Lasallian Women Symposium

Meeting 28-29 December 2021 in Boys Town, Madurai, South India

On 28 and 29 December 2021, a meeting was held in Madurai which focused on job security for women at all Lasallian centres in the District, as well as appreciation for their contribution. Among Associates/partners, in fact, "women outnumber men"; however, their importance is not much recognised or encouraged in most decision-making processes.

For this purpose, the Sector Team appointed a group of women, led by Ms. Helen Mary, who coordinated the entire programme online in the organisational phase, together with Brothers Arockia Doss and Anbunathan, programme advisors.

The participants, 68 in all from 9 different institutions in which the Brothers of the District have worked in the past, and other related groups, as well as their usual partners, arrived at the headquarters on the morning of the 28th.

At 9.30 a.m., each team led by a member of the coordination team, gathered in the main meeting room, where Ms. Helen initiated the opening session. Brother Ricky, General Councillor for the PARC Region and Brother Bertram, Visitor of LASAD (Lasallian District of South Asia), read out messages of hope and encouragement and received a long applause from the participants. The Auxiliary Visitor, Br. T. Amalan, spoke about the *empowerment of* women in all their places of work, appreciating all the hard work of coordination that was done at the Symposium.

The morning sessions held by Dr Anurathna, an activist and doctor, were mainly oriented towards talking about women's mental health in today's context. For most of them, it is at a critical point. Today, stress is felt most by working mothers. Feelings of anxiety and isolation are some of the consequences of stress. Therefore, one needs safe spaces to have open and honest conversations about one's needs in the workplace. Staying positive and sharing with optimistic people are some ways to overcome stress. Prioritising family and work responsibilities and delegating them where possible is another way to manage stress. Adjusting our expectations and fixed standards is equally important. Include **'my time in your schedule'**.

In the afternoon, participants shared some of the best practices from each of the institutions represented, for example on how female staff are involved in the overall development of schools.

In the evening, Brother Arockia Doss presented “The Role of Women in the Life of our Founder”, gathering some notes from recent research on this topic at the Institute level and sharing them with the participants. Starting with De La Salle’s grandmother, the influence women had in shaping the birth of our Institute is truly amazing. De La Salle learned many things about school and community life from Sr. Franco Dougal and Sr. Anne, as well as from Madame Mailefer, a key figure in the life of our Founder.

The second day was then devoted to the safety of women in all workplaces. Sister Amala of the Sisters of St Joseph of Lyon, an activist and lawyer at the High Court Bench in Madurai, spoke to the participants present about the POCSO (document dealing with Protection of Children from Sexual Offences). It is important for teachers to be aware of this law so that they can properly educate the children under their care.

The Organising Committee would like to thank Brother Amalan, Auxiliary Visitor, for all his support, guidance and encouragement during the process of planning, organising and implementing the Symposium, which was very successful as it met all the expectations of the organising team.

Original text by Brother Arockia Doss, FSC, and Brother Anbunathan, FSC, coordinating team consultants.
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