

CIRCULAR - 07/2025

(On various matters from Metropolitan Council Meeting, Aurangabad)

21/10/2025

Dear Provincials, Fathers, Brothers and Sisters,

Thy Kingdom Come!

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

On 11 and 12 August we had the Nagpur Metropolitan Council Meeting of Bishops from Amravati, Aurangabad, Chanda and Nagpur. The main points discussed in the meeting included the following:

- (i) SC/ST issue of losing the reservation and constitutional provisions by changing their religion
- (ii) The risk of running boardings outside school campus.
- (iii) The revision of mass stipend and matters connected to Mass intentions
- (iv) Atrocities against Christians in different parts of our country and issue of conversion
- (v) The farmers' issues in Vidarbha region
- (vi) The Nagpur metropolitan level celebration of Holy Year Jubilee 2026.
- (vii) The Liturgical celebrations.
- (viii) Arrest of two Holy Cross Sisters in Aurangabad

I wish to share with you few points for our reflection, discussion and follow up:

- (i) SC/ST issue of losing the reservation and constitutional provisions by changing their religion

The expert opinion is that in accordance with the Indian Constitution the people of SC has no right for reservations once they change their religion as Christian is not scheduled in the Constitution for such provisions. The two court orders of Madras High Court and that of Supreme Court support this view. Additionally, they point out that there is no caste system in Christianity.

However, it is said that such people have the right of reservation of the economically backward communities. This reservation/provision is very little and very difficult to claim,

which means with regard to SC people we are in a helpless situation. Indeed, the political parties are using this loophole to support anti-conversion in the country.

As we all know the Church (CBCI) has been fighting for this right of SC people in the national level for the past 40 years or more. There is an injustice involved in it and a violation of the constitutional right of a citizen to profess and propagate any religion of his/her choice. All political parties play gimmick ever since the discussion started on this point as Christians are not at all a great vote-bank in most part of our country. So the natural conclusion from the discussion is that we have to find solution to our people within our limit. On the other hand regarding the ST people, they have a right for reservation and they can fight for their cause. The tribal people have no religion (they believe in cosmic gods) and they are free to adopt any religion, which does not occur to lose their reservation. But the political parties grade them as Hindus to serve their political hidden agendas and there is no base in considering tribal people as Hindus. In the case of tribal people what we can do is that, to give them legal assistance for their cause. Here another issue come up is the recognition of tribe in respective States. For example, Oraon is not a recognized tribe in Maharashtra. So we have additional responsibility of moving legally to get the tribe recognised in the State. It requires a State Assembly legislation, which is much beyond our purview as our hold over the State is very minimal. Again as we are aware that some tribal organisations have been fighting for the recognition of their tribes, for sometime but until now there have been no positive outcome whatsoever. From the discussion above we are forced to conclude that in any way we have no great hope to help our people!

(i) The risk of running the boardings outside school campuses

In the present situation in our country it is almost impossible to run a boarding. The current political scenario, the JJ Act 2015, the POCSO Act 2012 etc. are not conducive to our missionary activities. To get permission and to run a boarding as per the stipulations is a task almost impossible. The recognized boarding will be regularly monitored by Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and it will be difficult to run it in just and truthful ways. If we cannot run it in a fair way, we have to reflect whether we should continue it. In many places the boardings outside school campuses have brought unnecessary troubles and for that reason, many have closed down the boardings. Within the framework of legal formalities, what is permitted/tolerated is to run paid hostels in the school campuses. So what we can run such hostels in the school campuses. However, we have to tender an application to CWC asking permission for the same. In such case it is mandatory that the student should be doing studies in the school which is in the campus itself. The latest stipulations on boardings clearly indicate that the government agencies are forcing parents to send their children to Ashrams and discourage private/NGO boardings. We have to discuss this matter seriously and reach a final decision so as not to face unnecessary challenges or troubles. We shall prudently act lest we face with untoward incident. In this context probably the feasible solution to give faith and character formation to our children is to start daily evening or weekend tuition and summer course in our mission centres.

