



Church of Bangladesh

# NEWSLETTER

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## Church of Bangladesh advocating for fair trade and rights of the **garments worker**

Recent days readymade garment manufacturing in Bangladesh has come under big question whether it is slavery for workers. The Rana Plaza collapse that has claimed a death toll of more than 1000 people has revealed a tragic reality of severe exploitation of this industry. The workers work under minimal wage and in an extreme life threatening condition. In one estimate it is found that from a value of a T shirt 60% is usurped by international buyers and retailers, and out of remaining 40%, 35% goes for material and establishment cost, and only 1% is spent on labour wage. On an average a worker earns around US\$ 38 per month which is below the poverty level of income and it does not agree with the minimum wage rate specified by the country's labour laws.

Readymade garment industry is a major source of Bangladesh's economy. But for constant irregularities and exploitation of workers the export is now under pressure of suspension from importing countries. The US recently has suspended the Generalised System of Preference (GSP) for Bangladesh particularly for neglecting the rights of the workers that has largely been surfaced by the Rana Plaza incident.

The Church of Bangladesh (COB) took the Rana plaza disaster very seriously and responded immediately to assist the victims with emergency needs and put an appeal through Anglican Alliance for rehabilitating the poor victims aiming at supporting in treatment and rehabilitating with alternative livelihoods those who can hardly get back to work again due to major injuries such as losing limbs. The appeal has been responded quite widely by different Churches.

The Moderator Bishop Paul S Sarker of COB has taken a further plan to aware the people involved in garment industries about the harmful working environment and unjust distribution of benefit which in turn may relegate Bangladesh from export markets.

Being part of that an advocacy campaign for fair industry and trade was launched on 5 September 2013 with the initiative of Church of Bangladesh Group in UK.



*Jamila Begum (55), Mother of Shyla Akter (25), operator, worked in Rana Plaza and now missing.*

## From the Moderator



The time we go through is mixed with sorrow and joy. April was solemnized month to Christian for the events of Good Friday and Resurrection of Christ – the basis on which we exist. And further it was the month of Bangla New Year, a most joyful day in the Bengali culture.

But, there were violent strikes and political troubles from January regarding the trial of liberation war and next election related matters.

All that joy and troubles had been overridden by the sudden incident of collapsing the multi-story building Rana Plaza that eventually claimed a death toll of more than 1,000 people mostly were poor garment workers and majority of them were women. The incident astonished the whole world with exposed misery of the garments worker. To comment on the issue, Pope marketed it as slavery of labor and dishonoring the most decent creation of God - the human beings. It is found nothing but negligence, exploitation and corruption were the causes of the death of some precise lives. We pray for the peace of the souls those who have left us, and deeply mourn for the bereaved families. We specially pray for the victims those who have severely injured so that they can come back in normal lives and livelihoods.

Church of Bangladesh has taken the issue very seriously within its capacity and has taken a plan of campaigning in association of partners at home and abroad to defend the rights of the poor labourers and safeguard the economy of our country which largely depends on the garments manufacturing sector. It is our responsibility to respond to Biblical call to, "let justice roll on like a river," (Amos 5:24), and that has urged us to advocate for positive changes in the livelihoods of workers living in poverty.

This year in our four Deanery Councils I talked on the same issue in the light of above theme of Amos 5:24. I had a nice discussion on the issue with our Church Partners in UK in last June and being part of that an advocacy campaign for fair industry and trade was launched on 5 September 2013 with the initiative of Church of Bangladesh Group in UK.

The big Muslim festival Eid-ul-Fitre was celebrated after the Ramadan with joy and spirit. However, journey to home for celebrating it with relatives and family members was not joyful at all. The strike and some other events have undermined the joy of the festival.

The nation is heading to the national election that will take place early next year. There is a political debate and anxiety that under which government the election will take place - Care Taker Government or the Ruling Party Government?

Please pray for us and for our nation. May God bless us to build a society with justice and peace!

