

## The Catholic Higher Education & Mentoring Society

The following are many of the questions raised about the Catholic Higher Education and Mentoring Society during our various discussions with a number of our Parishioners and those outside, whom we have contacted, so as to become members and also raise the required funds as donors. Our general answers to the questions are also given below. Now that the Society is Registered with the Charity Commissioner and is in operation for more than four years, we are keen that many of Catholics in the Archdiocese, who have not become members so far, fully understand what is behind the formation of the Society, how we have fared so far, and then become active members of the Society and also be the donors. We also need help to enrol Catholics from Mumbai region who are living out of the country to be large donors,

1. Why another Higher Educational Society when there are already similar Societies and Charity funds in Mumbai?

So far no one has been able to give us the name and address of any such Christian Charitable Educational fund or Society in Mumbai which caters to Students aspiring to obtain higher education. We have not found a single institution where we can ask a EWS Catholic student in need for financial support, to go to and obtain the required information about the funds available and the required support/assistance available.. For months in the past we had tried to locate such a Charitable fund or Society without success. If such an Higher Educational fund is available for the EWS Catholic students, it should be known to all Catholic Schools and the Parishes in Mumbai and more importantly the EWS Catholic students. Now that we have operated a Charitable Educational Society for more than 4 years and during the period helped around 15 students with their higher studies, we believe time has come to grow and provided a helping hand to such deserving students in other Parishes. The students helped include 3 non- catholics.

2. Why not ask the EWS Students to obtain the Higher Educational loans from the Bank?

The Banks necessarily have to follow Government and Banking rules. They have to ensure that their loans are secure and hence insist on surety and proper guarantees, based on fixed assets from the student and his or her parents. Besides at times, the life of the student needs to be covered to the extent of the loan by the required life insurance cover. This in most cases is not something the EWS students or their Parents can provide to the Bank. Even the Catholic Banks have declined to make any special concessions to the EWS Catholic students. The Society however will work very closely with the selected Nationalised banks to provide the major part of the large Educational loans required by the Students, at the best concessional terms and conditions. Though the pamphlets on educational loans distributed by Nationalized banks state that they will give educational loans upto Rs. 4.0 lakhs without securities, this in practice is not easily available. When questioned the Bank authorities point to the growing educational loans NPAs they have incurred due to such educational loans,

3. What is the guarantee that the students will repay the Bank and the Society the unsecured loan?

There is no guarantee that the EWS students can give than a written one by themselves and their own family members, since many of their families do not have the necessary wealth or assets. The Society will have to depend mainly on written personal guarantees while providing the EWS students the financial support. The basic need for starting a Charitable Society such as this one, is due to the fact that the Banks are generally unwilling to depend on such an undertaking or guarantee by the student and his or her family. The Catholic community funding this Society will have to take up this risk. The Society can also try and see if the Bank can be flexible if needed with regard to the repayment of loan installments, based to earnings of the new Graduate.

4. Why involve the Principal of schools, Parish Councils and Small Communities?

We believe this will ensure the students and their families asking for the financial assistance from the Society are trust worthy. The students and their families will have a moral obligation to return the loan to their own community based Society, which has funded their higher education, guided the students and provided the Mentoring service, based on the recommendations of their neighbors. The community peer pressure works even in cases of Micro Finance banking societies. We also believe this will encourage the parish Catholic community to participate in the Society as members, donors and mentors. They are in a way stake holders in the Society.

5. Why have the structure of a Society and not just a voluntary Charity Trust fund?

This structure makes even a single member, a stake holder in the Society. Hence the Managing Committee will have to be responsible and answerable to the members and face them at least once a year during the Annual General Body meeting. The Society will also have to work within the stipulated State laws for such charitable societies. The By- laws of the Society meet the laws of the land. There will be some kind of overall control on the funds of the Society by the stake holders. The By- laws of the Society are based on the Bye laws of a similar educational Society which has successfully operated for 66 years. However we have been advised in today's conditions, it is better to have it Registered as only a Charitable Society and not a 'for profit' Co-Operative Society. The Bye- Laws have been vetted by qualified lawyers.

6. Why is the Society offering a wide spread Membership?

We hope as in case of other Societies this will attract many contributing members, and each member will also donate more money to the Society. The Managing Committee will be held responsible to the Society members to be financially prudent and conservative. We have kept the membership sufficiently low for many to contribute to the fund as Members. This may be one of the ways the Economically weaker sections of the community may feel that they are also in their own way, giving their helping hand to the deserving students known to them. The Society also accepts like minded non Catholics as members and donors.