(i) *The revision of Mass stipend and matters connected to Mass intention*

The discussion on this subject was not applicable to us strictly as we do not come under the purview of Metropolitan Council of Nagpur with regard to liturgy. However, a mutual understanding in regional level may be good to avoid unwanted discussions among our people. The Mass stipend remains the same as Rs. 100/- (one hundred only). The other three dioceses in the metropolitan council (Nagpur, Aurangabad and Amaravathy) have decided to introduce Multiple or Pluri Mass intentions and Box intention Mass. Please See the details of the same in the Circular of Archbp. Elias Gonsalves, the archbishop of Nagpur, attached herewith. This system has been in effect in Bombay archdiocese for past many years. As we don't receive too many Mass intentions from our people it may not be practical and applicable in our diocese. However, if anyone feels good you may try box intention Mass as it has the advantage for those with less money also get Mass announced and offered for their intention (See details in the archbishop's Circular). After having received feedback from the diocese I shall give official permission to start such practices in our diocese. With regard to Mass stipend we shall have recourse to the Synod of Syro-Malabar bishops before a decision is taken.

(ii) *Atrocities against Christians in different parts of our country and issue of conversion*

The statistics show that atrocities against Christians in India is on increase year after year. It was 127 in 2014 and it has increased to 834 in 2024, and most of these are based on false allegations. There is conscious and systematic plans to target Christians in the country. What had happened in Durg railway station in August 2025 was one of the last incidents in the row of targeting Christians in India. We should not leave in oblivion that some Christian denominations for their over-zeal add fuel to fire and we become the victims. The teachings of the Catholic Church does not endorse forced conversion [Cf. Dignitatis Humanae # 4, Mystici Corporis Christi # 104 etc.]. But the fact remains that many are attracted towards Christians faith by our service and institutions. However, we are victimised for no fault of ours. Indeed, what Christ promised is sufferings and persecutions [Cf. Mt.10:17, Mk. 13: 9 Lk. 12: 11. 21: 12]. 'Blood of martyrs is the seed of Christianity' is a constant reminder. We are exposed to challenges so that Church may grow. Indeed, that is how the Church has grown in the past. In this scenario what is expected is do our best to evangelize with prudence and caution, and leave to God conversion/baptism as the work of the Holy Spirit. We shall focus on conversion of heart and leave the rest to God. As targeting and false allegations are the issues to be tackled, which is beyond our purview, what I suggest is not a remedial to the problem but only a means to understand the problem and adapt some strategies to go ahead in our mission. The great command of Christ perennially invites us to preach and baptise (Cf. Mt 28:19- 20), and we are called to be prudent like serpents as well (Cf. Mt. 10:16).

Here I wish to add an appendix to complete the discussion and continue the reflection. In India the government and people are intolerant to some religious faiths while in West Europe USA, Canada etc. any faith is, not only tolerated but also respected. In those countries there is freedom of religion and it is respected by all. Number of Hindu sages, sanyasis and preachers propagate their faith freely in West and they do establish temples and

monasteries. We never heard not even one instance of arrest of such preachers for propagation of their faith or conversion of people to their faith. There have been instances of many Christians following the faith these preachers propagate. Neither any government nor any political parties in such countries raise objections. Some foreigners come to India as well to initiate to Hindu faith. There have been few instances also in India some leaving Christian faith and following other religions. One could find no answer whatsoever for the intolerance of our bretheren of some religions in India towards others. We shall continue to pray for them, for Jesus told us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Cf. Mt. 5:44).

