

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE
CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE BICENTENARY CELEBRATIONS OF THE
DIOCESE OF CALCUTTA AT ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL**

Kolkata, West Bengal: DECEMBER 13, 2015

1. I am happy to be present here at this closing ceremony of the bicentenary celebrations of the Diocese of Calcutta, Church of North India. At the outset, let me congratulate this historic institution on completing two hundred years of its fruitful journey of service and commitment to the city of Kolkata and to the society at large.
2. The Diocese of Calcutta has a significant history behind its inception and existence. In 1814, a Letter of Patent was issued where upon the "*Bishopric of Calcutta*" was given effect to and the Diocese of Calcutta was defined. The Diocese of Calcutta at that time comprised entire India, including Burma. It extended up to Ceylon and gradually even as far as Borneo, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, Cape Town and China. However by the time India became independent in 1947, most of the dioceses outside the geographical boundary of India had become separate. Presently, the Diocese of Calcutta comprises the Churches and institutions in and around the city of Kolkata, a Church at East Midnapore, and the churches located in the neighbouring districts of Howrah and Hooghly.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

3. It is sacrosanct to have faith in the greatness of God through kindness and concern for others. Lord Jesus Christ had taught mankind and I quote: "*Love thy neighbour as thy self*" (unquote). It is important for us all to embrace this teaching in word and deed. To my mind, the Diocese of Calcutta has shown the way through its respectful conduct of multifarious humanitarian activities and set an example for others to follow. It has fully exhibited faith in action. Its activities and services are in whole-hearted consonance with the vision and mission of the Church of North India, which are Unity, Witness and Service.
4. It is heartening to note that the Diocese of Calcutta along with its Churches, educational institutions and organizations is extensively involved in helping the underprivileged sections of society. Their efforts are aimed at providing equal opportunity to all the deprived and needy people in terms of developing social awareness, gaining access to quality education, building capacity, and providing healthcare services.
5. I am told that the Diocese of Calcutta runs many educational institutions, including schools at all levels, from pre-primary to primary, secondary and higher secondary levels. These schools impart quality education in both the vernacular and English

medium. The society also operates under-graduate colleges and offers post-graduate courses as well. Nursing and engineering colleges, a hospice for AIDS patients, Child Care Centre for the children of AIDS affected or infected parents, Tuberculosis centre and hospitals, Old Age Homes, Orphanages and Day Child Care Centres are other priority projects of the diocese. Women, children, the elderly and backward sections of the population residing in both urban and rural areas are helped by the Diocese through these projects. It has empowered them to break the chains of poverty and injustice, and has helped them to lead a life of human dignity and respect. Mother Teresa had once said and I quote: “*Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love*” (unquote). The Diocese of Calcutta has truly exemplified this thought by its social engineering projects. Its noble deeds have significantly impacted and transformed the lives of the citizens of Kolkata across many generations.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

6. Every religion preaches the fundamental values of humanity. Forbearance, restraint and acceptance of different views form some of our core principles. India prides itself in its pluralistic ideals. In India, several major religions have thrived due to its assimilative character that has come to define our civilization over the centuries. People professing different faiths have lived here in harmony for a long time.
7. It is the mosaic of being multi-religious that makes our nation an oasis of peaceful co-existence and communal harmony. It is here that the Christian community is looked upon with respect for their peaceful and humanitarian nature and for their magnanimous contribution to the process of nation building. The fabric of our society would remain strong when every individual irrespective of caste, creed, language, region and religion can live and partake in its progress without fear and prejudice. In this context, the Diocese of Calcutta’s effort in promoting inter-faith dialogue is truly commendable.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

8. I am today reminded of the words of the great missionary of Serampore, William Carey, who had said and I quote: “*Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God*” (unquote). On this auspicious occasion, I urge the Diocesan Family of Kolkata to keep up the good work and continue making a difference to the lives of citizens. At the end, I once again compliment the Diocese of Calcutta and wish them the very best for the future.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