7. Will the general public in Mumbai invest in a Society which has been promoted by unknown persons?

This could have been a problem initially in case of attracting funds from persons outside the St. Anthony's Parish. But now that the Society is properly set up with the required By- Laws, and supporting committees have functioning properly, we should be able to attract funds from outsiders. We in the St. Anthonys Parish have past experience in collecting money to build the new church. We need to showcase the type of students that the Society is helping with their higher studies. Catholics in other Parishes of Mumbai Archdiocese have been generous in supporting good causes in the past and we need not have doubts that they will do so now. Many are aware that St. Anthony's church parish is poor by itself and requires outside support.

8. Will there be any restrictions in bringing in well known Persons into the Managing Committee of the Society?

Initially it may be difficult to get such people to take active interest in such a new society. But once the Society is set up and gets functioning properly and grows, the well known Persons may consent to provide their time and effort to the Society. We needed to sow the seed quickly and once the plant germinated we could bring in additional inputs for nurturing it and making it grow. Having well known Persons in the Managing Committee or the advisory Governing Council will be welcome, as long as they are ready to provide the required time and effort.

9. Why is the Society attached to the St. Anthony's Parish?

Because the need for such a Society was thought of by some of the members of the St. Anthony's Parish for their EWS students who want to pursue higher studies. The Society requires a lot of initial support to put it into operation and get it working and the challenge has been taken up by the Parishioners. As a matter of fact helping a few EWS students has taken place in the Parish over the years, but a more systematic system is being put into place in the Parish. We will be doing our best to have as many Society members as possible from the St. Anthony's Parish and are hoping at least a few will offer the Society some free voluntary service for it's smooth operation.

10. Will the services of this Society be available to the EWS Catholic and other students of other Parishes?

As the Society is registered and it's working has stabilized, it is open to other Parishes who are ready to participate in the fund raising activity of the Society. The Society will concentrate on the EWS students of the St. Anthony's parish itself and its school, untill it has the necessary time and resources to expand further in a big way.. The future expansion will depend on the mobilization of sufficient funds and managerial capabilities to deal with larger funds. The By - Laws allow for such expansion within the Mumbai Archdiocese. We have stated the process by already helping 3 students from two other neighboring parishes.

11. Why is the Society taking the responsibility of Providing the Guidance and Mentoring services to the students?

This is a free and voluntary service that will be provided to ensure the students make a calculated good choice of the Profession and Career that they want to pursue after they know in some detail what efforts are needed, the money that needs to be invested and the benefits they can obtain from such higher studies in later years. We strongly believe in cases of students from the Economically Weaker Sections of the community, this essential information may not be readily available to them. The rich and the middle class people are aware and put in the efforts to ensure their own children get proper career guidance, mentoring and later on networking to get a good job.

12. Why restrict the loans for higher education only?

These days the school education is almost free especially in Parish schools. The Parishes are able to even supplement this by providing free books and uniforms etc. with the Parish funds. The families can manage to provide the required support when the children are in school. The money required to pursue and obtain good higher education is growing. Even the Professional courses run by Catholic colleges are charging high fees. However having higher education increases the chance of the students and the families to raise above the poverty levels. Higher Education is a gate way to economic growth of the family. Hence the Society is concentrating to ensure, that the finances required for higher education to obtain college degrees or skills are made available for students in need.

13. Why restrict the financial support to only bright students who obtain first class marks?

We believe at least in the beginning there will be limitation of funds available to the Society and hence there should be some cut off point. Cost of pursuing college education is rising all the time and there will be a financial limit in how much the Society can undertake. In difficult conditions even with proper Mentoring there is better chances for brighter students to complete their courses, obtain suitable jobs and repay their loans to the Bank and the Society. We need to keep in mind that even in developed nations like USA, the highly educated new graduates are finding it difficult to repay their higher education loans. However, the Society is open to help non first class students to obtain diplomas and other skills which will help them to obtain jobs.

14. How will the Society deal with students who default in returning the money given as loans?

We are of the opinion that the default will occur if for some reason the student is unable to complete his studies. This is the reason the society is stressing about the need to provide the students with proper mentoring service. The Society will also depend on the peer pressure of the other members of the community to get the students and their families to repay the loans. Incase of deliberate defaults which we believe will be very few, the Society may have to use official legal methods to obtain the return of the loan of a deliberately defaulting student. The Society will in due course work towards building a default fund. Mentoring services provided to the

student undergoing studies in stressful situations will help the student to overcome problems. One of the main reasons for there being many bank loan defaults by poor students is due to lack of proper mentoring.

