

Interfaith Dialogue in Action and Religious Contribution During Covid-19

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Abstract: *During the time of COVID-19 different religions contributed so many services to the society. At a time when people suffered a lot viz financially, physically, emotionally, spiritually; various religions raised helping hand for them. Many organizations and individuals think various options to address the threats caused by COVID-19 and they follow interfaith and various religious principles. The role of interfaith dialogue in action and religious contribution are imperative in this context. They protected the life and dignity of the individual, also respected the rights and responsibility of each person, helping the poor and vulnerable sectors of the society. Following aspects promoted interreligious dialogue viz the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of theological exchange and the dialogue of religious experience.*

Keywords: Interfaith, Religion, Cooperation, Spiritual Intervention, etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the absence of any effective medicine COVID-19 remains a global threat. Social and political sciences inform us about patterns of behaviour among individuals, communities, societies and states in times of crisis and conflict. In such situations, policymakers and societies can become less tolerant. Violence and exclusion against people perceived to represent a threat may not only be tolerated but also justified. The roles and reactions of religious agencies in such a context become essential for many people, guiding them to cope with the situation and interact with the other. The dialogue of life, in a time of COVID-19 pandemic promotes the idea that people of different faiths, religions and spiritual traditions live in an open and neighbourly spirit. The dialogue of action is a concrete commitment to the praxis of faith in building a just and humane society. The dialogue of theological exchange where specialists seek and deepen their understanding of world religions. The dialogue of religious experiences promotes shared ideas and ways of searching for God, the Absolute, the higher being/principles in life. All these four ways of interreligious/interfaith dialogue can serve as a model for human flourishing in the age of COVID-19 pandemic. The four ways of interreligious/interfaith dialogue can be applied by world religions in their spiritual/religious interventions in response to COVID-19 pandemic.

The global partnerships of all religions promote values amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. People of all promoting the life and dignity of the human person, a sense of community, and participation, respecting the rights and responsibilities of each person, helping the poor and vulnerable sectors of the society, respecting the dignity of work and the rights of the workers, solidarity and caring for the whole creation can be a positive force that can build a just and humane society. Religions, in a time of COVID-19 pandemic can be a force that can change the world. After all, we are all one human family.

II. RELIGIOUS CONTRIBUTIONS DURING COVID 19

Kothamangalam Diocese

Covid-19 pandemic that started in December 2019 has done and is doing great damage to the overall development of humanity. The whole world is trying to battle down this virus attack. In this attempt all countries of the world and all states are doing their maximum. In the state of Kerala, a lot of covid prevention activities are going on. Governmental and Non-governmental agencies are very active in this social service. Among the various agencies that fight against Covid-19, Kothamangalam Diocese also is playing an important

role. Different organizations under this diocese, such as Kothamangalam Social Service Society (KSSS), KCYM (Youth Association), Vincent De Paul Society, Catholic Congress etc are participating in this joint endeavour. Being the official organ for social actions, KSSS is leading the covid preventive activities in this diocese.

A. Distribution of Mask and Sanitizer

Joining the health officials and public administration, we distributed masks, sanitizers, hand wash and soap kits. KSSS handed over these items to Mr. Antony John MLA (Kothamangalam) and he in turn entrusted these items to the Thahasildar, Mrs. Rachel K Varghese in meeting organized for this purpose at St. Joseph Hospital, Kothamangalam.

B. Training Program for Volunteers

KSSS organized a group of volunteers to act against covid 19. This group works as an Emergency Relief Team. It is named as "KOTHAMANGALAM SAMARITANS". In the training session 30 persons participated offline and 150 volunteers took parts online. In the training programme for volunteers, Dr. Anjaly Unnikrishnan, supt. of Kothamangalam Taulk Hospital and other resource persons from medical field gave training on themes such as how to wear mask properly, how to wash hands, how to handle dead bodies of covid victims etc. Resource persons from Fire and Rescue department also took class and demonstrated safety measures.

