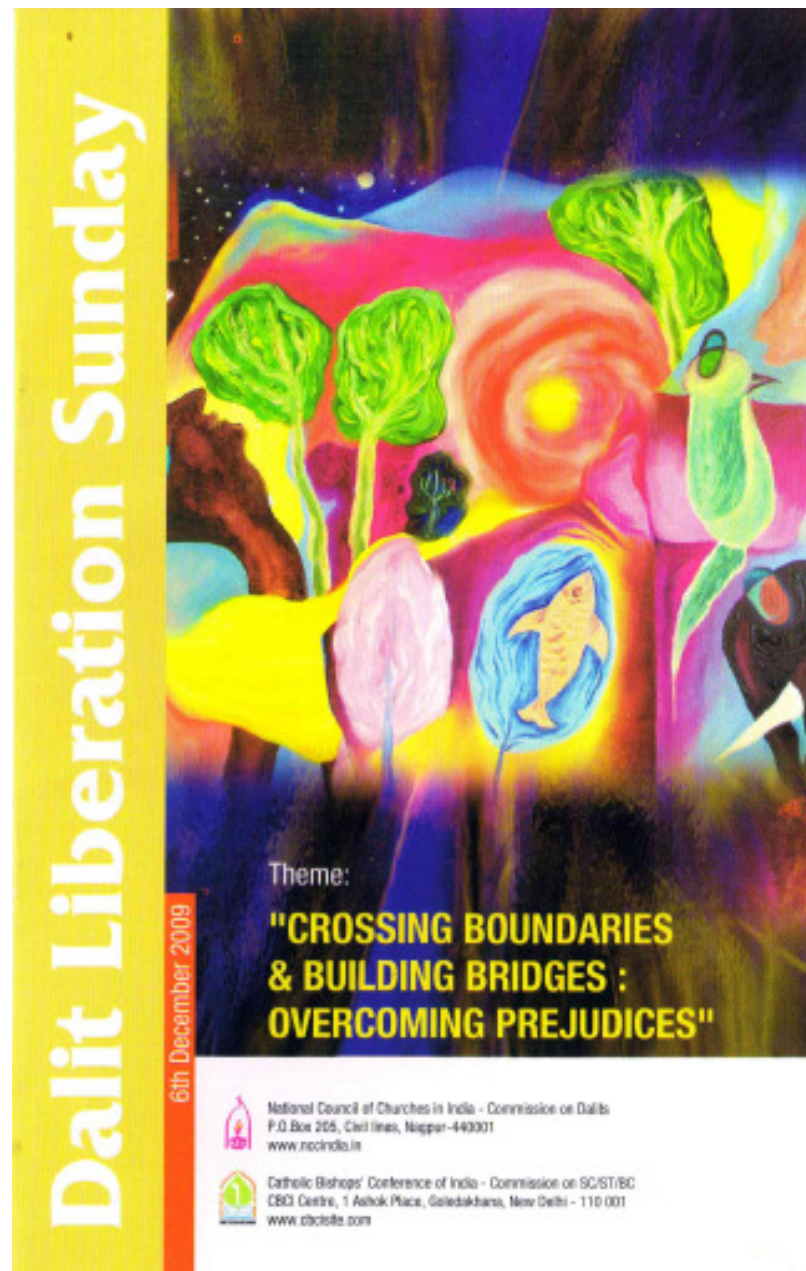



Commission on Dalits
National Council of Churches in India
P.O. Box # 205, Civil Lines,
Nagpur - 440 001 (M.S.)
www.nccindia.in




Dalit Liberation Sunday

6th December 2009

Theme:
**"CROSSING BOUNDARIES
& BUILDING BRIDGES :
OVERCOMING PREJUDICES"**

 National Council of Churches in India - Commission on Dalits
P.O. Box 205, Civil Lines, Nagpur-440001
www.nccindia.in

 Catholic Bishops' Conference of India - Commission on SC/ST/BC
CBCI Centre, 1 Ashok Place, Gole Market, New Delhi - 110 001
www.cbciite.com

Worship Material for
Dalit Liberation Sunday
6th December 2009



National Council of Churches in India
Commission on Dalits
P.O. Box # 205, Civil Lines, Nagpur - 440 001