15. Will it be possible for the Society to remain sufficiently funded?

We are hoping considerable amount of money raised for the Society will come in the way of donations. This should help in covering any default of students to repay the loans. We also expect many successful students who will become over the years reasonably wealthy, will provide some large donations to the Society. Since public funds are involved and the Society is answerable to its members, all efforts will be made to ensure the Society works without losses. The Society is a 'not for profit' organisation and no dividends are being paid to its members. Much of the interest earned on fixed deposits are kept with the bank. The success of the Society will be gauged not on the profit it makes but on the dividends deserving students it will help financially to be successful members.

16. Will the Society approach other Catholic organizations for help?

We are in touch with other Catholic organizations such as the Dimensions, the Bombay Catholic Sabha and the Christian Workers Movement. We believe they can assist this Society in a big way. We will request for their help to increase the membership and the required donations to the Society.

17. What about Scholarships to the students?

One of the functions of the Society will be to keep a track of Scholarships that are available from the Governments and private organizations for such EWS students and help them to obtain them. Our study has shown most of our EWS students are not aware of such scholarships available. The Society at this stage does not plan to provide any Scholarships to the students, unless the donors of any funds to the Society specifically earmark it for a Scholarship.

18. How will the Society provide Guidance about different Professions?

The Society intends to have a suitable updated booklet which will give as much information as possible about various Professions that require higher studies, details of such professions, the entry levels and the colleges and institutions, their addresses and the tuition fees and other costs involved. This kind of information should help the interested students to pursue their ambitions. We plan the website which will be compiled from the information available on the Internet and gathered from the local colleges. We expect this to be prepared and maintained by the Teachers the Parish and will be kept updated. If required we hope to rope in some of more experienced members of our Parish Community to help the youth. The Society will have the required "Guidance Unit" to look after this function.

19. How will the Society manage to provide the required Mentoring service?

The Society places a lot of stress on the mentoring service it provides to the students who are pursuing higher studies with loans from the Society. We are trying to provide this with the help of volunteers from the community from similar profession chosen by the Student. We expect that we can rope of more persons who are in the same profession or those who have retired from it, to volunteer such services to the EWS students. This is to try and ensure reduced delinquency rates in student repayment of loans. We believe this is a difficult task for the Society, but needs to be provided. The society will have a suitable "Mentoring Unit" to supervise this function.

20. How will the Society help the Students obtain suitable jobs?

The Society will try and help the students if necessary and time permitting find suitable part time jobs, which may help them in their future profession. At the end of the education the Society will try and help the students with the net work developed to find lucrative employment, so that they can start repaying their loans. The Society is fully aware that even in a rich country such as the USA, the students without proper jobs are finding it difficult to repay their educational loans. It is stated that next to the house mortgages, the higher educational loans are the biggest burden the American families have to bear these days.

21. How will you pay for the back up office services required to ensure the Society works efficiently?

Initially we believe that the funds that will be generated will be small and we could handle the transactions with the help of volunteers from the Parish. As the Society grows, we will have to employ part time or full time staff depending on the work load to deal with the stake holders. We may even employ part time some of the students who have taken the loans from the Society to provide them with the required experience. The Society has the backing of Parishioners who have considerable experience in Administration, Banking and Finance to guide the Society.

22. How will you ensure financial integrity of the Society is maintained?

The By-Laws of the Society requires the Society to be operated in a very conservative manner. The Society books will be open for scrutiny of it's members. Being a Registered society and Charitable Trust the required laws of the State will have to be followed. As stated above the Society will have the guidance of experienced Bankers and Financiers from the community itself to help it. We are trying to ensure the Managing Committee will have the advise of a capable Legal firm to ensure the Society works within the laws of the State. We will also have an internal Audit unit.

23. How will the deserving students from the Economically weaker sections of the community be selected?

The decision will be taken by the Executive Committee of the Society. The Society will get feedback leave this to the Parish council to decide within the given parameters set out by the Society. The Parish council and the various zones of the parish who know the deserving students and their families will thus have some moral responsibility to ensure that the families and the Students are provided with the required non financial help and later once the students start working, they return the loan of the Bank and the Society. A suitable counseling and selection such committee will be set up to select the deserving students.

24. How will the Students from the economically weaker sections know of this Society?

We will approach the Parish, Priest, the Parish Council and the Youth groups of the Parish. In Catholic Parish Schools the School Management will be advised of the Society. We need to deal with the situation very discreetly and not damage the sensibility of the EWS students. We intend having a website for the Society providing the required information for the students and their families. In due course we intend having an office for the Society which provides the required information to the students in need of it. We will have our teams interact.

25. How will the Society interact with the Educational Institutions:

Due to the difficult conditions under which the students from EWS study, and the chances of the such students dropping out is high, the higher educational institutions may not be too keen to enroll such students. We believe the Society can intervene in such situations and give the required confidence to the institutions about the students. The Society will also be able to try and obtain the best concessions for the students from the institution. The Society will co- ordinate closely with the Catholic Higher education institutions to get some preference to such students not only with the fees, but also in the entrance exams. A sub committee will be set up to deal with the Institutions.

