

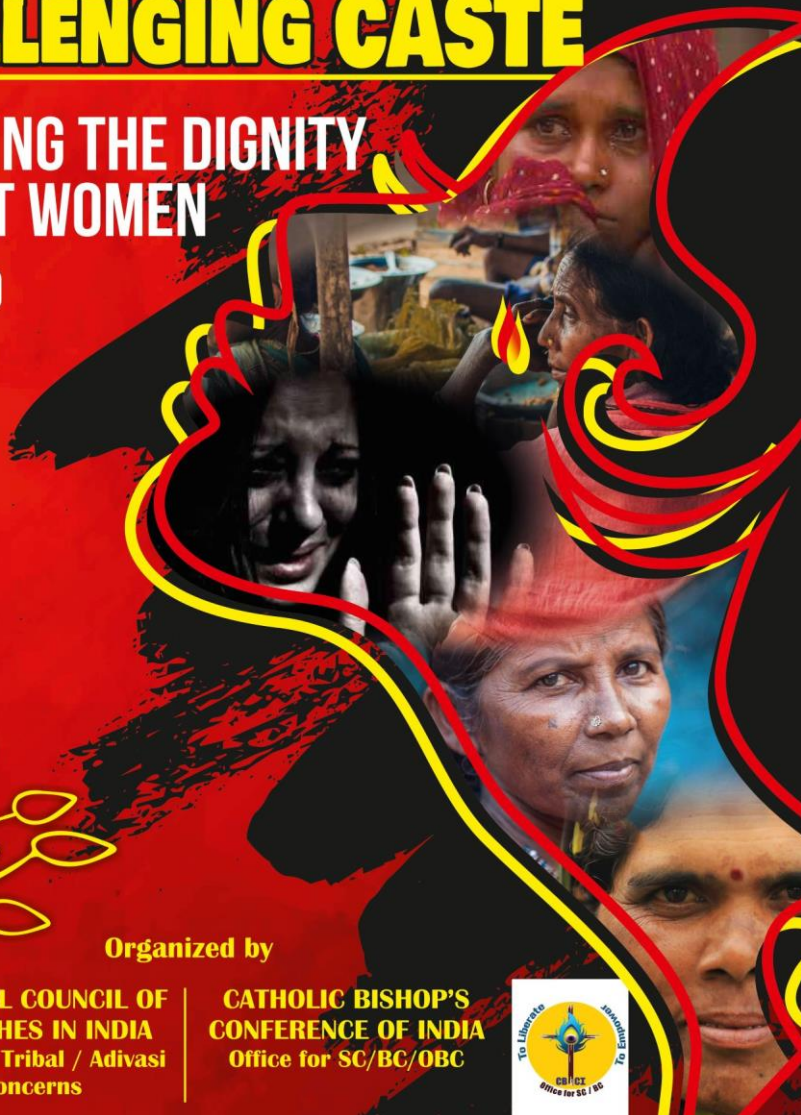


"How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (John 4:9)

DALIT LIBERATION SUNDAY CHALLENGING CASTE

AFFIRMING THE DIGNITY OF DALIT WOMEN

08.11.2020



Organized by



**NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
CHURCHES IN INDIA**
Dalit and Tribal / Adivasi
Concerns

**CATHOLIC BISHOP'S
CONFERENCE OF INDIA**
Office for SC/BC/OBC



FOREWORD

The Churches in India represented by the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) join together in this pandemic year 2020 to challenge caste and affirm the dignity of the dalit women. The observance of the Dalit Liberation Sunday this year on 8th November 2020 will focus on '**Challenging Caste: Affirming the Dignity of Dalit Women**'. Dalit Liberation Sunday is an annual joint observance.

The Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches in India consider that this deep-rooted hegemonic discriminative oppression of people based on work and decent is by far the single largest structured oppressive system in the whole world. Its prevalence, domination and perpetuation in all walks of life have to be continually challenged.

Practice of caste in its many manifestations despite it being rendered illegal is a blot on Indian social life and polity. Unfortunately Social institutions including churches and political parties practice caste either tacitly or sometimes even openly. This they do despite preaching equity both in terms of human existence and in terms of subscribing to a theology that condemns discrimination and untouchability.