Themes used for **Dalit Liberation Sunday:**

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|------|--|
| 2007 | Put away Violence and Oppression;
Execute Justice and Righteousness (Ezek. 45:12) |
| 2008 | ...Seek justice, rescue the oppressed... (Isaiah 1:17) |
| 2009 | Crossing boundaries & building bridges:
Overcoming Prejudices (Isaiah 11:1-9) |

“Crossing Boundaries & Building Bridges: Overcoming Prejudices”

DALIT LIBERATION SUNDAY 2009

6th December 2009

Prejudices

“We can correct a person, never by his/her prejudices” has been an old saying, which is still relevant for our times as well. It is very unfortunate that the Indian society and the Indian Church are plagued with the problems of religious prejudices, regional prejudices, linguistic prejudices, gender prejudices and the worst of all caste and sub-caste prejudices. These social prejudices have had a baneful influence and sordid effect on the lives of the people where caste bias overrules every other consideration for establishing justice and creating a fraternity of equality. These prejudices have been one of the root causes for discrimination and growing violence against Dalits. Whether it is a question of segregation or secession, whether it is a question of oppression or opportunities, be it is a question of caste people or Dalits & Tribals, be it is a question of *Safai Karamchhari* (manual scavenging) or white collared jobs, when it comes to a question of caste Christians or Dalit Christians, when the question for migrants or inhabitants arise, when it comes to a question of strangers or neighbours, a question of people with disabilities or people with different abilities and whether it is a question in the case of Mala Dalits or Madiga Dalits and between other sub-castes, the amount of the indoctrination of prejudices have been incorrigible.

Boundaries & Gaps

Prejudices have drawn visible and invisible boundaries among people and have widened the gap between people of different identities. The prejudiced lines of control (loc) have become battlegrounds, with little space or no space available for making reconciliation with the other. Exclusions in the name of caste, gender, class and religion have become rampant and

individualism vis-à-vis community living has been dominating the lives of the people. With these exclusions, gaps among people on these battle lines have been increasing by leaps and bounds. In such a context, where prejudices dominates and overpowers the life within our churches and societies, it is envisaged that we as churches need to get challenged in overcoming prejudices by crossing our own graffiti boundaries and by building bridges with people of different life affirmations. Dalit Liberation Sunday (DLS) 2009 is a calling to that end, and the theme for this year is *“Crossing Boundaries & Building Bridges: Overcoming Prejudices.”*

Overcoming Prejudices

Jesus crossed boundaries of his times drawn as lines of tradition, lines of cultures and was in the mission of building bridges with those people of other faiths, traditions, cultures. He exposed the prejudices of the people and their deceitful hearts for the sake of liberation and was bold in doing that. Dr. Ambedkar gave inter-dining and Inter-caste marriages as examples in overcoming prejudices. We can cross the boundaries by seeking forgiveness for our prejudices and we can build bridges by making new equations of friendship among communities and individuals. We need to confess of our prejudices, which have been either silenced or not really thought as sins in our lives. Overcoming prejudices involves breaking status quos and stereotypes of labeling communities on their caste and ideologies. Let us as individuals and as Churches commit ourselves to be bold to cross the boundaries of our own prejudices and identities, by creative ways and means of widening our tents. On crossing the boundaries, let us build bridges with those who have been victims of our own prejudices in our vicinities. Once we overcome the caste prejudices, we are on the move towards liberation and transformation of our societies and Churches. Once such prejudices are overcome, there will be an increasing space for mutual respect, mutual dignity and mutual learning from each other and justice, peace and equality will no longer be a distant reality. DLS calls out the local congregations and communities to work out innovative, creative and challenging

strategies to overcome prejudices and work towards affirming life, given to all people and identities in all fullness. To correct an individual, one need to correct ones prejudices first, for that is the call to all those observe the DLS09.