+ *Paul Sarker*

**Rt Revd Paul Shishir Sarker**  
Moderator, Church of Bangladesh



## Education Consultation has held

A two-day long consultation of Church of Bangladesh took place from 31 May – 1 June 2013 at Savar Conference Center of COB. The Theme of the consultation was “Education for enriching the life”, and Principal Rina Das, Martin Luther College, Dhaka spoke on the Theme. A total of 20 teachers from major schools of COB attended the consultation. Moderator of COB, Bishop Paul S Sarker and the Synod Education Coordinator Mrs. Janet Sarker were present the total period of the consultation.

At the beginning of the consultation conveyor of the Synod Education Board Mr Augustine Dipak Karmakar explained the objectives and goals of the consultation. He said, for the last 200 years Church of Bangladesh has been running education programme. Where there was a parish, one education institute should be there – it was the goal of the church with the view to provide education to the people, particularly the deprived lived in backward villages of a parish. He mentioned, until recently the maximum schools were being financed by foreign countries, but that has largely been reduced presently as they now like to provide assistance directly to government

and they think Church running schools should get support from that source. But reality is, the missionary schools are not getting any support from government. He emphasized that with academic education if we like to build a society with free from corruption and inequality, we then have to develop the religious values, morality character of the students through Church run schools.

He later highlighted the objectives of the consultation mentioning – how the quality of the education can be enhanced and make the schools self-sustained, a long-term planning for that is to be developed through this consultation.

### **The discussion on theme “Education for enriching the life” highlighted the points that:**

- *The quality of education of COB Schools is much better. But for conducting a holistic programme, long-term planning and strategy should be drawn.*
- *The salary scale of the teachers should be in line with the government schools.*
- *Young people should be included in teaching for building god teachers for the future*



Discussing on the “roles of the teachers to develop the quality of education” Mrs. Maria Aloka Ghose, Head Teacher of Mission High School, Rajshahi emphasized the following points:

- The curriculum of education should be contemporary
- The education system should be reorganized adding the information technologies
- Commitment should be ensured of skilled teachers
- Skilled and dedicated managing committee should be in place
- The facilities of government should be tapped
- A well management system, infrastructure and environment are to be ensured for the schools
- Education should be provided based on well-organized early education plan

Discussing on “the roles of teachers to build the Christian values and morality” Moderator Bishop Paul S Sarker mentioned that social degradation is getting widespread due to the lack of moral education. He added, in many cases following the inclusion of schools with government the quality of moral education has dropped. He emphasized if moral education has no place in mainstream education that education, cannot contribute to build a fair society.

On the issues of enhancing the quality of the education along with sustainability of the schools, Mrs. Janet Sarker Mentioned for that, skilled teachers, cordial relationship between student- teacher – guardian, moral education, separate care for weak students, and effective managing committee are required. She discussed in detail about the sustainability of schools and recommended some ways towards that. These are:

- Increasing the fees of the student
- Introducing admission fee following the government instruction
- Raising school development fund
- Supporting village schools by self-sustained school
- Efficient financial management
- Effective planning and directives

Discussing on the “skill and quality”, Mr. Subrato Edward Gomes, Principal of Methodist English Medium School mentioned that skill, commitment and values are the priority factors for a quality teacher. He added a process should be built-in within the school management system to nourish that continuously.

The consultation ended with group discussion for developing a three-year plan of action for enhancing quality and sustainability of the education programme of Church of Bangladesh. The outcomes of the discussion are as follows:

### *Recommendations for development of quality of education*

- Ensuring quality and contemporary education
- Ensuring skilled teachers
- Improving relationship between student-teacher- guardian
- Improving infrastructure and school environment
- Modernization of classroom and adding IT facilities
- Emphasizing on moral education
- Introducing special care for weak students
- Ensuring effective management committee

### *Recommendations for achieving sustainability*

- Increasing the fees of the student
- Introducing admission fee following the government instruction
- Raising school development fund
- Supporting village schools by self-sustained school
- Efficient and transparent financial management
- Efficient uses of school resources
- Effective planning and directives



## International Women's Day 2013 observed by Church of Bangladesh

The Church of Bangladesh (COB) observed IWD 2013 through an elaborate programme. The programme included the Bible studies, prayers, meditations, discussions, rally, sharing messages of the IWD with community people and door to door message dissemination.

