

MEDIATION IN THE MULTIETHNIC SOCIAL DIALOGUE

by don DASS

Respected Professors and honourable guests, a very good morning to all!

At the outset, let me first shortly introduce myself. I am Fr. Das and come from India. I am working in a Parish and I belong to the Congregation of the Missionaries of Precious Blood of Jesus. Since I am working in a Parish oratory, my approach to our theme “Peer to peer mediation” would be based on the different conflicting situations that we face in our Oratory and how we mediate upon these situations and come up with reasonable solutions. The spirit of our Oratory is to create a family or a fraternal atmosphere where all the boys who come there would be treated equally with respect, taken care and together form a community.

I really do acknowledge that our theme of mediation is very vast and there are very many diverse methods and guidelines for mediation. However, I would like to propose to you a Gospel passage where Jesus gives two specific guidelines in the situation of a conflict between two brothers in a community which could be applied for our theme the peer to peer mediation.

The passage from the Gospel of St. Matthew 18, 15-16 states: “If your brother wrongs you, go and take up the matter with him when the two of you are alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that every detail may be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”

The first indication or the guideline that is suggested in the Gospel passage is that the two who are in conflict, are encouraged to resolving the matter between themselves. Sometimes we seem this proposal to be so difficult and almost impossible, but I believe it is immensely possible when the other is seen as my brother/sister, my friend or my companion and not as my rival.

The second guideline would be when the two who are in conflict are incapable of listening to each other, because they are emotively wounded and feel unjustly offended by the other. The role of those who mediate is to make understand the two concerned that they are equally important, the offence can be repaired and there is a possibility of regaining the relationship of each other. This is a gradual process which requires time, patience and care of the community. What is more important is that each one is respected equally irrespective of their sex (male or female), religion, colour or nation.

We all are aware that due to immigrations and emigrations, the face of our society and also our schools are all multi-ethnic.

I would like to present to you some of my experiences with regard to mediation when there are conflictual situations among the boys of our oratory. We have boys who come from different ethnics and nations. The majority are Italian boys and we have other boys from Tunisia, Morocco and Bangladesh. The conflicts and quarrels often happen between Italian boys and sometimes it happen between boys from two different nations which later becomes a group conflict.

I share with you an incident that happened recently in our oratory. Two boys from Bangladesh were playing table tennis and one Italian boy who came in, wanted to join them to play. Since the boys from Bangladesh are reserved and are afraid to mingle with others, replied to him saying that they have started the match already and so when the match gets over he could play. Meanwhile comes another Italian boy, informs about the situation and insists them either to join both to the game or to leave the rackets to them and go off. The Bangladesh boys say that they won't leave because they came before and they have already started playing. So they started to quarrel with each other. Hearing their noises there came other Italian boys and started to offend the Bangladesh boys with offensive words. The Bangladesh boys got angry and went and called their companions from Bangladesh and thus started a huge fight between these two groups. So the animators and we who were in the football ground had to rush up, ask them to sit down and explain the situation. We told them that we will take the matter after a small snack break. We gave them all some snacks and made them to relax.

Then we called only the leaders of the group and the four boys who were involved. We asked them whether there were any past incidents and they said there was nothing. They had only some fear and prejudices towards each other. We advised them to start knowing each other, made them mingle amicable with others because the difference sometimes may become a source of great enrichment for both. They accepted to make friendship with each other and that afternoon itself we organised a match with all the four of them and we had a good fun. Once the root causes of these conflicting situations i.e. the way they looked at each other especially as someone rival, dangerous and from whom I need to defend myself is being taken away they were able again to relate well with each other.

I am so much convinced that the attempts that we take in the schools, oratories or sport centres to help the boys and girls to know and to relate with each other, surely will free the children from their prejudices and fears towards those of other nations. Here the act of mediation and the role of mediators will be very precious. Because these are the places where the boys and girls can overcome the conflictual situations and can learn to mediate between each other and then be capable of accepting and have respect for the other outside the circle of their school or oratory.