Our Resolve

Dalit Liberation Sunday has become an important feature in the calendar of Indian Ecumenical Movement, for the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India (CBCI) observes it jointly for the last three years. NCCI's recent Lenten Campaign for Dalit Liberation has also called on the Christians in the season of Lent, to 'fast unto justice' in journeying towards liberation. Over the years, there has been a positive response to these observances in sensitizing the local congregations towards concerns of Dalits, for no longer caste issue is visualized as a sociological issue or an issue outside the purview of the Church but more seen as an issue challenging the core of our faith and gospel. The recently concluded General Body meeting of the NCCI has resolved to observe this DLS in their respective constituencies, which is a welcome move in the history of the National Council for the cause of Dalit liberation. This year, it is indeed a happy moment that both the NCCI and CBCI are going to circulate joint posters for this observance, which truly depicts the spirit of ecumenism, friendship and partnership, and also a step forward in our journey.

6th December 2009,

On 6th December 2009, the Sunday preceding the International Human Rights Day and the Second Sunday in the season of Advent falls the Dalit Liberation Sunday for this year 2009. December 6th, as we all know also happens to be the anniversary day of the cruel demolition of Babri Masjid at Ayodhya and the day to remember the death anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar. At the same time in Churches in India, first Sunday in December is observed as 'Bible Sunday'. It is very appropriate that DLS 09 falls on this day, for we all draw our inspiration from Bible on issues of liberation, inclusiveness, justice and equality. This year DLS observance would be more fitting to draw out lessons in

overcoming the prejudices of religious fundamentalism and also to take inspiration and courage from Dr. Ambedkar in overcoming prejudices of caste, for many Christian Dalit activists and Church leaders drew inspiration from him. DLS 2009 also serves as a prelude to the celebration of the 2010 Edinburgh centenary celebrations of the World Missionary Conference, for the theme of DLS 2009 echoes the spirit of ecumenism in general and the theme of 2010 "Witnessing Christ Today" in particular.

Our Call

Let us as local congregations observe this DLS 2009 in all sincerity and truthfulness to our calling as Christians and sensitize our people to overcome prejudices and build friendships with all people in our communities. All of you are called to have special prayers on this day for some ideas for order of worship are attached herewith. Preach some relevant homilies on this day, have special meetings, display some paintings, organise inter-faith programmes or can use any other creative local means in observing this day. Join us to observe DLS 2009!

*Rt. Rev. Dr. B. S. Devamani,
Chairperson,
NCCI -Commission on Dalits*

*Rev. Raj Bharath Patta,
Executive Secretary,
NCCI- Commission on Dalits*

Ideas for Worship

1. Prayer of Thanks Giving:

Leader: God of Justice, Respect and Life, we thank you for enabling us to establish your justice and to create a fraternity of equality by crossing boundaries that hinder us to realize your Kingdom and building bridges to nurture all your creatures.

Together: The wolf shall overcome its prejudices and shall dwell with the lamb; the leopard shall overcome its prejudices and shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion shall build bridges among them and will eat together and the little child shall lead them. Hosanna for such a just and peaceful community, free from all prejudices.

Leader: God of Compassion, Humility and Forgiveness, we thank you for giving us a heart of compassion, a sense of humility and a mind of forgiveness to share love, respect and joy with our fellow beings to realize the equality in your creation.

Together: The cow and the bear shall cross their boundaries and shall feed; their young shall lie down together in peace, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox establishing equality between them. Hosanna for such a just and peaceful community, free from all prejudices.

Leader: God of Dignity, Equality and Fraternity, we thank you for strengthening us to create a space for mutual respect, mutual dignity and mutual learning, so that we overcome all kinds of prejudices and clothe ourselves with the life giving qualities of your Son and our Lord.

Together: They shall not hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Hosanna for such a peaceful community, free from all prejudices.

2. Responsive Reading:

A Conversation with Psalmist Aspah in Psalm 82

Together: When exclusions, discriminations, oppressions have become the norm of the day, when injustices and acts of violence on the vulnerable have become rampant, and when gaps between people are widening, where is justice? Where is God to deliver and execute justice?

Leader: *God has taken God's place in the divine council; in the midst of gods God holds justice.*

Together: For ages, people have been prejudiced to discriminate Dalits in the name of caste. The caste people gave it a religious sanction for such a wicked and evil practice. Justice for Dalits has always been denied, delayed and distanced, for the caste people try to influence the systems of justice and enjoy power and continue to suppress justice for Dalits.

