

### **S.C.C.s INSPIRING “N.C.C.s”**

Living among the people in what is termed as “inserted religious communities” has been a strong impetus for me to seek “New ways of being Church” for the CHILDREN of the neighbourhood. One such venture was the formation of the “Neighbourhood Children’s Club” [N.C.C.] in the 1990s based on the 3- fold aspects of the S.C.C., viz. Community building, faith –formation and outreach. This idea received a boost after the Archdiocesan Synod of 2001 which chose the ‘Youth Ministry’ as one of its top priorities. Subsequently, the “New Methodology” for this ministry spearheaded by Bishop Bosco Penha has challenged me over the years to find new, creative ways of tapping the latent talents and energies of children.

The children of today hold much promise for our future world. As Tagore aptly puts it, “On the seashore of endless worlds children meet.” Exposure to the social media has impacted them tremendously even from early childhood, both for better and for worse. Instead of bemoaning the latter, we need “all hands on deck” to “treasure-hunt” their hidden potentialities, to give them the time and space to grow in ways different from our upbringing of yesteryears.

I share here one such initiative in its humble beginnings. My initial concept of a ‘cosy club’ for children has evolved as I observe our children of today. In the housing society where we live there are about 175 families with people hailing from different States of India. They and therefore their children too, form a kind of “Mini-India”. Capitalising on this concept we have brought our children together in a “Mini-India Children’s Council” to bond together as one ‘Neighbourhood Children’s Council’ [N.C.C.] comprising children of all faith.

The word ‘council’ gives children a sense of co- responsibility for the world they live in. I believe children are capable of understanding this if they feel trusted and supported by the adults around them. At our first two meetings the goals of our council were explained. Basically it is a ‘government of the children, by the children, for the children, not forgetting others’. The basic concepts of the S.C.C. stemming from the communitarian dimension of our living, form the pivot on which the goals stand. These include learning to live and interact with one another is a spirit of friendliness, caring, sharing, and respecting one another. In this process it is hoped that the children would also develop their innate talents, their capacity to think, reflect, choose and plan wisely, and to execute these plans through Team-work. To aid, guide and supervise their activities as needed, we invited the cooperation of some young parents and the religious sisters who live here.

Each child is entrusted with a Ministry of one’s choice. Altogether we have nine ministries which pertain to the life of the children. Some of these are: Talent search, Care for mother earth, Sports, Food and diet, Spiritual connect, Communication/Outreach and the like. At each monthly meeting, three ministries make a creative presentation keeping in mind the holistic growth of each one. This project has elicited much interest and excitement from the children and from the parents as well.

An official ‘debut’ of this group in front of all the residents of our society was made this 15<sup>th</sup> August. In keeping with the spirit of the day’s celebration, the N.C.C. surprised all with a lively presentation: ‘Wake up: Know your Rights and Duties; Know the sublime value of our Indian Constitution.’ Each child came forward and announced one basic Right or Duty as given in our Constitution. A fitting conclusion was drawn by a couple of our SCC animators linking it with a call to all to be alert to the happenings in our country and in our world around us in order to respond as enlightened citizens.

The heartening responses to this event urge me to recommend the formation of such Childrens’ groups in our SCCs. The need of the hour is to build bridges, to forget differences and build on our resources, to network with people of all faith and to uphold secular values that will enhance our humaneness and sense of one humanity. Who better than children to create this new civilization? I believe that this is possible when children are not just at the receiving end, but when they feel confident to contribute to the well-being of our society by just who they ARE!

-Sr. Manisha Gonsalves rscj-

[Sr. Manisha is a Religious of the Sacred Heart involved in the Pastoral ministry at St. Anthony’s Malwani, Malad. ]