

Now I am recognised in the society

Friday, 21 March 2008

A young worker from India

My dear friends, I am happy to share with you my experiences and how I developed myself through the movement Young Christian Workers.

My family situation I am Felix Xavier (28 years of age). We are six in my family. My father was Xavier. He died in 1988. He was working in the cooperative shop. My mother is Rita (55 years of age) a social worker organising women into self help groups. My younger brother is Brutus Xavier (27 years of age) working as a plumber in construction. Another younger brother is Stubert Xavier (24 years of age) working printing press. My youngest sister is Benasir Mary (21 years of age) doing Masters Degree. My grand mother is Maria Nesam (78 years of age). My mother took the whole responsibility of my family after the death of my father. She did not have any permanent job to get the income to run the family. Therefore she had to borrow money from others to spend for our education. We did not have regular food and at times and we were starving. We could not buy dress like other children in my neighbourhood. This experience developed inferiority in me. I was not confident to speak with my friends and felt depression in my life.

My Work experience I studied diploma in Electronics and Communication Engineering. However, I could not get a job related to my education. Therefore, I searched for any kind of job. Finally, I started working in 1998 with a company that provided cable TV to the homes. My work was to put the cables and to collect the money from the homes. I had to work 12 hours per day and have to travel 3 hours per day. My salary was Rs. 800 (Euros 14). This salary was not enough to meet my needs and I asked to increase my salary. However, the owner did not increase the salary and I had to stop that work after six months. Then I started working in the construction as a help to the mason. I could get 15 days work only and the salary was Rs. 120 (2.14 Euros) per day. There is no security at work (many accidents while working in high buildings) There is also no respect for the person doing this work. While doing this work I started thinking of getting organised.

My personality I would like to share with you two of my experiences. Once, I was invited to thank the people at the end of the public meeting during the feast of our parish. I went into the stage and stood in front of the people. However, I could not speak due to fear and then I came down from the stage in the middle. Once, I was asked to read the passage from Bible during the mass in the church. I read the passage with fear. After the mass, a few people teased me since my reading was not clear to them. I felt discouraged and I stopped reading in the church.

Organised into YCW group I organised my friends (who were working in construction) in to a group called "Saint Xavier's Construction Workers". This group started at the parish level since there was no organisation for construction workers (informal workers) in our place. At that time, the YCW leaders from my diocese contacted our group and explained to us the need of being a part of a movement. We also agreed to become YCW base group.

Development through YCW Since we were all construction workers, it was easy for us to discuss and reflect about the experiences and situations we faced in our work. We discussed about our work, wage, our rights, our participation in church activities etc. I also slowly took leadership in the activities of the church. Then I was chosen to represent our group to the Diocesan YCW team meetings. However, I still had the fear and lack of confidence in me. I felt shy very often to share my views and opinions in the Diocesan YCW meetings. I wanted to speak in the meeting but I was not confident. Since, I was regular to the meetings and my interest in YCW, the Diocesan team elected me as the secretary.

I was nervous to present the monthly report in the diocesan team meeting. When I reached the meeting place, I could feel my hands and legs trembling, my eyes getting reddish and I was sweating. The team had 15 leaders. I read the report with fear and trembling. However, the leaders listened patiently.

Seeing my interest in YCW, the leaders sent me for training on Leadership, public speaking and singing, personality development, budgeting, planning and evaluation and creativity and arts. I could discover my strengths and limitations through these trainings. In order to develop my strength, YCW gave me opportunities to speak in public (during a campaign) and to animate training sessions. These training and actions developed confidence in me and slowly I could overcome my fear and inferiority complex. I started sharing my opinion and reflections in the meetings without fear.

After these developments, I had a discussion and confrontation with my parish priest on a particular issue. (Before I could

face him due to my inferiority feeling) I was bold enough to share my opinion to him. He appreciated my confrontation and said that after becoming a leader in YCW I developed a lot. This credit goes to YCW. Seeing my development, I am now chosen to lead the Basic Christian community in my parish, I am a member of the Parish Council representing YCW, member of Liturgical committee and given responsibility during the festival such as Christmas and Parish Feast.

I learnt the method of SEE – JUDGE – ACT from YCW. It helps me to deal with the experience I face in my life, in my family, with my friends and neighbours.

Taken Responsibility in the National YCW On seeing my development and commitment, the national YCW gave me the following responsibility at the national level:

- Full-timer (to contact and to organise young workers in to communities)
- Unemployment action team member and became its coordinator
- Member and editor of YCW news letter (Thozhamai)
- YCW National Secretary
- YCW National Treasurer
- Representing YCW in the meetings of the commission for Labour, Catholic Bishop’s conference of India
- Member of the preparation team for the International Council 2008

As I am now a national leader of YCW India, I had to represent the movement to government also. Therefore, I had meetings and discussion with the Labour Minister and officials of government of India in 2005 & 2006 in Delhi. I had to also interact with Member of Parliament on the campaigns of YCW India. I could do these because of the confidence and capacity that I developed through YCW actions.

I feel respected Today my opinions and reflections are listened and respected in my community. The same people who excluded me now come to me to discuss about issues related to people and workers. I also feel respected by people around me. I think it is because of YCW that I feel respected. It is because of YCW I developed confidence in myself.