** presently encourages the setting up of new Support and Care centers for the people affected with HIV/ AIDs.
- ***The Commission for SC, ST, & BC*** continues its struggle for the SC status to the Dalit Christians at the state and national level participating in the agitational programmes of National Council for Dalit Christians (NCDC).

- *The Commission for Women* held regional / zonal consultations based on the CBCI Statement on women empowerment. It promotes drawing up of diocesan plans of action in the region.
- *The Commission for Youth* organizes many training programmes for the youth from the region and help them participate in the international and national events. It conducts annual regional YCS/YSM Council and biannual APCYM Conventions with grant success.
- *The Commission for Justice, Peace and Development and A.P. Social Service Forum* organizes relief and rehabilitation through the diocesan Social Service Societies with the collaboration of Caritas India. It collaborates with the A.P. State Christian Finance Corporation in reaching its schemes to the needy. It promotes *Prison Ministry* in the region which is active in almost all the dioceses.
- *The Commission for Labour* began to function formally from 2009 with a new a chairman and secretary while *National Domestic Workers Movement* is operative for over a decade in the region.
- *The Commission for Interreligious Dialogue* organizes interfaith programmes in collaboration with the *Inter Faith Forum* and *In-dialogue Foundation* of Hyderabad. The Commission promotes the formation of Interfaith Clubs in schools and colleges.
- *The Commission for Ecumenism* promotes the observation of week of prayer for Christian unity, united celebrations of Christmas and other ecumenical events. It takes forward the ecumenical movement by animating *the Andhra Pradesh Federation of Churches (APFC)* in which the Catholic Bishops and Heads of other Denominations are members. The common issues of the Christian community are represented to the Government of A.P through the APFC.

3. Social Services rendered by the Church

3.1. Forms of Social welfare and Development works

From its very inception, the Catholic Church in A.P. has been engaging in the service to the needy through the missionary societies like the PIME, religious congregations and the dioceses. The legacy of the foreign missionaries in social service and charitable work is gratefully acknowledged and acclaimed by the public and the Government in the State. The APBC is committed to carry on this tradition by promoting social justice and human rights of the downtrodden and continue to exercise her “option for the poor” in accordance with the Social Teachings of the Church.

Around 1970s, when the local Church of AP became strong, the Andhra Pradesh Bishops’ Council (APBC) was the pioneer in India in founding the Regional Bodies like

Amruthavani Communications Center, Andhra Pradesh Social Service Society (APSSS) and A.P. Jyotirmai Society for coordination and organization of various socio-pastoral ministries more systematic manner at the regional level. The Dioceses and Religious Congregations started Social Service Societies for relief work during the natural disasters that have become frequent in the State. They also set up welfare institutions and take up developmental projects.

Thus, the Catholic Church is able to provide nearly 25% of the social work in the State in the form of educational institutions, health care centers, community health, adult education, supply of drinking water, watersheds and agricultural wells, construction of houses, skill trainings, rural development, youth services, child development, promotion of the welfare of the disabled persons and special children, and caring for the socially stigmatized patients of leprosy and HIV/AIDS. The APSSS and other APBC Commissions are involved in the empowerment of Dalits, Adivasis, Youth and Women by animation and leadership training programmes and by the organization of *sangams*, self - help groups and people’s movements.

3.2. Latest Estimated Data of Catholic Social Services:

➤ Educational Services:

- Post Graduate Colleges = 020
- Degree & B. Ed Colleges = 030
- Technical Schools \ Colleges = 120
- Junior Colleges = 070
- High Schools = 450
- Upper Primary & Primary Schools = 900
- Nursery and Pre-Schools = 400
- Orphanages/ Boardings & Hostels = 600
- Number of students served = 0.3 million

➤ Health Care Services:

- Nursing Schools and Colleges - 020
- Dispensaries & Health Care Centers - 230
- Hospitals - 070
- Leprosy Hospital and Colonies - 020
- TB and HIV/ AIDS Care Centers - 020
- Homes & Schools for the Disabled - 050
- Beneficiaries of all Social Works - 03 million

3.3. A.P. Catholic Charitable Institutions

(as per the Catholics Directory of India 2005-06)

Diocese	Colleges	Higher Sec. Schools	High Schools	Upper Prim. Schools	Lower Prim. Schools	Nursery Schools	Train. Schools	Tech. Schools	Orphanages	Hostels	Hospitals
Adilabad	-	-	13	14	19	17	-	6	20	2	10
Cuddapah	1	2	32	13	41	5	12	2	28	5	14
Eluru	13	2	36	100	66	-	14	-	70	9	32
Guntur	3	12	68	6	160	43	2	24	80	-	33
Hyderabad	21	12	63	6	2	4	-	9	3	12	18
Khammam	1	-	24	12	-	8	13	4	15	49	5
Kurnool	4	-	34	5	39	-	14	2	-	45	11
Nalgonda	6	29	37	23	-	2	12	1	-	60	6
Nellore	2	3	19	3	28	5	-	5	16	5	18
Srikakulam	2	-	13	4	-	-	-	2	1	20	2
Vijayawada	14	14	14	11	135	-	13	7	33	39	16
Visakapatnam	6	-	49	2	87	28	1	7	28	5	11
Warangal	5	4	39	6	7	-	-	7	-	50	9
Total	78	78	441	205	584	112	81	76	294	301	185

4. Challenges and Opportunities

Through the inspiration and strength imparted by the Holy Spirit the Catholic Church in the A.P. region has come a long way and is making a steady progress. The ministry of evangelization is taking place in the State as the people here in general are open to the Good News of Lord Jesus Christ. The education ministry of the Church is making good progress. The dioceses and congregations are opening new professional educational institutions like engineering and pharmacy colleges apart from upgrading the existing schools and colleges. Health ministry is also going on and some new health centers are being open. The ecumenical movement in the A.P. is growing progressively. Apart from the formation of the Andhra Pradesh Federation of Churches (APFC), a few state-level ecumenical organisations of the Christian leaders, alliances of Christian political activists and fellowships of pastors have emerged in the State. Some issue-based groups are also active at various levels.

However, despite many efforts the legitimate human rights of the Dalit Christians has not been conceded by the Government. At times this leads to despair and discouragement in the Community. The socio-economic situation of the Christians, majority of who are poor, has changed only marginally. The recent floods have worsened their condition in some places. The educational services and other ministries by the Church also face some difficulties. The grant-in-aid denied by the Government to the aided schools is proving to be a heavy burden to the Church. Due to this, new schools are not being opened in the rural areas any more to cater to the poor.

The witness and service by the Church need to be strengthened as the good name and image enjoyed by the Church is on the wane. In general, the mass media in the State does not seem to be sympathetic to the Church. The opportunistic groupism and casteism in the Church lead to conflicts and scandals. Though the BCCs are active, the participation of the laity is limited. The Church also faces the challenge of the numerous independent Christian denominations that are engaged in sheep-stealing. The attacks on the preachers and pastors by the Hindu fanatic groups are increasing as the number of Christian believers is growing in the State.

These are some of the challenges and opportunities to which the APBC must keep responding with the discernment and fortitude of the Holy Spirit. In order to respond effectively and relevantly to the challenges of the Church and issues of the Society in the present context, the APBC needs a strong well-equipped Regional Animation and Training Center that can act as a power house for capacity building and coordinating the development works and to make the Church an effective instrument of social transformation for building up the Divine Reign of Love, Justice and Peace in the region.