Institutions, including churches and Christian and ecumenical organisations, that practice caste owe a public apology to the dalit community for being a part of direct and indirect acts of omission and commission that continue to provide legitimacy and sanctity to the institution and practice of caste that violates human rights.

The NCCI has for decades announced a zero-tolerance to caste discrimination in any form. Its affirmation that "No one can serve Christ and caste - practice of caste is sin and untouchability a crime' is out there for over a decade to hold itself accountable by all. Recently the NCCI announced that people can write to dataconcerns@ncci1914.com if they come across any instance of caste based discrimination within the churches in the fellowship of the NCCI.

Furthermore, women in dalit communities are the most violated in caste conflicts. Unfortunately, in times of abuse within the community they have nowhere to go lest they be abused again. In recent times we have also seen the conduct of state machinery in conniving with casteist forces in perpetuation of caste-privilege and male-privilege against the dalit communities.

The annual observance of the Dalit Liberation Sunday is an occasion and an opportunity to introspect on the presence of this inhuman practice of caste amidst us, weed it out, and renew our commitment to the annihilation of caste. It is our prayer that we as churches in India will be able to do this in our journey of faith, carrying the legacy of an agency of influence, affirming the good news of shared heritage of abundant life for all, and more importantly and significantly on the terms of the weak and vulnerable.

Rev. Asir Ebenezer

General Secretary

National Council of Churches in India

INTRODUCTION

Dalit women suffer both gender and caste-based violence. The caste system declares Dalit women to be intrinsically impure and 'untouchable', which sanctions social exclusion and exploitation. The recent case of brutality against humanity in the form of gang rape and assaulting of 19yrs young Dalit girl in Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh leading to her death is an example. Every time a Dalit woman or a woman from any so-called lower-caste is subjected to sexual violence, it becomes clear that the prevailing structure of caste and the status of women in society are largely responsible for the violation of their human rights. For Dalit women, violence is almost always associated with their caste positions, and also depends on how they behave within the system. Their resistance to or dissent towards the caste structure often triggers the violence. Due to the caste hierarchy, dominant caste men have a perceived right over Dalit women's bodies while gender inequality and subordination norms play an important role in the perpetuation of marital rape and in-caste sexual assault. Dalit women are considered to be available sexually to any dominant caste man. Additionally, the use of forced temple prostitution and trafficking are major concerns for young Dalit girls. Sexual exploitation of Dalit women is a common occurrence due to their low socio-economic status and dominant caste members take advantage of their power and authority over them.

Violence and inhuman treatment, such as sexual assault, rape, and naked parading, serve as a social mechanism to maintain Dalit women's subordinate position in society. They are targeted by dominant castes as a way of humiliating entire Dalit communities. Human rights abuses against Dalit women are mostly committed with impunity. Police personnel often neglect or deny Dalit women of their right to seek legal and judicial aid. In many cases, the judiciary fails to enforce the laws that protect Dalit women from discrimination. It is shameful and unfortunate that even 73 years of independence, the patriarchal structure of society has refused to alter. Violence, sexual harassment, rape are crucial mechanisms to show dalit women, their position in society.

The theme "**Challenging Caste: Affirming the Dignity of Dalit Women** (*John 4:9*) calls the churches/institutions to denounce caste based gender violence as an aberration of the very fabric of society and reflect on Jesus's call to be a community that believes and lives the "Kingdom" values of love, justice, equality, peace, reconciliation and communion. We take this opportunity to invite you to observe Dalit Liberation Sunday on 8th November 2020 in your church/ local parish/ institution. However, if you already have some programs on 8th November, you may think of observing this special day on later Sundays. Herewith we are sending you a special order of worship for the day. You may take the freedom to use the entire worship order and translate it in your vernacular language or adapt parts of it.

Pradip Bansrior
Executive Secretary
Dalit and Tribal/Adivasi Concerns
National Council of Churches in India

“No one can serve Christ and caste!”

An AFFIRMATION OF FAITH from the
National Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits,
Convened by NCCI in partnership with WCC, New Delhi, 22-24 October 2010

The Church is called to denounce and resist the ‘spiritual forces of evil’ (Ephesians 6:12) and repent and realize the kingdom of god (mark 1:15). Today caste divisions, caste discrimination and caste violence have saturated the country and divided the church. In this moment of time we are prompted by the spirit to repent from our complicity with caste mentality and dismantle its mechanisms, to reconcile all the victims of the systems, to restore the fullness of life granted to all the children of god and release the power of inherent dignity that has been gifted to all human beings. Dalits are the worst victims of the caste system.