Leader: *How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked?*

Together: Our yearning for justice continues. Justice to Christians and Muslims of Dalit origin has been a long pending struggle, and justice is awaited. What an injustice it is to clean human excreta by *Safai Karamcharis* because they are born into a Dalit family? Their rights as human beings are curtailed. When will these our brothers and sisters will live a life in dignity, free from these evils?

Leader: *Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.*

Together: Who shall rescue our Dalit women, who have been the worst victims of oppression, in the name of caste, patriarchy, class and gender? Dalit children are forced into child labour and their plights knew no bounds. Who shall deliver them?

Leader: *Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.*

Together: The practices of hierarchies are internalized by the vulnerable and are enduring it, for they are economically not

independent. It is the ploy of the caste groups to divide and rule the Dalits, create conflicts among Dalits and enjoy power in their sectors of life.

Leader: *They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.*

Together: The systemic violence and discrimination are not just limited to the rural settings; even institutions of higher learning, elite groups and communities of higher social standards are not free from caste discrimination. Caste system has been deeply rooted in the minds of people at all levels.

Leader: *I say, you are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, you shall die like men, and fall like any prince.*

Together: When prejudices are prevalent among nations, boundaries of caste identities are deep rooted, and when gaps among people in the name of caste, gender, class, religion etc. are growing, come O God to deliver justice to these your nations.

Leader: *Arise, O God, judge the earth; for to you belong all the nations!*

3. Confession: (Together)

Lord, you have given us a spirit of freedom, but we live in fear. Suspicion, prejudice and hostility have ruled us more. Lord, we come before you acknowledging that in spite of affirming cultures and peoples in public, we often deny them in our day to day private interactions. We confess that many a time we do not transcend our self-made identities, even when we know that they are oppressive and prevent us from loving fellowship. The demon of caste has possessed us and we have let it tie us down; we have allowed it to take priority in our lives, and we justify it in the name of culture and tradition and identity. We have seen pain, death, and cruelty, and yet we have prevented these realities from hurting us and challenging us to live a better life. Lord, we are sick and we need your healing. By our constant thoughtless repetition, we have emptied words of their meaning. We

have forgotten righteousness, joy, peace, unity, and fullness of life. We have formed our own exclusive and homogenous and parochial circles. We don't want to be like this. We want to be free. Forgive us.

Assurance of Pardon

God desires not punishment but joy, not evil but good. God has heard our prayers. He is kind and merciful. But he is watching and waiting. Let us go in peace and live a life of love in freedom for we are forgiven.

4. Prayer of Solidarity: (Together)

God of mercy and compassion, we bring forth into your presence all the communities that are experiencing segregation, discrimination and oppression based on caste, class, creed, colour and gender both in the church in the society.

It is your death on the cross that has put an end to all enmity by breaking down the walls that separate us. We ask you to empower us O Lord, to tear down the fences of hatred and indifferences. Liberate us from bonds of pride and self seeking. Enable and strengthen us to overcome our prejudices and fears. Grant us your courage to open ourselves to others so that we may continue to live in solidarity with the oppressed communities. Amen

5. Scripture Readings:

1. Isaiah 11: 1- 9
2. I Corinthians 12: 12-26
3. Matthew 15: 21-28

6. Affirmation of Faith: (Together)

We believe in God the creator, the sustainer and the redeemer of the whole human kind and cosmos. We believe that God has created all in God's own image.

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's son, who was born and lived as a Dalit during his earthly life; who was born of the so- considered lowly Mary; who suffered unjust discrimination in the context of the Roman Empire. He suffered humiliating crucifixion for his voice of resistance against the hegemonic Empire. He part- took in the death of the martyrs to identify himself with the death and the death- like lives of the Dalits. He ascended into life to bring about fullness of life in all.

We believe in the Holy Spirit who functions as an advocate and a counselor to those who are marginalized, and empowers them towards liberation. We affirm our faith in the Holy Spirit, the Living Spirit of God, who empowers her children to break inhuman barriers, and the obstacles that negate life, justice and peace. It is this Spirit that strengthens us to suffer for justice, inspires us to stand against life negating forces and prejudices shaping us into community of forgiven and freely accepted brothers and sisters, set apart for God's service raised with Christ, we share in his work for God's world of everlasting life, justice and peace.

