

# Youth Preaching- ISKCON Kolkata

## Brief History

From 2001 to 2009, Youth Preaching was led by H.G Ananga Mohan Prabhu and Acharya Ratna Prabhu under the constant guidance H.G Radheshyam Prabhu from Pune. Students from IIT Kharagpur took leading positions and continued youth preaching. From 2009 to 2014, Prem Swaroop Prabhu lead the youth preaching as Chairman, with 12 Brahmacharis working under him. Later Mukund Lila Prabhu took over as the Chairman till 2016, with the current Chairman being Nimai Anand Prabhu.

## Structure

- Youth preaching started under the inspiration of H.G Radheshyam Prabhu and guidance of H.G Antardweep Prabhu. Acharya Ratna Prabhu, the pioneer youth preacher was personally present to offer guidance.
- The body responsible for youth preaching is called Kolkata Development Body, under which is the Youth Development Counsellor (YDC) which consists of 5 members, mainly Brahmacharis, which takes the lead role in expanding youth preaching and taking crucial decisions.
- Among the many committees under YDC is Local Youth Coordination Committee (LYCC), which focuses on temple youth preaching. Temple Brahmacharis in various other departments, who don't get to preach, are given a chance to preach to the youth.
- Many outstation VOICES have been developed apart from 8 colleges across Kolkata. Wonderful VOICES have been developed in IIT Kharagpur, NIT Jamshedpur, Jadavpur University, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose College, etc.
- Separate teams are present to cultivate donors and to care for and nourish devotees who want to become Brahmacharis and Grihasthas so that they can enter their respective Ashrams smoothly.
- A Training and Placement Department is present to place devotees around Kolkata so that along with work, they can also continue Krishna Consciousness.

## Noteworthy Achievements and Contributions

- Youth preaching is taking care of all the activities of the temple and everything is expanding due to youth preaching. The Prerna youth festival flagged off in 2009 on the topic 'The Journey Home' with H.H Radhanath Swami Maharaj as the speaker.
- Prerna Festival has given the temple 300 committed devotees, with over 60 Brahmacharis. Currently, there are 35 IITians serving as Brahmacharis.
- Coaching Institute named PARTHA was started with the motive of providing devotees with teaching jobs as well as preaching the students.
- Talented IITians came up with the concept of Trans Enigma- a Company formed to give jobs to the devotees and also help them continue Krishna Consciousness.
- Donor Cultivation, Book Distribution, Deity Department- all these requirements are fulfilled through youth preaching.

## Overview of Preaching Program

- College Centered Preaching
  - One devotee meets students on a one-to-one basis, listens to them and spends time with them.

- Inspired students register for the 6 session program and then take to chanting 1 round everyday.
- After the 6 session course they are invited to Sankalpa Camp where they come across dancing in kirtan for the first time. Here they also learn to wear a tilak and other Vaishnava habits. Cultural programs are also held in this camp.
- Interested students then come weekly to the youth centre for the program where they are introduced to Brahmacharis who give class.
- Sphuriti Camp is held mainly in Jagannath Puri where senior devotees give seminars. After this, they commit to chant 8 rounds daily. The more serious devotees attend morning programs in the youth centres.
- Then, students are registered for the Utkarsha Camp in Mayapur. More than 20 colleges participate in the various activities organized by this camp. Here, the student for the first time sees foreigner devotees, gurukul and mangal arati being held. This increases their faith and they commit to chant 16 rounds.
- Software Training Workshop (STW) and Vaishnava Training Workshop (VTW) are held so that, along with practicing Krishna Consciousness (KC), their material needs are also taken care of.
- Apart from practicing KC, they also take up responsibilities of various departments and preaching programs too.
- In their 2<sup>nd</sup> year, devotees become more serious and learn different temple activities.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> year devotees become group and team leaders. They give presentations and hold seminars for 1<sup>st</sup> year devotees.
- By the 4<sup>th</sup> year, he becomes a coordinator and enhances youth preaching. So by the time he passes out, he becomes a good leader and learns management skills
- Post this, devotees choose between Brahmachari and Grihastha Ashrams. Based on this, they attend Gauranga Sabha or Nityananda Sabha. Many even work outside and contribute 10% of their salary for the temple.
- Temple Centered Preaching
  - Prerna Festival, which is held once in 3 months, is one of the best ways of temple preaching. Many pious students come on their own or through their friends and also sign for the 6 session course.
  - Brahmacharis in other departments get a chance to do youth preaching. The youths are taken to nearby places for camping and kept in touch through the weekly program.
  - Going to Sri Dham Mayapur inspires them, thus increasing their faith and rounds. They are given the option to stay close to the temple so that they can increase their sadhana and attend morning programs.
  - Once they take up devotional activities seriously, they are introduced to the idea of Ashrams (Brahmachari/ Grihastha).

## Key Points

- Guidance is very important for young devotees, without which it is very difficult to advance. When they pass out from Utkarsha & enter VOICE, a guide/ mentor is allotted to them.
- A counselor/mentor plays a vital role to answer questions and doubts at 3 junctons where critical guidance is required:
  - The 1<sup>st</sup> time when he shifts to a youth center.

- When he passes out from college/youth center and is joining work.
- While leaving his job and joining Brahmachari Ashram or while joining Grihastha Ashram.
- A counselor guides them as the youths stay at home and may face difficulties in changing their habits.

## Financial Management

- In the early stages, the youngsters don't earn and many come from poor backgrounds too. So, this requires a lot of initial investment and may go on for many years without returns.
- In the beginning, there was a lot of support from the temple management and in the later years, those who started working, contributed for youth preaching to expand.
- With donations coming from outside, help from the temple has been reduced.

## Unique Features

- A festival called 'Preeti Vardhanam' is conducted once in 3 months for training temple preaching devotees. The devotees come to the temple, stay overnight, attend mangla arati, learn sloka recitation, cooking, how to deal with parents, relatives and practice KC. In the evening there is Harinam Sankirtan and the program ends with 'Realisation discussion'. This festival boosts their spiritual life.
- ISKCON Disciple Course is held by H.G Atul Krishna Prabhu during Durga Puja holidays.
- An Annual Youth Convention is held on 30<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> December and 1<sup>st</sup> of January every year. This festival unites all the youths and preachers and in this way a bigger family works together.
- Training of Preachers is also important- if leaders are not united, faith of the students dwindles. A bi-annual festival is held in Mayapur for 3 days where leaders are invited to give class. When everyone works in a team, their faith is automatically boosted.

## Challenges and Lessons

- Genuine KC relationship is a requisite for all workings to run smoothly. Youth Development Council leaders, brahmacharis, project leaders- all must remain united.
- Empowerment and delegation is important for growth. It is important to let them take responsibility of important decisions.
- Tapping the power of team work is the key. Anyone, though capable, might become overburdened if he does all the work.