Caste has fragmented us at all levels. Our tables are divided, our communities are divided, and our cemeteries are divided. Dalits bear the inflictions and injuries of such division. We are ashamed that as Christians we are unable to testify to the oneness of life as members of the body of Christ.

Caste discrimination has corroded our inner being and has borne its bitter outward fruits. It has robbed Dalits of their self-esteem; denied them access to places of worship and sources of water for survival; and curtailed their opportunities for education and employment. We are ashamed that we as Christians have Spawned such weeds of discrimination when we had opportunities to sow seeds of acceptance, integrity and justice.

Caste violence has broken the body and bruised the soul. Dalit children are shunned, stunted and have their childhood shattered. Dalit women are beaten, raped, and murdered. Dalit men are dispossessed, locked up, and lynched. The evil confluence of caste, class and patriarchy has distorted human dignity and destroyed human bodies. We are ashamed that we as Christians have remained silent while our brothers and sisters have been violated and killed.

Yet though Dalits have been crushed they have not been Extinguished, Though they have been brutalized they have not despaired. Dalits resilience and resistance in the face of caste division, discrimination and violence invites the church to join in solidarity to denounce and resist the ‘spiritual forces of evil’ even as we must repent and recommit ourselves to the good news that the kingdom of god is at hand.

As Christian we claim to reflect the mind of Christ but we are vested in the logic of caste. Jesus says “*no one can serve two masters, for as slave will either love the one and hate the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other*” (Matthew 6:24). In a context of division, Caste Discrimination and caste Violence we announce from the rooftop: **“No one can serve Christ and caste!”** We also confess that in our Caste-infested world “we have decided to follow Christ.” Empowered by a deep faith in God, Who binds us into communion, who frees us for justice and who heals us towards wholeness, we join together to live faithfully as disciples of Christ in India today. This involves public confession of our complicity in the sin of casteism, reaffirmation of our faith in a God of justice and a radical commitment to solidarity with those crushed under the weight of the caste system.

Our Confession

“We have become like rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things to this very day.”(1 cor4:13b)

We confess:

- Our complicity in sharing in the mindset of caste and perpetuating the workings of evil caste system
- Our individual indifference and collective silence in the face of caste division, discrimination and violence
- Our willingness to let our theological and material resources be captured by the dominant caste and class communities
- Our unwillingness to allow the abundance of social, cultural, political and economic resources given by God to be utilized for the empowerment of Dalits.

Our Reaffirmation

“The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed...” (Psalm 103:6)

We Reaffirm:

- Faith in the God of justice who works for abundant life for all human beings. This calls us to name casteism as sin, apostasy and rebellion against God. Caste discrimination is unbelief in God and a crime against humans beings.
- Love for God in ‘the word made flesh” who links the wounded body of Jesus to ‘the broken ones. ’This calls us takes sides with the Dalits struggling for freedom and wholeness. Casteism is a rejection of Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. Caste discrimination is the extended wounding of Christ among us as the least and crushed ones.
- The communion of the Holy Spirit that brings healings with reconciliation for Dalits and contrition with reconciliation among Dominant communities. Casteism is a grievance against the Holy Spirit. Caste discrimination manifests signs of enemies of the holy Spirit, Whose greatest gift is love.(1 Cor.13:13)
- The historical working of God, the liberator, accompanier and advocate, who never fails Dalits, at times through the witness of the Church that protects, supports and nurtures the broken ones. This calls us to deepen our solidarity and further our commitment to God’s mission of liberation of Dalits.
- Hope that the reign of God will come on earth as it is in heaven. This calls us to commit to break all walls of separation trusting in the power of spirit to make all things new in the way of Jesus and for the glory of God.

