

Saleians of South Asia Meet to define Strategies for Effective Youth Services

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A two day meeting and animation of fifty five Salesians from South Asian region was held at the Salesian Provincial house, Mumbai from the 30 – 31 October, 2016. The gathering brought together the twelve Youth Ministry Teams of the region under the umbrella of South Asia Youth Ministry led by the Delegate, Fr. Maria Charles.

Mumbai Provincial house with Fr. Glenford Lowe, the Rector of the community at the helm and Fr. Goyal Anthony with his administrative efficiency prepared the venue of the meeting and the hospitality arrangements to its best expression. Taking care of the minute details of the logistics, which despite the heavy schedule even found a slot for "Mumbai by night", made the present meeting and the one that followed just excellent. Fr. Godfrey D'Souza, the provincial of Mumbai presiding over the opening Eucharist reminded the participants, "We can lose our way in our work for the young, but God will find us". In his inaugural address in the first session of the day he welcomed the participants and made the facilities and resources of the house at the disposal of the participants. We all felt truly, "*Mumbai meri hai.*"

The key note address by Dr. Prof. Lata Narain, from the Centre for Lifelong Learning, TISS, Mumbai, gave a glimpse into the scenario of the situation of young people in the country. She highlighted the policy of the government by which it has broadly grouped the youth into two categories, 13 to 19 and 20 to 35, the former as adolescent group and the latter as a group moving towards forming an identity of its own. Anyone working with young people should know this age grouping to tap into the resources available with the government. Later in the address she presented a bird's eye view of the various movements in India starting from 1970s which caught the imagination of young people and got them involved. Presently, she said, the young people are caught up in the technology movement, wanting to know more: "*Dil mange more*". Whatever the category of the young one works for, she reminded the group, every category will have both the marginalized

and the vulnerable. Post independent young people, though not involved in the struggle of the nation for freedom, still seek freedom from traditional life style, being placed under control, regular academic performances etc... They are in search of identity - national, ethnic and religious. She concluded exhorting the Salesians to create learning processes that would facilitate reflection and space for themselves.

The presentation of Prof. Lata served as a back drop for the sessions that ensued. The participants representing each dimension of the Youth Ministry Team met in their respective groups and collated the activities and planning of the year 2015-16. The occasion provided an opportunity for each to listen to the processes set in motion in the youth ministry of the provinces.

In order to facilitate the youth pastoral team with its strategic planning, Mr. Conrad Saldhana, a longtime friend of Salesians and management guru helped the participants to go through an experience of strategic planning. After introducing briefly the five steps of the planning process he asked the participants to engage individually in it. He then invited them to share the last step in the general session for common learning.

The dynamics of the planning process included group works and general assembly for presentation and sharing. This was also the space for each to listen to the success stories brought in from provinces and also to take home cues to reprogramme the approach of the province in Youth Ministry.

The two day meeting also provided space for the Youth Delegates of all the provinces of South Asia to give a short power point report of the youth ministry processes that are in place in the province. Innovative services and creative presence with the young were visibly seen in the South Asian Salesian youth ministry.

The two day programme on strategic planning concluded with the final session set aside to report back from group work zeroing in on two issues that need priority attention, proposing an important intervention in the lives of Salesians regarding Youth Ministry and recommending a national mega event. The assembly that was divided into six groups presented its own findings. No decisions or proposals were made at the national level. The assembly preferred to take these proposals back to the provinces and set its own priorities. Fr. George Maliekal, the Provincial of Shillong, representing the SPCSA for Youth Ministry, concluded this part of the meeting with words of high appreciation for the work done by the Youth Ministry Team at the national level led by Fr. Maria Charles. He further said, "We can do more. We can do more effectively, qualitatively and quantitatively". He then

reminded the assembly, "Youth ministry is the birth mark of the Salesians. Let us do it well".

