



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Indian Dalit Ecumenical Federation CC

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Dalits, Hindus, Christians, Muslims

Location of CC: Varicadu, Tiruvalla, Kerala

Key Areas of Focus: Development, Peace Building, Capacity Building, Women empowerment, Environment protection

Summary:

Indian Dalit Ecumenical Federation CC is located in Kerala, India. The CC's main purpose is to promote harmonious co-existence among religions and to work for the betterment of the conditions of the oppressed. Indian Dalit Ecumenical Federation CC is composed of a group of Aborigines (Dalits), Hindus, Christians and Muslims striving to uplift their communities. In addition to conducting interfaith seminars, the Indian Dalit Ecumenical Foundation CC runs a Peace Centre where courses, leadership training, and women's welfare programs are offered. The CC collaborates with a variety of organizations for programs and is at the forefront in their work for peace and social justice in Kerala.

1. What is the current religious/cultural/social context in the area where your CC is working?

The Indian Dalit Ecumenical Federation is the first CC in Kerala. We started primarily to uplift the Dalit class. Our CC is situated in a place called Varikadu, where a sizable number of Dalits reside. Dalits have been historically economically disadvantaged. The Dalits were designated as untouchable, and this continues to impact them to this day. Our CC works for equality and development of the Dalit class.

2. Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed in the area where your CC works?

There is also a Muslim population in our area, and occasionally there are clashes between these different sections of society. Also, when there are communal clashes in any part of India; the reverberations of these clashes are reflected in this area. Bridge building is very essential between the aborigines (Dalits) and other communities.



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

3. Please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is carrying out this year?

Our activities this year include interfaith harmony week celebrations, children's holiday camps, felicitation of students, environmental seminars, interfaith seminars, Independence Day celebrations, peace rallies, public meetings, Kerala Day celebrations, interfaith Christmas celebrations, orientation classes for students, and picnics.

4. Between which specific religions or cultures are bridges being built?

Our work is mainly to uplift the downtrodden sections of society. We try our best to give them the same opportunities as other communities. Whenever there is a clash in the neighboring areas between different communities, URI plays a very significant role in harnessing peace. We have a long-standing reputation, and Bishop Geevarghese Mar Coorliose is our patron.

5. Please explain the method or strategy that your CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that would otherwise not interact or cooperate with each other.

We organize a series of training programs & public meetings in the Bethel Ashram and our URI Peace Centre. Students from all communities attend our free tuition classes. Women from the area are brought together for handicraft training classes. Our wee long workshop in peace building, environmental protection, and capacity-building attracts a large number of youth. We conduct regular interfaith seminars also in addition to celebrating interfaith festivals like Onam, Bakr-Eid, Diwali and Christmas.

6. Given the current context you described, what does your CC hope to achieve (goals)?

Our primary mission is to promote peace and harmony among different sections of society. Uplifting the Dalit class is also one of the main objectives, and the Environment is also one of the main concerns for us. We want to protect the mother earth. Our CC also participates in the forestation program of the government.

7. How do you see your CC's work improving cooperation among people of different traditions?

There are excellent indicators of improved relationships among various communities. Since our CC started working here, our Peace Centre is active like a bee- hive and various sections of society come here for different types of trainings. We organize



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

different programs in partnership with likeminded organizations such as the Bethel Ashram, YMCA, and NSS.

8. *How is the work of your CC helping to prevent religiously inspired violence or transforming conflict?*

Whenever there is a conflict, our CC organizes peace processions, and ensures the participation of leaders from all communities. We have easy access to the leaders of different communities because of our longstanding reputation.

9. *What are some observations or signs you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where your CC works?*

When we celebrate interfaith festivals, we have large numbers of people turn out. URI representatives are also invited for all important functions in the village. We also have representatives of all classes attend our training programs regularly.

10. *Please share a specific short story about your CC's work that might teach a lesson about interfaith or inspire other CCs.*

It was a few years ago that Dr. Abraham Karickam shared the idea of a URI Peace Centre in our area. He assured a donation of 1000 US dollars for the construction of a Peace Centre provided someone offered 2 cents land. Joseph Chacko, our founder, immediately seized the opportunity and offered 2 cents of his paternal property for the same. The title deed was made and the property was registered in the name of URI Peace Centre. We also had the URI San Francisco office offering 1000 dollars. It was through this collaboration that we constructed a peace centre which has become the nucleus of peace building in the area.

It was our privilege to have Rev. Dr. Charles Gibbs who dedicated the building in the presence of Sally Mahe, Barbara Hartford, the whole URI moral imagination pilot members, and also members of the second Holy Books Conference. Our Centre had the privilege of becoming the first URI Peace Centre in the world.

11. *How is your CC's work helping to achieve the mission of URI?*

URI works for the well-being of the earth and all human beings. The second principle of URI states that: "we respect the sacred wisdom of each religion, spiritual expression and indigenous tradition". Our CC fulfills this aspiration as a large number of our members belong to the indigenous community. This helps us to achieve URI's mission.



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

12. Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths and cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation among your CC's members? What are the challenges?

The cooperation within our CC is excellent. The relationship among the different communities has improved very much. We cooperate with the Paippadu CC, which gives us more chances for interaction with members of other religions. Our main challenge is to do away with the caste system, which is showing its face in various forms in society at large.

13. How is being part of URI helping your CC to achieve its goals?

We understand that URI is doing a great deal towards the betterment of indigenous traditions all over the world. We were able to participate in the Mayapur Global Assembly where we came into contact with so many traditions. We learned from this wonderful experience of other CCs doing great work. We heard especially about the world forum of indigenous leaders which took place in San Francisco. We look forward to a new phase in the life of our CCs in future.

14. Aside from funding, what are some specific ways URI can better support your CC in reaching its goals?

- 1) We need help for the development of URI Peace Centre.
- 2) We need training in peacebuilding.
- 3) We want to have networking opportunities with other indigenous CCs and forums.