



# NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN INDIA

The HOUR has come; let us get going...

December 2023

NEWSLETTER

## My kingdom is not of this world Christmas Message 2023

The Gospel according to Mathew starts with the question about the birth of the King of the Jews, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" (Mathew 2:2). Legend holds that the fourth Magi's search for the Messiah ended when he ultimately reached Golgotha much after the Messiah was crucified – "And sitting down they watched him there; and set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.... (Mathew 27: 36, 37).



*Photo Courtesy: Google*

While being questioned whether he was the king of the Jews, Jesus responds "My kingdom is not of this world..." (John 18: 36). This resonates with what the writer of the fourth gospel records earlier that Jesus' followers are 'in' the world but not 'of' the world (John 17: 13,14, 15).

While Mathew presents Jesus as 'king of the jews' amidst the shining star and Magi, Luke portrays Jesus' birth with the angels and the shepherds as a matter of great Joy to the world. The writer of the Gospel according to Mark, however, starts with Jesus' wilful enrolment into the call of John the Baptist. With no reference to Joseph (except Joseph of Arimathea) and without any reference to Mary as his mother, Mark presents Jesus as saying, " .... whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother" (Mark 3: 31 – 35) indicating working the will of God as the primary purpose of mission in the world. [More](#)



## News from NCCI

### Good Tidings & Christmas Delight at NCCI Nagpur Office

The NCCI and IPC Nagpur staff came together to embrace the delight of Christmas on 20 December 2023, sharing the comfort of Jesus' birth. On this occasion, the Nagpur Deaf Fellowship added a unique touch to the festivities by presenting a Christmas song in sign language, declaring Jesus is born for all, fostering inclusivity and spreading the spirit of togetherness. Notably, the event also welcomed the students from Manipur, standing in solidarity with them during the challenging times away from their homeland and people. This gathering also provided a precious opportunity for reflection, allowing everyone to look back on the year and appreciate God's faithfulness in their lives. With everyone the occasion served as a reminder of the importance of community, compassion, and gratitude. The event encapsulated the true essence of Christmas, emphasising the values of togetherness and shared joy in the face of diversity and adversity.





## News from NCCI

### Soaring High: Fruitful Completion of Ecumenical Internship

The NCCI interns, Ms. Shivarnim Ajay, Ms. Moilen Nyiam, Ms. Alonika Achumi and Ms. Santipriya Tudu completed their ecumenical internship in December 2023. Expressing heartfelt gratitude for the enriching learning experience, they affirm that their time at NCCI has been transformative, providing valuable insights into their respective fields and fostering ministerial growth. They appreciate the guidance, mentorship, and opportunities provided by NCCI during their tenure. They acknowledge the organisation's commitment to creating a conducive learning environment that has equipped them with practical skills and knowledge. NCCI, in turn, wishes the interns the very best in their future endeavours. As they embark on new journeys, the organisation hopes that the skills acquired during their internship will contribute to their success and make a positive impact on their careers. The shared experience between NCCI and the interns serves as a testament to the collaborative and conducive learning environment cultivated at NCCI, affirming the organisation's dedication to nurturing talent and fostering a foundation for future achievements.



### The NUCF Professing and Proclaiming Peace



The **National United Christian Forum (NUCF)**, which comprises CBCI, NCCI and EFI, met on 14 December, 2023 to address pressing issues.

The emphasis was on bringing forth a document for Unity Octave endorsing peace. The discourse delved into the intricate situation in Manipur, particularly the allocation of memorial land for victims' burials. The forum directed attention towards bolstering the health and education systems in the region. A pivotal outcome was the formulation of a collaborative document titled 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct,' aimed at safeguarding the community. The session also broached concerns regarding Christian education in India and the status of Dalit Christians. NUCF's comprehensive deliberations exemplify a commitment to fostering unity, advocating for justice, and enhancing the well-being of Christian communities in the multifaceted socio-religious landscape of India.



## News from NCCI

### Visit to Parliament

The President of NCCI, H.G.Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios paid visit of NCCI Delhi Office. The NCCI Delhi office staff along with the president and the General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Asir Ebenezer visited the parliament to share christmas greetings with distinguished leaders. It was an opportunity to share the joy of Christmas and contribute to the promotion of communal harmony.