Our Commitment

“You will know them by their fruits, are grapes gathered from thrones of figs from thistles, in the same way every good tree bears good fruit but the bad tree bears bad fruit...thus you will know them by their fruit.” (Matt 7:16, 17)

We Commit:

- To be faithful to Jesus Christ and to realize that being born again means to be born against caste.
- To put our energies and resources to work to end caste division, caste discrimination and caste violence in our churches and society.
- To make our churches courageous and concrete witness to the body of Christ free of caste division, caste discrimination and caste violence.
- To our churches serving as zero tolerance zones for casteism and caste based discrimination and our churches developing policies on social inclusion. That also involves that our institutions become sites that practice preferential option for Dalits in admission, employment and in perspective.
- To designating Lent 2011 as a time of purging caste from our churches. This will be an occasion for developing resources, both theological and liturgical ,for use in Sunday Schools, Youth Groups, Women's and Men's fellowships and pastors and bishops retreats with the specific mandate to root out casteism in our mindset and caste discrimination in our way of life.
- To do all humanly possible with God as our Helper to save Dalits under attack from the regimes of casteism let loose in our nation. As Living members of the body of Christ we will "watch and pray" to prevent Dalit attacks, rapes and murders. Each local congregation and institution will join in God's mission to be defenders of the Dalit right to live in security without fear and be prompters of the Dalit right to live in freedom with justice in our caste violence prone society.

ORDER OF WORSHIP

Theme: Challenging Caste: Affirming the Dignity of Dalit Women (John 4:9)

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Their inhuman atrocities have carved caves
In the rock of my heart,
I must tread this forest with wary steps
Eyes fixed on the changing times
The tables have turned now
Protests spark
Now here
Now there
I have been silent all these days
Listening to the voice of right and wrong
But now I will fan the flames
For human rights *(Taken from 'Caves' by Jyoti Lanjewar, a Dalit Woman Poet)*

Come let us praise God who appoints us over nations to pluck and pull down evil and oppressive structures.
Come let us worship God who empowers us to destroy and overthrow dehumanizing and subjugating systems.
Come let us rejoice in glorifying God who plants and builds a society equal and Just. Amen.
(Jer. 1: 10 modified)

OPENING PRAYER:

God of justice and dignity, who broke the yoke of oppression and slavery in the midnight for Israelites, help us to be mindful of your presence and may Your presence help us to find renewal of life. God of grace, who stood with Ruth and Naomi who roamed with empty bellies, grievous and anxious hearts, strengthen us in our helplessness to work for those who are pushed into margins. God of Love, who engaged the Samaritan woman in your ministry, liberate us from oppressive structures and dominant forces that enslave us. Let the gift of Your life continue to grow in us, drawing us from death to faith, hope, and love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

OPENING SONG : *An appropriate Song/ Hymn/ Bhajan can be sung*

PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

(These prayers are prepared keeping in mind about the Hatras rape tragedy)

Voice 1: "I AM THAT I AM" – The LORD, the God of your ancestors. This is my name forever and this is my title for all generations. I feel sorry for having made humankind on earth, and it grieves my heart, because now the earth is corrupt in my sight, and the earth is filled with violence. I see the wickedness of humankind and it is great upon the earth and every thought in their hearts is only evil.

ALL : Forgive us O Lord, for our selfishness and for all our cruel thoughts. We are weak, sinful, and have been corrupted and led astray by the spirits of life negating forces like patriarchy, casteism and racism. We are ignorant of the consequences of our selfish acts and the agony caused to our fellow beings.

Voice 2: “I hate, I despise your worship and I take no delight in your gatherings. Take away the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your music instruments. But let Love and Justice roll down like pure waters for those who thirst for it, and compassion like an ever-flowing stream.”

ALL : Forgive us O LORD, for we are unmindful whether our actions and behaviour are please unto You or not. We forget that Love and Compassion are a part of every worship, and as true advocates of Your will, to be trustworthy to others.

Voice 3: I am your God, who breathed life into you. I am your Creator, the mother who formed you in the mystical womb; Before you were born, I have consecrated you. I appointed you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

But listen, This is my pain,

I am cruelly killed because of caste and race and you do not care;

I am raped and you keep silent;

I am beaten and paraded naked in public and you enjoy it;

You may ask me, when did we do this to you?

Truly I say to you, if these things are happening to one of the least in my family, it is happening to me.

ALL : Forgive us O LORD, for we remained oblivious to our responsibilities, even while having Your breath in us. We failed to project justice to those whose breaths were snuffed. We ignored our obligation to stand together with those crushed.

