

Interreligious Dialogue – For social transformation

Compiled by Student Coordinator : Anseeya Vaz, Staff Coordinator : Dr. Vini Sebastian, Associate Professor, SXIE

“Religion is a candle inside a multicoloured lantern. Everyone looks through a colour, but the candle is always there.” – Mohammed Neguib.

St. Xavier’s Institute of Education, organised an ‘Interreligious Dialogue under the Faith Formation’ programme, on **21st February, 2019**. The Institute has adopted the theme of **“ACTION FOR HARMONY”** and to infuse this attitude and value in the student teachers all the programs had to integrate the theme. We are deeply indebted to the Bombay Archdiocesan Commission for Interreligious Dialogue for conducting this session for us. We were privileged to have two great resource persons Fr.S.M. Michael, Chairman of the Bombay Archdiocesan Commission for Interreligious Dialogue and a Consultor to the Pontifical Commission for Culture, Vatican and Fr. Aniceto Pereira, Rector of St. Pius Seminary, Goregoan also was the Director of Institute for Ministry for Faith and Education (IMFE) program of the Bombay Archdiocese. Our very own Manager Fr. Blaise D’Souza s.j. also provided deep insights into the theme of Harmony as well as Interreligious Dialogue and stated that Harmony has to be a celebration, celebration of cultures and celebration of religions. Our Principal Dr. Sosamma Samuel also reiterated that Harmony among all of us is a necessity for today, India being a plural society this theme is very important for us.

Dialogue is an integral part of human life which enables every individual to mingle in the society of heterogeneous than a monologue in the same society. It brings people closer. The human being alone is capable, not only of reacting to a certain stimuli but also of responding to the other stimuli through language and culture, and in this manner builds up the community. While the increasing facility and rapidity of communications and the growing economic and political interdependence favour mutual relations and fellowship, the symbolic systems that structure human life, like language, culture and religion, combined with the human desire for domination, seem to be causes of conflict and division. But their desire for peace and fellowship urges people to a dialogue based on their common destiny and on mutual acceptance of and respect for each one's dignity and freedom.

The session was a delightful experience to all of us delivered by two great priests Fr. Dr. S. M. Micheal and Fr. Anicetto Pereira focussing on the essence of Interreligious Dialogue that each one should have in one’s life. A skit enacted by students depicted the harmony of religions as well as conflicts arising because of the religious issues disrupting the social and religious harmony. We viewed the session through the lens of a Jigsaw puzzle where all the pieces though being different and unique from each other but when they fit into each other make a beautiful picture. The effort to bridge the gaps in understanding between religions has led to efforts at inter-religious dialogue. The purpose of this dialogue is not to reduce religion to some common affirmation like "we all believe the same thing," for this is neither true nor helpful to prompting understanding. Different religions believe and practice different things, and in dialogue, those differences become the objects of discussions.

The session also was tied together with the College theme, Action for Harmony, believing in social and religious harmony where the spokesperson and students built up a rapport which seemed like harmony of music .i.e. when all musical cords and notes come together the effect achieved is melodious music soothing the mind of people. When people can talk about differences, they can move beyond the content of those differences — the notoriously difficult theological content — to see before them another human being who is, like them, living in a community, offering respect and expecting it from others, and seeking meaning and purpose through a vision of a transcendent reality.

The session dealt with provoking students and teaching them how to conduct inter religious services and laid down some steps and action in their schools which ended with a prayer service by reciting some verses from Bible, Quran, Granth Sahib and Bhagwad Geeta respectively where students after reciting their respective religious prayers were asked to pour water into a common vessel with portrayed oneness of human race and integrity of religions which give out similar meanings to humanity though belonging to an array of religions.

Dialogue does not solve all problems or bridge all gaps. Its importance is really in creating a space for conversation where differences can be peacefully and respectfully confronted and understood. Dialogue fails if people pretend differences don't exist. Even if disagreements stand and awareness of differences is heightened, respecting the dignity of the conversation partner is essential to living a good life where peace, understanding and learning are cherished. And beyond that, it is even essential to faith and to living a religious life well.

In turbulent times of today, the institution has taken a step to create a positive change in the minds and hearts of the future teachers who will affect the lives of millions of students under their care. We are sure that the session has helped us change our perspective towards different religions and also respect and treasure our own.