**H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios**  
NCCI President's visit to NCCI Delhi Office



Leaders from different faith traditions  
at the Ministry of Minority Affairs  
Christmas Celebration



**Shri Satish Upadhyay**  
Vice Chairman  
New Delhi Municipal Council



**Shri John Barla**  
Hon'ble Minister of State  
Minority Affairs of India



**Shri Ram Kripal Yadav**  
Member of the Parliament in Lok Sabha



**Shri Anto Antony**  
Member of the Indian Parliament  
for Pathanamthitta



## News from NCCI

### Worshipping in Sign Language : Raising Praises to God

The **Nagpur Deaf Fellowship's** unique approach to worship, conducted entirely in sign language, extends a warm embrace to the deaf community. Unlike traditional church services, this inclusive environment resonated with the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), fostering a sense of belonging. Typically, persons with disabilities might feel marginalised in conventional worship settings, but here, they found acceptance. The Nagpur Deaf Fellowship's commitment to accessibility not only breaks down barriers but also serves as a powerful example of fostering inclusivity, ensuring that everyone, regardless of abilities, can participate in the spiritual journey with a sense of community and understanding.

NCCI's participation extended beyond the bounds of traditional inclusion efforts, as they took significant steps to immerse themselves in the world of the deaf community. The initiative is a testament to NCCI's commitment to making PWDs feel more integrated into society. Our engagement with the Nagpur Deaf Fellowship is a step towards fostering genuine inclusivity. By understanding their world, we aim to break down barriers and create a society where everyone, irrespective of abilities, can thrive together.



### Entrepreneurs' forum

In the spirit of innovation and collaboration, the **Ecumenical Entrepreneurs Forum** gathered on December 18th, 2023, at the NCCI campus in Nagpur. This lively second meeting welcomed five new members, adding vibrancy to our entrepreneurial community. The session was illuminated by an insightful talk from Sony Thomas, a distinguished speaker and life coach, who passionately explored the theme of 'Celebrating Entrepreneurship', as a Entrepreneur and founder of the Celebrating Life Portal, shared practical insights from his journey. The forum hummed with excitement for the upcoming National Ecumenical Entrepreneurs Meeting. Held in high spirits, the forum is poised to connect, collaborate, and contribute to the broader entrepreneurial landscape.

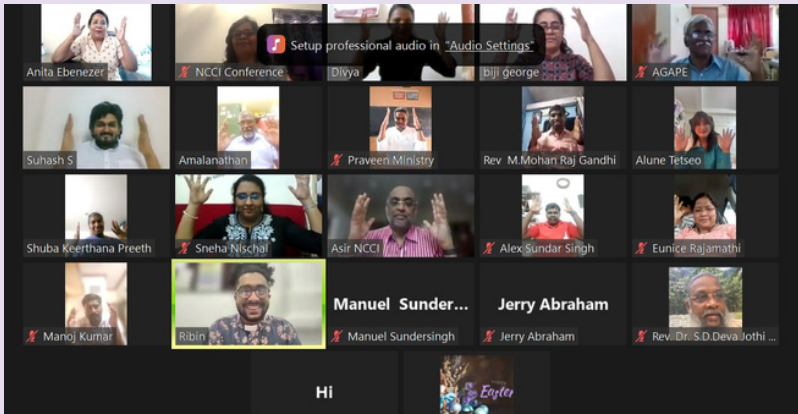




## News from NCCI

### Breaking Down Barriers: One Sign at a Time

The NCCI-IDEA Online Indian Sign Language Course commenced its transformative journey on September 23, 2023, celebrating International Sign Language Day with 20 enthusiastic participants from diverse regions across India. Under the dynamic guidance of ISL Trainer Ms. Madhurya Y, with seven years of expertise, the course unfolded as a beacon of hope and communication. The online valedictory celebration on December 17, 2023, not only marked the successful completion of the three-month program but also featured an engaging interaction session, where the graduates had the opportunity to connect with Pastor Praveen, a person with hearing impairment.



The event was further enriched by a poignant valedictory address by Rev. Asir Ebenezer, General secretary of NCCI, fostering meaningful connections and emphasising the course's impact in breaking down barriers. With newfound Indian Sign Language proficiency, the 16 graduates are now poised to contribute to a more inclusive and communicative society, embodying the spirit of forging deeper connections and breaking barriers.