ABSOLUTION:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything that is oppressive and hard hearted has passed away. May God our Creator who turns darkness into light, who brings us from ignorance to knowledge and from death to life forgive us and make us a New Creation. Amen. (*II Corinthians 5:17*).

SCRIPTURE READING: *Genesis 1:27; John 4:5-29; Galatians 3:25-29;*

SERMON/ REFLECTION:

The Gospel of John is very special and important as the Gospel clearly highlights the importance of women in the life and Ministry of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman is very significant as it shows how important women were in the Mission of God. It is with the Samaritan Women Jesus affirms that He is the Messiah and from then the Samaritan Woman becomes a pivotal personality carrying the Mission of God. It is with the woman again that Jesus reveals Himself after His Resurrection. It is Mary Magdalene who conveyed the Gospel of the Resurrection to the disciples and thus to the whole creation. In the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan Women, The Samaritan woman asks Jesus, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” By this, the Samaritan woman basically was questioning the attitude of Jews and their identity and mission. But the reply of Jesus to the Samaritan woman’s question is very

remarkable. Being a Jew, Jesus emphasises on the Spirit instead of talking about the (Torah) Law. By this, Jesus breaks all the barriers of Gender, Race and such other boundaries. John 3 and 4 talks about 'Spirit' which shows the importance of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus. The context of John 4:1 is basically about the Jesus' inauguration of gentile mission in the Spirit which was later continued by the Johannine community. Jesus and Judaism looked entirely to God and the future for the conversion of Gentiles.

Because of their resistance to Hellenism and due to their pursuit of righteousness effectively through following the Torah, Jews become more firm and their Identity lead them to legalism, nationalism, and separatism in the history. However, Jews becomes more oppressive and completely nullified the purpose of God by reducing their closeness to a race. The attitude of their racial superiority can be noticed in the Gospel of John. In John 4:9 we read that the "Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans." Another example is where they claimed themselves as the children of Moses and Abraham. Knowing this Jesus harshly called them "children of devil" (John 8). The main motive of Jewish mission and conversion was to retain their identity and to promote the Jewish nationalism. But as a Jew, Jesus had crossed the racial, ethnic and religious boundaries to give life to the Samaritans and the other gentiles. Holy Spirit plays an important role in Jesus' mission and ministry because it is all about the universal salvation and promotion of life. Here Jesus identifies with the Johannine community. This same Holy Spirit was endowed upon the disciples to enable them to continue the ministry of Jesus on earth. As the Church is basically animated by the Holy Spirit so it should be contrasted to the society. So because, the world is animated by those fallen humans and demonic spirit forces which create societal structures and institutions in opposition to the purpose and presence of the living God.

Johannine community was a spirit-led community as "trans-ethnic community" that was a mix up of (Galilean, Samaritan, Gentile) communities who were Jesus' followers. According to Holladay it is an "anti-society," which is a group that exists within a dominant society as a "conscious alternative to it." According to Malina & Rohrbaugh "it was an alienated group that had been pushed/withdrawn to the social margins which stood to protest the values of the superior society". The scope and depth of this alienation is evident in the language of the Gospel itself. The *cosmos* (world/society) is polluted by the feelings of patriarchy, racism and casteism, which are 'life negating forces' that are deeply rooted in the minds and hearts of the people for centuries. The Church is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit and it is both a witness of life to a dying world and a sacred space which professes the 'sacredness of every human life' within the world. Jesus in John's Gospel says to his disciples, "If the dominant society (*kosmos*) hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the society, the society would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the society, but I have chosen you out of the society – therefore the society hates you." (John 15:18-19). So, as the followers of Christ, we should embrace the weak and the vulnerable and we should embody before the world a distinct socio-political alternative as the Body of Christ by becoming the 'counter community.'

The Christian mission and ministry is a life promoting in its nature. The church which is ordained by the Spirit many times failed to do such ministry/mission due to their interest towards the life negating forces like caste and race. As a Christian community, we should be led by the Holy Spirit in order to promote life and light to all. Church becomes a sacred place of cleansing the evil minds in order to affirm the dignity and the sacredness of every human life. May God, the source of life make us channels of life in our endeavours and empower with the power of Holy Spirit to counter the life negating forces. Amen!

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH:

We believe in God, who created human beings in God's own image, who created the world and gave human being the care of the earth.