The Ministry of Women Fellowship of COB this year arranged a very organized programme and that was undertaken at all parishes. They focused on the theme of the Year "The Gender Agenda: Gaining Momentum" and call the congregation quoting from St. Paul to Galatians "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28) stressed on securing the rights, equality and empowering of the women to achieve gender equality through the cooperation of men and women together and prayed to God for having the strength and wisdom to act on that.

The Ministry of Social Development of COB, CBSDP took a separate programme to observe the day at all Upazila where it works. The activities included seminar, rally, group based discussion and disseminating messages to individual households. The overall focus of its programme was on understanding the gender equality status in the society, situation

of domestic violence, women rights and searching the ways for women empowerments. In the seminar many different issues on women empowerment were discussed, particularly women's secured mobility to different places of service was a strong topic in discussion. Many different views shared by the women taking from their real experiences and sufferings.

## Church of Bangladesh, Dhaka Diocese, Youth Leadership Training 2013

Youth Leadership Training of Dhaka D Youth Leadership Training of Dhaka Diocese, Church of Bangladesh was held on June 12-16, 2013 at Retreat and Conference Centre, Savar, Dhaka. There were 42 youth leaders from 4 deaneries & Chittagong City Pastorate of Dhaka Diocese to attend the training. The main theme was "For

even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45). Rev. Shourabh Pholia, Principal of St. Andrew's Theological College spoke on the theme. He mentioned, Jesus himself showed leadership being servant by doing all works in his ministry. He added, Christian leaders should have power of the Scripture, passion for the soul, sacrifice, and love for the people as leaders. The key issues focused in this training were - Christian Leadership, The Goal setting in the Youth Ministry, How to build an effective youth group in the local and urban area, What is Church of CoB, Youth Leadership and Management in the local and urban Churches, Eve teasing and violence against young girls, Church and Youth. How to lead an effective youth group and Bible study in the Church, Ecumenism and Interfaith in youth leadership, "Back to the Bible", Praise and Worship.

It was very practical and effective training to lead the local and urban youth ministries to think locally and work with strategies and tools being in team.

The training was facilitated by Mrs. Juliet Keya Malakar, Philip Mondol, Mr. Timothy Bhakta, Dr. Peter T. Halder, Rev. David A Das, Mr. Kallal Chowdhury, Mr. Sukhen Biswas, Mr. Lipton Gain, Mr. Prantic Esua Baidya, Rev. Sosi Baroi & Mr. Avoy Das.

The whole event was coordinated by Mr. Philip Mondol, Secretary, Youth Fellowship, Church of Bangladesh.





## Gift of Love boxes distribution

The Diocesan Bishop attended the Gift of Love boxes distribution ceremony on 21 June, 2013 at Christ Church Karpasdanga, Chuadanga, where 500 gift boxes were distributed by the UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer) of Damurhuda Thana of the Government of the People's



Republic of Bangladesh.

These gift boxes were given by Generation of Bangladesh from the children and friends of the USA. We thank the Generation Bangladesh and children from the USA for their kind cooperation and gifts of Love for the vulnerable children of Bangladesh.

## Major committees sat to prepare annual programme

In the Diocese of Kushtia there are 8 major committees. During May 3-4, 2013 the committee conveners and the members sat at Kushtia Mission Junior High School's library room for preparing the yearly programme for Bible School & Brigade, Youth Fellowship, Women Fellowship, Elderly People's caring, Mission and Evangelism, Stewardship and Self-reliant, Education, and Property Management.

## Special counselling

In June, 2013 Diocesan Bishop sat for the special meeting and counselling with the clergy, catechist, youth and women staff workers of the Rajshahi Deanery. Where the Bishop discussed the pastoral care, The Bible School, youth fellowship, women fellowship, elderly people's programme, self-reliant programme and the progress of mission and evangelism and Church plantation programmes.