(iii) *The farmers' issue in Vidarbha Region*

As everywhere in India, in Vidharbha region too the farmers face many challenges. The weather, wild animals, finance, marketing, low price monopoly of corporates etc. are some of such challenges. The government policies and subsidies, are the solutions to the problem. We have neither control nor any voice over such matters which are strictly Government prerogatives and they are manoeuvred by political parties and corporates. However, what we could do is to organise our farmers to form associations, to increase their bargain power, to train them for more profitable farming, increase their self-confidence, channelize financial assistance within our limit, free or concessional education to their children, make available employment opportunities etc. Thank God that there are fewer farmers' suicide among our people and in our area compared to other areas in the country. We shall think together and do something better for our farmers. The Community Empowerment Year 2026 as announced in our Church may be an opportunity to help the people in general and our faithful in particular.

vi) *Nagpur Metropolitan level Celebration of Holy Year Jubilee 2025*

A united celebration of Holy Year Jubilee 2025 is scheduled in Nagpur SFX School on 02 October 2025. The following are the participants: The curia members, provincials and their teams, diocesan pastoral council members, seminary rectors, etc. One hundred participants each is expected from four dioceses - Amaravathy, Aurangabad, Chanda & Nagpur. For the concluding Eucharistic celebration there will be around 1000 people. Fr. Benny Mulackal, Proto-Syncellus, will contact you and give necessary directions.

vii) *The Liturgical Celebrations*

The attached circular regarding liturgical celebrations in the Metropolitan dioceses of Nagpur Amaravathy, and Aurangabad is a very good reading for everyone. Though they pertain to liturgical celebrations in Latin rite many points are equally applicable in our liturgy too. They provide adequate matter for a decorum and discipline in liturgical celebrations. I exhort everyone to read it and use whatever is applicable to our liturgy. Dispositions, decorum and discipline are must for fruitful and meaningful celebration of liturgy.

viii) *Arrest of two Holy Cross Sisters in Aurangabad*

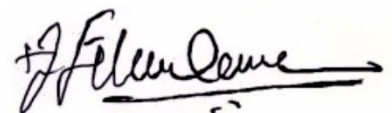
It was on 30 June 2025 that two Holy Cross Sisters were arrested by police in response to

the allegations of some girls who ran away from their boarding. From the whole episode it is learnt that the Sisters were trapped by the girls at the instigation of some external pressures. The Holy Cross Sisters have a girls' hostel in Aurangabad and it is run strictly under CWC supervision. Some girls, recently brought to the hostel by the police have shown some criminal characters. The matter was reported to the CWC and the Sisters expressed their reluctance to keep them in the hostel, however due to insistence of CWC and out of compassion the Sisters permitted them to continue in the hostel. The whole episode started as follows: One day one of these girls manifested some uneasiness in the body and asked the Sisters to pray over her and insisted to sprinkle holy water. The Sisters generously did pray for her as the other girls requested. It was videographed by others and later they alleged against Sisters that they baptised her and forced to accept Christian faith. The two Sisters were arrested and they were behind the bar for six days. The sisters described to the bishops their ordeal under custody. They were given no proper food or facilities for bathing in the jail. Indeed, it was a terrible experience for them for six days. Once again such incident invites us, to have a proper plan of running of hostels, the mission preaching, our charitable activities etc. We shall resolve to be prudent and cautious.

These reflections and sharing once again remind us to a deeper level discussion so as to arrive at some solutions that can help us to be on safer side. Political parties in general are anti- Christian and anti-poor. They have least concern for the poor, marginalized, down-trodden etc. They make laws to trap us and protect themselves from mischiefs and corruption that they do.

The common man has no protection and left to a situation between satan and deep sea. Whatever choice the common man makes, he is in trouble. Common man faces struggles and he has no escape from his fate. In this vicarious situation we have to support our people, we shall use our resources to help our people and to support them to have a dignified living status. May I request everyone to do whatever is required to support our people so that they may grow in faith and self-confidence. With our people we shall build up the Church and witness Christ and all values of Christianity. With good wishes and prayers, Yours devotedly in Christ

Yours devotedly in Christ



† Ephrem Nariculam Bishop,
Diocese of Chanda