### Transforming Trauma into Triumph: Consultation Charts Positive Courses for Disabilities in Emergencies

In a pioneering three-day consultation (19-21 December 2023), jointly organized by India Peace Center Nagpur, WCC – EDAN((Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network), and NCCI IDEA, on "Disability, Conflict, and the Response of Faith Communities in India." The spotlight was cast on the plight of persons with disabilities during recent disasters in India. Stories of exclusion, neglect, and tragedy were shared, underscoring the alarming trend where persons with disabilities are often left behind in emergency responses. The consultation, a first in global ecumenical/Christian circles, brought together diverse stakeholders, including church representatives, relief agencies, theological students, and members of the Deaf Church Nagpur, with an unprecedented fifty percent participation of people with disabilities. Panel sessions and hybrid presentations delved into the challenges faced by this marginalised group during conflicts, earthquakes, floods, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The workshop yielded draft guidelines aimed at enhancing the preparedness and recovery efforts of churches, institutions, and relief agencies to cater specifically to the needs of persons with diverse disabilities during emergencies and conflicts. The event concluded with a closing prayer in sign language, symbolizing a collective commitment to addressing these challenges and fostering inclusivity. The refined guidelines will soon be circulated through NCCI-IDEA, marking a significant stride in acknowledging and responding to the often-overlooked needs of persons with disabilities in times of crisis.





## News from Member Churches

### Christmas with Transgender People in CSI St. John's Church

In a poignant display of compassion and unity, the Men's Fellowship at **CSI St. John's Church** in Pondicherry orchestrated a transformative Christmas gathering for the transgender community, bringing together 110 members for a resplendent celebration. On 16 December 2023, this festive event radiated the spirit of inclusivity and joy, underscoring the harmonious convergence of diverse gender backgrounds to commemorate the Birth of Christ. The joyous celebration radiated inclusivity and unity, symbolising the true spirit of Christmas.



The gathering stood as a powerful testament to the community's commitment to embracing and respecting transgender individuals, fostering a profound sense of belonging during the festive season. More than just a celebration, this event marked a milestone in acceptance, illustrating the extraordinary power of love inherent in the narrative of Jesus' birth. In its essence, the occasion exemplified the true meaning of Christmas, transcending barriers and illuminating the path towards a more compassionate and inclusive society.

### Extending Prayers and Solidarity through Essential Flood Relief Goods

**CSI Erode Salem Diocese**, on 21 December 2023, undertook a commendable initiative by distributing flood relief materials to the southern districts of Tamil Nadu, showcasing an exemplary commitment to humanitarian aid. In the face of natural calamities, the organisation demonstrated solidarity and compassion, providing much-needed assistance to the affected communities.



The timely and efficient distribution of relief materials reflects the dedication of **CSI Erode Salem Diocese** to alleviating the suffering caused by the devastating floods.

This philanthropic endeavour not only addresses the immediate needs of the affected populace but also symbolises the essence of community support and resilience. By extending a helping hand to those in distress, **CSI Erode Salem Diocese** has not only exemplified the principles of empathy and social responsibility but has also fostered a sense of hope and unity among the affected populations. The impactful work carried out by the organisation in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu serves as an inspiring model for others to follow in times of crisis.



## News from All India Christian Organisations

### Hope and Festive Delights : Sharing Blessings with the Vulnerable People

Embracing the true essence of generosity, the **Believers Eastern Church's Ranchi Diocese Women's Fellowship** embarked on a heartwarming mission to spread love and warmth this winter season. With unwavering dedication, they orchestrated a benevolent act by distributing not just warmth but also a sense of festive delight. The team extended their caring hands to the most vulnerable members of the community – the needy widows and elderly individuals enduring the harsh winter cold alone. Each blanket wrapped recipients in a cocoon of care, while the festive cakes added a touch of sweetness to their lives.



The team's dedication to bringing smiles to the faces of those in need exemplifies the power of community-driven initiatives and the transformative impact of selfless acts during the festive season. In the midst of winter's chill, the Ranchi Diocese Women's Fellowship created a ripple of warmth that resonated with the true spirit of giving.

### Called to Minister the faithful : Legacy of the Faith

In a solemn ceremony held at the **St. Thomas Believers Eastern Church Cathedral**, a profound spectacle unfolded as the priests were ceremoniously adorned with the sacred 'Phiro,' symbolising an unwavering commitment to the Church's rich Orthodox heritage. This deeply symbolic gesture, meticulously crafted to echo the revered practices of the Church's ancestors in both lifestyle and attire, represents a monumental stride towards preserving and upholding the legacy of the faith.