## Seminar for SSC Candidates, 2013



Seminars arranged for SSC candidates, 2013 of Jobarpar and Haluaghat deaneries at Gopalganj and Edilpur during 26-29 April and 17-20 April 2013 respectively. The theme of the seminars was : 'Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another'-Mark 9:10.

Revd Shoshi Baroi for Jobarpar Deanery and Revd Probhudan Hira for Haluaghat deanery spoke on the theme. Both of them urged the students to build them becoming difference so that they could be blessing for others. Other topics including living with Christianity, importance of technical education, setting goal of the life, climate change, addiction and its impact, love, marriage and sexual life were discussed in the seminars. Apart from that the attendee visited villages and took part in cultural programmes.

The programmes ended with awarding the participants and evaluating the events.





## Bishop Paul Observed Easter with Garo Community at Idilpur Parish

This year, 2013, Bishop Paul S Sarker observed the Easter with ethnic minority community. He administered the Holy Communion service of Easter and preached at St Thomas's Church, Idilpur in Haluaghat Deanery. In his sermon he highlighted the essence of resurrection which is the basis of our faith in Christianity.

After service bishop met the community people and later spent some time with the children of Usha Children Village. He also attended the service of the Good Friday in the same parish and delivered lecture on the seventh words of Jesus from the cross.

During his stay in Idilpur, Bishop visited some parishes around there and prayed with a few families. He was accompanied by Parish priest Revd Vanu Chishim and Mr. Jewel Sarker, Manager of the Usha Children Village.

The community, who are solely the ethnic Garo people, became extremely happy to get Bishop with them during the holy occasion.

## Post-Easter Worship



A post-Easter worship was held at Synod office for the central synod staff of Church of Bangladesh. The worship was administered by Moderator and Bishop of Dhaka Diocese, Rt Revd Paul S Sarker.

In his address he discussed the core essence of the resurrection through analyzing the events that took place after rising of Jesus from death.

He told, Jesus met His disciples, blew upon them and infuse the Holy Spirit, and by that he empowered them with the ability to forgive sin as he was entrusted by His father. He mentioned, it was a victory and a command as well to preach love to humankind.

He further elaborated that in maximum religions the issue of resuscitation has been mentioned, but in different forms. In Christianity, resurrection is the basis of our faith in God. Muslim believes that they are sent by Allah and will be back to Him. The Hindu believes in rebirth or reincarnation, and Buddhist believe in Nirvana – enter into death and passing into another kind of existence of peace, and it is possible through conquering of lusts.

He concluded with inviting all to receive the kindness of God and the opportunity to transform us with the spirit of love and to take the role of an agent of Christ to transform other.

## Teacher training

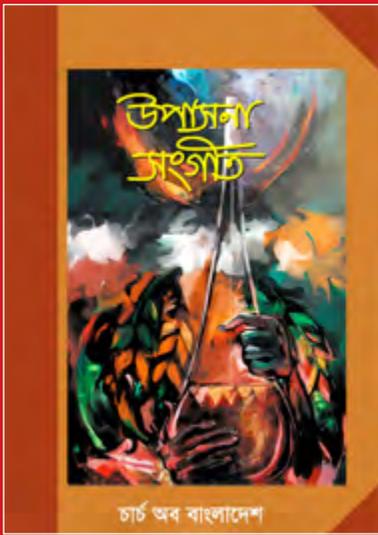


A teacher training took place on 12 July 2013 at Rupantor Training Centre at Kushtia Diocese campus for the primary school teachers (class III to V) from different schools of Kushtia Diocese. A total of 32 teachers attended the training programme. The welcome session was conducted in English being part of a process to promote the skill and develop the interest in communicating and conducting session in English.

Mrs. Monita Mankhin, Headmistress of Kushtia Mission Junior High School led the whole training session along with other teachers. Bishop Samuel Sunil Mankhin of Kushtia Diocese inaugurated the event. The training course particularly focused on the lesson preparation of Mathematics, English, Bangla and science.

## Tree plantation

The Diocesan Bishop encouraged and joined the tree plantation programme at Belghoria, Natore. A good number of Mahogany lychees and mango plants were planted by the parish members on the premises of Belghoria church.