C. Kothamangalam Samaritans-Task Force

This volunteer's group is very active in the time of this pandemic. They help people for covid test, distribute safety kits etc. Funeral of covid victims was a matter of fear and confusion in the early times of spreading. This group took leadership to conduct funeral. By this time 130 funerals were conducted by this group. This group consists of priests, lay people and sisters. They conduct funeral service according to the traditions and liturgical prescriptions. Wherever the service is requested by other denominations and castes, the team is ready to help them too. They have done such service in public cemeteries also.

D. Conscientization

KSSS has played an important role in the sphere of conscientization of the public about this pandemic through talks, short films, leaflets etc. We produced a video album highlighting the importance of hygienic measures, such as washing hands, wearing mask, keeping social distance.

E. Food Kits

KSSS and other organizations of this diocese distributed food kits to poor people in different areas. In some colonies, almost all families were having covid +ve members. In such places joining with local authorities, we gave food assistance.

F. Financial Assistance

Due to this pandemic many people lost labour. Many families face financial difficulty. In this situation children studying for professional courses needed money to pay fees. We helped such students by giving laptop and mobile phone for online classes. Also, we helped many people for medical treatment and house construction or maintenance to.

G. Free Antigen Tests and Medical Kits

With the help of St. Joseph's Hospital Kothamangalam, Holy Family Hospital Muthalakodam and Nirmala Medical Centre Muvattupuzha we conducted free antigen test medical camps in different areas of the diocese, especially remote areas. Those who were covid +ve, we were given free medicines prescribed by health department as part of covid protocol.

H. Medical Safety Kits

Medical kits, consisting of pulse oximeter, Digital Thermometer, Steam inhaler, Sanitizer, N95 masks, were arranged by KSSS joining with KCBC and distributed freely to many people. More kits were made available for sale in our five medical shops.

III. SANTHIGIRI COLLEGE OF COMPUTER SCIENCES, VAZHITHALA - CONTRIBUTION DURING COVID-19

SCOP is a special cell that coordinates the outreach welfare activities of Santhigiri College. It has regular monthly activities like treatment assistance for the eligible, vocational training for the disabled children and providing Physiotherapy & Speech therapy for the challenged students at their homes.

During Covid pandemic season, SCOP initiated a lot of activities to help the victims and to promote the covid protocol. Awareness generation programs among the inmates of rehabilitation centre and nearby society. Distribution of essential food kits to the 100 poor families at Purappuzha Panchayat. Distributed hygiene kit includes sanitizer, mask and gloves for 175 handicapped students from Thodupuzha taluk. Financial assistance was provided to the poor covid patients and extended the necessary services during quarantine period.

Also, in connection with MSW department we have provided free tele counselling for the covid affected families of Thodupuzha taluk. Also, online study materials were distributed to around 50 students including smart phones, note books, texts etc., Along with these, all the timely assistance to the needy in every manner is continuing as well.

IV. SUGGESTIONS

1. Express empathy and solidarity across religions, regions, and cultures to foster hope and dispel fears.
2. Strengthen charitable and service efforts, making them more regular, better coordinated, and more applicable across communities.
3. Adapt behaviours, approaches, methodologies and techniques to strengthen resilience.
4. Emphasize human interconnectivity and interdependency.

V. CONCLUSION

It is easy to believe that interfaith and interreligious dialogue activities are more of a priority during the covid-19 pandemic. But if we consider the social consequences of the pandemic, and how it is affecting the everyday life of many people, the role of interreligious interaction, cooperation and interfaith dialogue becomes quite apparent. In times of crisis and uncertainty, many people appeal to religious leaders and faith-based organizations for security, moral and spiritual guidance, and concrete help. COVID-19 has shown that we are interdependent and interconnected. While these characteristics are not new, it has reminded us of what we know and how we can adapt our efforts to be more effective during a pandemic. There is no doubt many interfaith workers have responded in heroic ways in confronting the difficult and at times disastrous consequences brought on by the pandemic.

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BIOGRAPHY



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