Guiding the faithful through this sacred ritual Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan I Metropolitan blessed and presented the distinctive headgear to the priests as a sacred emblem of their commitment. H.G. Dr. Samuel Mor Theophilus Episcopa and H.G. Mathews Mor Silvanus Episcopa were the co-celebrants of the ceremony. In his impassioned address, the Metropolitan underscored the pivotal role of priests as paragons of virtue, urging them to embody the lofty ideals intrinsic to their sacred calling. This momentous event not only introduced the Phiro but also served as a poignant reminder of the sacred responsibilities bestowed upon the clergy within the hallowed confines of the Church.







## News from Autonomous Bodies

### Representation of Faith Communities at COP28 to discuss Climate Emergency

The Conference of Parties – COP28 will come to a close on 12th December 2023. UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Simon Stiell calls for an urgent and unbiased implementation of climate commitment to protect people and planet in connection to “phasing out of fossil fuel”.

Mr. Angelious Michael, Director of **India Peace Centre** attending COP28 in Dubai as part of the ACT Alliance delegation representing faith communities highlights the importance of the voices from faith communities at this crucial time of climate emergency. He emphasized the fact that faith communities have been making significant contributions in climate related events including of the United Nations. The UNFCCC for the first time made a space available for the Faith Pavilion within the COP28 framework. This amplifies the UN’s recognition of the contributions of faith groups and interfaith network towards climate discussions and climate solutions.



Women, youth and children have been more visible at the faith side events at COP28. The need for interfaith collaborations in response to climate change is being realized more than ever before as that provides adequate strength for achieving ambitious goals together.



ACT Alliance has been instrumental in creating space for faith perspectives to come into play for climate negotiations and climate justice and to help prioritize cross cutting issues such as Migration and Human Mobility, gender, Indigenous people, Water, land, food & agriculture to the high-level discussions.

While Loss and Damage funds was a crucial outcome at COP28 in the opening plenary, there are lot to achieve and implement including Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), Mitigation, commitment for non-economic loss under loss and damage funds.

Countries must prioritise climate agenda and work collectively. We must not forget the Paris agreement of staying within 1.5 bracket and the timeframe of achieving Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.



## News from Other Ecumenical Partners

### Declaration of LWF's Commitment for Human Rights

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has expressed its enduring commitment to the human rights agenda, dating back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The LWF's Action for Justice team and representatives of the Lutheran Office for World Community in New York outlined their diverse support for member churches and country programs. Isaiah Toroitich, LWF's Head of Global Advocacy, emphasised that human rights are intrinsic to their faith, manifested through priorities like gender justice, peace, climate crisis mitigation, and assistance for displaced and disabled individuals.

In commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Rev. Dr. Anne Burghardt, LWF General Secretary, reiterated the global community's commitment to advancing human dignity and protecting the rights of marginalised individuals and communities. She acknowledged the role of Rev. Dr. Frederick Nolde, a key figure in the Christian human rights movement and one of the authors of the Declaration. Burghardt highlighted the courageous actions of human rights defenders within LWF member churches and across ecumenical and interfaith partnerships, acknowledging their unwavering pursuit of justice despite significant challenges. The Universal Declaration, born out of the atrocities of World War II, serves as a crucial international legal instrument reminding governments of their obligation to safeguard the rights of all citizens.

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### CWM Youth Delegations Denounces Inequality and Racism

In a transformative workshop organised by the CWM Discipleship, Spiritualities, and Dialogue program from December 8-11 in London, 18 young individuals from Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, and South Asia gathered. Departing from conventional training models, the workshop fostered an inclusive space, overturning the usual dynamic of knowledge transfer. Participants, liberated to express themselves, collaborated on challenging racial supremacy and promoting equality in their communities.



The agenda encompassed an insightful exploration of the intersection between the church and racism, addressing the historical roots of racism in colonisation and slavery. The young participants scrutinised prevailing perceptions of racism, even within theological spaces, and engaged in exposure visits to East London sites tied to colonisation and slavery.

Sharing personal encounters with day-to-day racism, the group delved into discussions on structural racism within the church, critiquing worship practices and biblical interpretations contributing to racial biases. The ensuing vibrant dialogue concluded with a prayer crafted collectively by the participants.