We believe in Jesus, Child of God, chosen of God, born of the woman, who listened to women and liked and stayed in their homes and was even financed by them. Who not only discussed the Kin-dom with them but also acted boldly to reject the taboos and laws against women and healed women because they were human beings. Who first confirmed His Messiah ship to a woman, who was anointed by a woman, who rose from the dead and appeared first to a woman and gave authority to proclaim it.

And who spoke of a theology that saw God as a woman seeking a lost coin, and who thought of pregnancy and birth with reverence, as a wrenching event, a metaphor for transformation, and for a born-again self. Who spoke of Himself as a mother hen, who would gather her chicks under her wings.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the *Sophia*; We believe in the Church, the Lover/Bride of Christ, the resurrection of hope, and LOVE everlasting. Amen.

INTERCESSORY PRAYERS:

God of creation, in the beginning your breath moved over the waters and brought calmness and peace to a chaotic world. Breathe into my being this day. Refresh my tormented self and bring alive my hope for peace through words and actions inspired by your Spirit. Breathe on me, Breath of God.

God of all, your planet is gasping for breath, heaving under the pressure and weight of rampant consumption of resources and greed-driven destruction of your world. The earth groans from forces of chaos that destroy what we have been given as a gift for all creation. Awaken us to our responsibilities to heal and bring peace to our earthly home. Breathe once again over the waters, skies, land, and all that inhabit them, Breath of God.

God, who continues to breathe, we pray for churches, communities, and individuals who actively resist the dominant powers of oppression and who live as agents of light and liberation, that God's reign may be realized throughout this world. Enable us to be cylinders of hope, to bring comfort and perfection. Breathe on us, Breath of God. **Lord in your mercy.**

Hear our prayers.

CLOSING HYMN: *An appropriate Hymn/ Song can be sung*

CLOSING PRAYER:

O Creator God, who breathed life in our being, help us to rededicate ourselves to administer justice daily. Enable the Church to become a transcending counter-ommunity in reality. Motivate us through your Spirit of resistance towards the oppressive structures and dominant forces that enslave us by the life threatening practices like patriarchy, casteism and racism. Continue to breathe in us, so that we can transform the people of evil mental illness as your Son did. Help us to be your channels of liberation in this world. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER:

Our God in our hearts and minds, hallowed be your name, your kin-dom of LOVE be revealed, your will be done on earth just the way you want it, provide us our daily needs, forgive our sins as we forgive others who sin against us, strengthen us at times of temptation, and deliver us from evil thinking and actions, for yours is the LOVE, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen!

BENEDICTION:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon YOU, because the Lord has anointed YOU to bring good news to the poor.
The Lord has sent YOU to proclaim release to the captives.
YOU are called to help recover the sight to the blind.
YOU are called to let the oppressed go free.
YOU are to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.
The breath of the living God is living within YOU,
bringing life to the ministries to which YOU are called. **Amen.**

ORDER OF WORSHIP PREPARED BY:

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Dalit Liberation Sunday Themes (2007-2020)

- 2007:** Put away Violence and Oppression, Execute Justice and Righteousness (*Ezekiel 45:12*)
- 2008:** Seek Justice, rescue the oppressed (*Isaiah 1:17*)
- 2009:** Crossing boundaries and building bridges: Overcoming prejudices (*Matthew 15:28*)
- 2010:** Will not God bring justice to people who cry out to God day and night? (*Luke 18:7*)
- 2011:** Our God with struggling people (*Exodus 3:7-8*)
- 2012:** Break the barriers; build the world of equality
- 2013:** “Celebrating Faith by Witnessing” (*Deuteronomy 1:13-18*)
- 2014:** “Dalit Culture, Dalit history, Dalit pathos: Regaining the lost identity in Christ”
- 2015:** “Climate, Caste and Care for the Earth”
- 2016:** “Administer Justice Daily! Deliver the Oppressed (*Jeremiah 21:12*)
- 2017:** Religious Freedom of Dalits
- 2018:** As for Me and My household. We will serve the Lord (*Joshua 24:15*)
- 2019:** Resist Caste: If one suffers all suffer together (*1 Corinthians 12:26*)
- 2020:** Challenging Caste: Affirming the Dignity of Dalit Women (*John 4:9*)