## Hymn Book's 6th Edition Launched

On 8th July, 2013 the Church of Bangladesh's Hymn Book's 6th Edition has been launched by the Moderator of Church of Bangladesh and the Deputy Moderator of Church of Bangladesh during the Clergy Retreat which held at Khulna. All the Clergy of Church of Bangladesh and their wives were present at the ceremony.

In this new Edition 35 new Hymns have been added and by that now the book contains a total of 665 Hymns (602 Hymns in Bangla, 13 in English, 29 in Achik (Garo), and 20 Hymns in Santali language and one National Anthem).



In a speech Bishop Paul Sarker said that Hymns are important part of our worship and devotion. Hymns work to praise and connect us with God. He stressed on proper singing of hymns as otherwise it does not integrate us with its purpose.

## Farewell and welcome .....

### Farewell to

Farewells were given to Secretary of Synod Women Fellowship, Mrs. Basanti Sangma and Mr Stephen Baroi, Synod Administrator, Church of Bangladesh on 30th April and 30th June, 2013 respectively . On those occasions Moderator of COB Bishop Paul S Sarker along with others took part in the discussion on their contributions to concerned sectors. Synod Women Convenor,



Mrs Janet Sarker highlighted Mrs Sangma's activities in fellowship and appreciated her sincere and significant contribution to women progress. She wished that, her contribution will be continued to encourage and enrich our women of COB, no matter where she stays. In her reply, Mrs Sangma expressed her gratitude for having the opportunity to serve the Church and gave thanks to everyone for providing cooperation to her in the work. She assured that if needed she will extend all possible assistances to the women fellowship.

Mrs Sangma worked with Women Fellowship as Secretary for the last two years.

Mr Stephen Baroi who had been working as Synod Administrator at COB Synod Office from April 12, 2010 and left the position on June 30 2013. In the discussion of the farewell ceremony, the participants appreciated his contribution that he performed very professionally. The discussion desired for a similar person in Synod Office to look after



the day to day administration. In return, Mr Baroi thanked all for the cooperation he got during his service and expressed the hope to assist the church no matter where he stays.

At the end of the farewell, some gifts were given to them as a token of love on behalf of the Synod. The farewell ceremonies were chaired by the Moderator of COB Bishop Paul S Sarker.

### New Staff in Synod Office



Rev Shourabh Pholia recently has joined the Synod Office of COB. His designation will be Synod Program Coordinator. He will look after the Synod office's day to day administration and other activities to assist the Moderator particularly to coordinate among internal and external Church agencies and partners.

Before joining here he had been working as principal of St. Andrew's Theological College which he will also be continuing in addition to these new responsibilities until the new Principal is arrived from Malaysia in December.

## Partnership Retreat between Church of Bangladesh & Compassion International - Bangladesh

From April 17-18, 2013, a Partnership Retreat was held between COB and Compassion International-Bangladesh at RRF Training Centre, Jessore. The main theme of this Retreat was selected from Colossians 3: 23 'whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for men.'



Rt. Rev. Paul S Sarker spoke on the theme and challenged all staff members of 8 Child Sponsorship Programs (CSP) to serve the poor and needy children with sincere love and care as if serving the Lord and not just for salary because the Lord takes care of the needs of His faithful workers.

It was a blend of both business and spiritual retreat, where all these 8 Projects had the opportunity to share their successes, failures and future plans for their children and projects as well, which was facilitated by Mr. Kajal Sengupta, Country Director of Compassion-Bangladesh. It was a very good business and spiritual retreat indeed that has inspired all the participants.

A total of 65 Project staff from 8 Compassion International supported Child Sponsorship Programs.



## Retreat to consolidate the faith and trust in God

A retreat organized by Synod Women's Fellowship on 17 April 2013 at Retreat & Conference Centre, Savar. The theme of retreat was "GOD, the Lord, is my strength;" Habakkuk 3; 19.