We believe in the Church that rises above the caste- based structure and that which overcomes prejudices by crossing boundaries and building bridges. We believe in One Holy Catholic Church that is called to risk its life to cross the boundaries for incorporating everybody into the Body of Christ, irrespective of caste, creed, class, colour and gender and of being in solidarity with the wounded communities.

We believe in the communion of Saints who share a common stance of acceptance of all in the sight of God and all humans; We believe in God's forgiveness of sins when we repent of our dominant nature and seek forgiveness wholeheartedly from the

victims of our oppressive nature;

We believe in the resurrection of the body as a witnessing voice to liberation from oppression;

We believe in the life- everlasting, which ensures restoration of an egalitarian cosmic family.

AMEN

7. Intercessory Prayer

Leader: Merciful God we gather here before you bringing our prayers and supplications knowing that you are a God who listens to the cries of your people. In our intercession today we remember all those who suffer the injustice of the caste system as well as all those who struggle to create an alternative society that is free from hierarchy, prejudice and discrimination.

Together: Lord, enable us to listen to the cries of the oppressed.

Leader: We particularly remember today the victims of caste based violence in our country, while we try to grasp your principles of forgiveness we also know that unless there is retributive justice there will be a further marginalization of Dalits in our country. We particularly remember women and children who have been victims of caste based discrimination.

Together: Lord, give us compassion so that we may feel the pain of the suffering.

Leader: Your son was a friend of all those who were despised and rejected because they were considered to be polluted. Today we pray for those who labour in occupations that are considered to be polluted. We remember the lakhs of manual scavengers in our country who are forced to continue in work that is banned by the government. We pray and work for a time when none will be forced into work that is degrading. At the same time we pray that you will give us grace to see that there is nothing unclean in this world but that you have made all things good.

Together: Renew us so that we may transform the world.

Leader: We pray for Dalit students in colleges and universities. We know that the hope of a better world of families and communities rests upon their shoulders. Give them the strength to persevere in the midst of an education system that excludes and discriminates.

Together: *We ask your protection*

Leader: We pray for those who are struggling to battle caste discrimination through advocacy work and particularly remember those churches and friends across the globe who stand in solidarity with the Dalits and their struggle. We pray for the work of Dalit movements and NGO's that are struggling for Dalit Human Rights and we also remember the work of the International Dalit Solidarity Network, the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation who have worked to place the Dalit issue on the International agenda. We similarly pray for those who fight caste discrimination on a daily basis by word and example.

Together: *Lord we seek your strength.*

Leader: We pray for our churches in our country, that we may be sensitive to the situation of Dalits in and outside our communities. We pray for a spirit of unity among us so that the demon of caste will not divide our church and for a spirit of love so that we may work for the justice of the oppressed, working to create just and inclusive communities for all. Lord in your mercy...

Together: *Hear our prayer*

8. Lord's Prayer

9. Benediction

Credits for Order of Worship:

1. Rev. Samuel Logan Ratnaraj, Arcot Lutheran Church, Tiruvannamalai
2. Mr. John Boopalan, CODECS, Bangalore
3. Mr. Philip Peacock, Bishop's College, Kolkata
4. Rev. Rohan Gideon, Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Madurai
5. Rev. P. Krupa Victor, CSI- Karimnagar Diocese.
6. NCCI- Secretariat

Credit for the pictures on the Poster:

1. Rev. Sunil Raj Philip, CSI- Madhya Kerala Diocese – He has drawn both the pictures on the poster, with an idea of depicting the life in the creation on overcoming the prejudices among the creation. The second picture is the picture of Jesus hanging on a cross, an expression to build bridges among the creation.
2. Mr. Raju Pidadi, Nagpur for designing the poster.

This order of worship has been prepared and published by the NCCI- Commission on Dalits. The posters and post cards are a joint initiative of NCCI-Commission on Dalits and CBCI- Commission of SC/ST/BC. This material can be photocopied or quoted with due acknowledgments.