## News from CSA

### Lok Kalyan Yojana's Intervention for HIV/AIDS Awareness

**Lok Kalyan Yojna** organised a compelling awareness initiative on 1 December 2023 marking World HIV Day, exemplifying a commitment to eradicating stigma and fostering education on preventing HIV infections. The President of the Positive Women's Network, Ms. Varsha Gaikwad, unfolded an uplifting opening remark, showcasing not only her resilient spirit as a positive woman but also her unwavering commitment to the cause. In a symphony of activities, the program aimed to foster openness about HIV, dispel misconceptions, and cultivate supportive communities for those living with AIDS. Strategic steps for this require involvement of trained professionals—ranging from individuals living with HIV/AIDS to clinical psychologists, social workers, and medical practitioners—in running these support groups.

The workshop exemplified its noble purpose: transferring knowledge regarding the care of HIV-infected women and children. With a multifaceted approach, the program not only provided vital information to students but also offered leadership opportunities to organisations, impacting attitudes and enhancing the community's psychological understanding. The event facilitated networking and collaboration, involving 50+ participants who were enriched with invaluable insights on HIV, through instrumental efforts of Mr Sanjay Wankhede. Noteworthy attendees, including Mr. Pradeep Kumar Khobragade, the financial management chief of the Ministry of Finance, underscored the societal importance of such initiatives, emphasising their role in capacity building and fostering partnerships among various NGOs for a collective impact on the well-being of the community.



### VCLC Empowering the Masses with Insights on Human Rights

The Human Rights Workshop held at **CNI St. Andrew's Church** in Chandrapur on December 10, 2023, transcended mere discourse, becoming a compelling catalyst for societal transformation amidst divisive communal and political narratives. The event, strategically organised to address ground realities, revealed its profound impact on attendees, opening their eyes to the pressing need for social development and justice. At the forefront was the President of the Human Rights Minorities Cell, whose brilliance, bravery, and bold articulation became the rallying point for the collective conscience. Mr Rajesh Jadhav underscored the pivotal role of Panchayat Raj in shaping a socially just landscape. The workshop became a nexus of minds, drawing VCLC Coordinators who added invaluable perspectives. The excursion to the Dindora water reservoir project unmasked the plight of displaced villages, etching a heart-wrenching narrative that galvanised our commitment to social development and justice. In this crucible of consciousness, the seeds of change were sown, sprouting hope for a more equitable future.





### Upcoming Events

**NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN INDIA**  
**T.I.R.T.H**  
 Traveling into Religion Through History  
**Ecumenism Pilgrimage**  
 DELHI TOUR  
 FOR DETAILS CONTACT  
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IT IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN ABOUT AND FROM EACH OTHER, WHERE PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT FAITHS AND BELIEFS WALK TOGETHER, VISITING PLACES OF WORSHIP ALONG THE WAY.

**NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN INDIA**  
**Youth Concerns**  
 National Ecumenical Youth Assembly  
**NEVA 2024**  
 2<sup>nd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> May 2024, Bangalore  
 1 Thess 5:11  
**Build ONE another UP**

### Our Campaigns

**National Council of Churches in India**  
 Indian Disability Ecumenical Accompaniment  
**ACCESS TOGETHER CAMPAIGN**  
 Mark Your Location to Make a Change

Step 1: Download Google Maps, sign into your google account, locate nearby places to review

Step 2: Upload Details, Add Photos of Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities, Add Photos of Barriers for sensitizing Change and submit your contribution

Step 3: Share your contribution in social media platforms with #Access\_Together\_Campaign and encourage others to participate

Step 4: Take a Screenshot of Your Google Review and share it with us through the QR Code below

**Award Ceremony will be held on Dec 3 (Sunday) along with other participants during the Mega Event on International Day of Persons with Disabilities.**

**Voice out, Voice loud. Say No To Gender Based Violence.**  
**#StopViolenceAgainstWomen #THURSDAYSINBLACK**  
 Need Help? Feel Free to call - 8455059522  
 mail us your concern - jyoti@ncci1914.com; ncci@ncci1914.com  
 \*It is a global movement of people who commit to wear black on Thursdays

**YOUTH HEALTH MATTERS**  
**Stop the abuse.**  
 It doesn't just affect your life. It affects every one.  
**NO DRUGS**

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