The main purpose of the retreat was to enhance the spiritual value of the women and reflect about our Lord in our lives, and the objectives were to:

- ensure participation of women leaders from all deaneries;
- share knowledge and ideas among women; and
- pray for the violence against women and girls, recovering from unrest situation of the country, and for the peace & justice in the world.

A total of 45 members of women fellowship joined the retreat from Bollovpur, Dhaka, Jobarpar, Haluaghat and Khulna Deanery.

## Pilgrimage took place at Panihati



A pilgrimage was arranged at Panihati Parish during 21 – 22 March 2013. Rt Rev Samuel S Mankhin Deputy Moderator of Church of Bangladesh led the pilgrimage "Towards the Cross." Thousands of believers of Christ took part in the event. The participants marched to the top of a hill holding candle in hand, singing songs and prayers and got down from the hill again. Later, in the evening, Father Nicholas Chishim conducted worship and discussed the essence of pilgrimage. He affirmed that nothing good can be achieved without hardship, sacrifice and prayer. He mentioned prayer is a power:

**More prayer, more power**

**Less prayer, less power**

**No prayer, no power**

On 22 March at 8.30am with holy sacrament the pilgrimage was concluded.



# Retreat of Clergies 2013

Retreat of clergies took place in Khulna from July 8-11, 2013. The retreat was added for the seminar for with some academic discussions.

The theme of the retreat was: "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" Mark6:31 NIV. Bishop Romen Boiragi of Catholic Church spoke on the theme. He mentioned that retreat is very essential to get closer and connected with Christ. It assists us to talk to Him with a stronger intimation and in unbound tranquillity. He mentioned retreat recharges us to work with fresh spirit and do more to fulfil God's wishes and mission.

As an additional paper on the theme Deputy Moderator Bishop Samuel Sunil Mankhin invited the participants to think on three perspectives that why did Jesus Himself felt the necessity to go into retreat to seek advice from God, why did the disciples use to stay with Jesus in retreat and took directives and suggestions from Him, and now we being Bishop, clergies and wives of clergies, whether we should find out the necessity to seek His words of guidance in retreat. He quoted Mother Teresa on retreat that the day she thought had to be busier, that day she gave more time in prayer in quite place.

Moderator of COB, Bishop Paul S Sarker commented on the essence of retreat refereeing it as a very active and essential process to empower the soul to act precisely to achieve the desired goal with assistance of God.

On other topic "Self-reliance and the roles of clergy" Revd John P Hira highlighted the necessity of the self-reliance and he clarified the individual and institutional roles for that. He emphasized the need of savings and austerity. He mentioned Church should be skill enough to use it resources efficiently and productively. He stressed on the need to enrich our morality and enhance our gratitude to God for His mercy and gifts and that we have to return through serving our Church. He added it may then work to

make our church self-sustained.

Upon the above discussion, participants put a few recommendations to achieve sustainability.

In the seminar two more core topics were discussed, one on pastoral Ministry in Urban and Rural Churches and second one on Pastoral Counselling for sick and Mentally Troubled by Father Bablu Sarker and father Noren Baidya respectively. The first one highlighted the socio-economic crisis and its impacts on rural and urban lives and the roles of the churches, particularly the clergies, to address those. He mentioned, the clergies have some roles to deal all the crises and assist the victims to overcome that and put the efforts to build the society with Christian faith and aspiration. The second paper encouraged the pastoral counselling to relive the sick and mentally retarded.

Another paper on UMOJA, means 'working together' - presented in the seminar by Mr John Tarun Mondol of CBSDP highlighting the values, objectives, benefits, stages of the implementation process of UMOJA. It is to be mentioned, COB is taking much interest to introduce similar approach like UMOJA across the province particularly in rural areas, and for that a comprehensive programme is under process to develop based on recently prepared concept note and log-frame.

Besides all the academic discussion, a session was arranged for the clergies and their wives for sharing the day to day issues with Moderator and Deputy Moderator of COB. It was a very open discussion with all the problems and possibilities for better management of the parish activities to achieve the marks of the mission of COB.

The participants as part of the exposure visited the local parishes of Khulna deanery and the mangrove forest, Sunderban, which is now significantly exposed to climate change.