26. Will a poor Parish such St. Anthony's Parish be capable of managing such a Society?

As advised elsewhere the Parish Catholic community though relatively poor ventured to build a new church. There were many skeptics including some of us, but the community succeeded in doing so. The Parish already runs a very efficient unit called the Jan Kalayan, which provides medical aid and education assistance to the poor within its means. Hence the Parish has some experience. However assisting higher education needs much more funds. We will take each step at a time and ensure the Society does not get derailed. The Parish will welcome external assistance in raising the required funds and managerial assistance to make this venture a success.

27. Why is so much stress being given to higher education of the EWS students when there are so many other problems faced by the Community?

One successful highly educated and well earning member of a EWS family makes a big difference to the whole family and helps it to get over the poverty line. The wellness of the small community in which such students live also depends on the general education level of its members. In cases when the community in numbers is small it can stand on it's own, if it produces high caliber Entrepreneurs, Business men, Managers, Professionals, Educationists, Government officers, Military personnel, Judges and even Politicians. For this we need more and more highly educated youth. Investing in our EWS students as such will produce considerable benefits to the community.

28. Have you made a detailed study about the number of EWS students in your Parish who require financial aid from the Society?

This is a chicken and egg situation. The Parish in the past has tried and helped a few of the EWS students within the means available. It is also doing so now. In the absence of any definite means or backup of helping such EWS students, it is not easy to evaluate the demand. In present circumstances it is difficult to raise false hopes of providing the required financial help and then back out. We will deal with the situation as the demand from students grow.

29. Are there similar higher education loan societies run by other Communities?

We are aware of the Jain Jagruti Society which is being run by the Jains for providing higher education loans to the poor students of their community. We have interacted with their Hon. Secretary Mr. Praful Kamdar. The Society has a fund of around Rs.8 crores which enables them to educate around 250 to 270 EWS Jain Students in USA and around 3000 to 4000 EWS students in India.

30. How can one become a Member of the Society?

The Society is looking forward to a large number of Catholics becoming members of the Society. We also welcome like minded non Catholics also. A person who wants to become a member of the society will have to fill in the required membership application form agreeing to the terms and conditions as given in the Bye Laws of the Society. These forms are available at the Society and Parish office. They are also available with Managing Committee members. To be an Ordinary Member of the Society the fee is Rs. 1,000/- per year. To be a Life Member a one time lump sum fee of Rs. 10,000/- will have to be paid. These are not refundable.



31. Is it possible for People to be just Donors without becoming Members?

Yes. People can donate whatever amount they want to donate to the Society and this will be accepted with thanks and a written acknowledgement. We are trying to obtain the 80G I.T. Concession. The Society will be shortly registered as a 80 G. + FCRA certificated society. The donors can directly send their donations by cheque in the Society's name to the Society's office address c/o St. Anthony's Church, Mankurd, Mumbai 400 088. Tel 022- 25513562. An appeal letter from the President of the Society & donation forms are available.

32. Do Promoters/Managing Committee Members/ Trustees of this Charitable Society have any personal agenda or financial interest in the Society?

The above have no personal agenda or financial interest in the Society any more than other Members of the Society. They have volunteered to provide their services free of any monetary return to themselves or their families.

33. Is the Society meant only for Catholics?

The Society as per it's Bye- Laws is not meant only for Catholics. It allows non- Catholics who accept the aims and objects of the Society to be it's members. The Society is also set up to provide a helping hand to students mostly from the weaker section of all communities with the loan requirement for higher education.

34. Is the Society looking at other means to help the EWS students obtain higher education with minimum exposure to loans?

The Society is also encouraging EWS students to simultaneously work and study using the Open University system and computer based distance education. Skills can be improved by the students using the new computer based MOOCS education. The students are also encouraged to take part in collage activities use an open library and be part of the church youth group to improve Communication skills.

35. More information about the Society,

This Q/A statement has been made to provide as much information of the Society has possible. It can be circulated to friends and relations who are interested in contributing to help EWS students to acquire higher education. More information can be had from the office bearers of the Society Fr. Patrick d'Mello President 9819035717,, Fredrick Mendonca Vice President 9320152052, Eric D'Sa Secretary 9820055658, Albert Machado Jt. Secretary 9833151833, Doald Lobo Tresurer 9820741025 Ranjan Kochery Jt. Tresurer. 9833365755. The Society has a website of its own giving further details.

The Managing Committee  
Catholic Higher Education and Mentoring Society