



THY KINGDOM COME (Mt. 6:10)

## DIOCESE OF CHANDA (CHANDRAPUR)

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### CIRCULAR - 04/2025

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ON

### ARREST OF TWO ASMI SISTERS AND ITS AFTERMATH

Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters,

Thy Kingdom Come!

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

"For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil".

(1 Pet. 3:17)

The arrest of two ASMI Sisters – Sr. Vandana Francis and Sr. Preethy Mary, raised great hue and cry in Kerala and few other parts of our country. In the Parliament also the issue was raised and took place very heated discussion. The Bishops, Priests, Brothers, Sisters, lay leaders and great number of people from Christian communities irrespective of affiliations have come out in street, particularly in Kerala to protest against the arrest and hippocratic acts of anti-Christian movements and police. They criticised thoroughly the double standard of Chhattisgarh government in the whole issue. The sincerity of the Sisters was very clear in the whole episode and the alleged accusations such as attempt of forced conversion and human trafficking have no base whatsoever, for, the girls involved in the issue are adults, they are already Christians for few years, they voluntarily decided to go for job in Agra with the consent of their parents and they had to give wrong witness under force and physical attack. These things have come to light in detailed investigation and the girls and their parents have divulged it before media. It is very clear that some hidden agendas of anti-Christian movements have worked behind to target Christian missionaries which has been prevalently active in our country for few years especially under the present political regime of our country. The whole episode once again invites us to be prudent like serpents (Mt. 10:16) in marching ahead in our missionary endeavours. We cannot water down our mission. We are called to be missionaries (Mt. 28:19-20), while being



responsible citizens of our country, observing civil laws and respecting all religious faiths, cultures, customs and people all over. Church does not endorse forced conversion. However, we demand the individual freedom of everyone to profess and propagate the religious faith of one's own choice. It is our constitutional right.

When the whole issue is analysed objectively we could see from the very first responses that we have received in the aftermath of the Sisters' arrest was that it could have been settled amicably as there wasn't anything wrong from the part of the Sisters concerned and they are indeed innocent. But the evil intentions of the anti-Christian movements have absurdly turned the issue upside down to curry their favours. It is very clear from the confession of the girls and their parents. The anti-Christian outfits have threatened the girls to give witness against the Sisters. Otherwise they could have got bail in couple of days. My enquiry from the concerned I got the impression that the Sisters would be released in couple of days as they are innocent and alleged accusations are baseless. Indeed, everyone expected that. But things turned other way around. At least in this late hours we shall show our solidarity with our beloved Sisters in their innocent suffering for the mission of the Church. Now we are happy that they are granted bail. We shall continue our prayers for the Sisters and we shall stand with ASMI General, Provincial Superior and the Sisters' family members in their grief and mental agony.

The crux of the issue lies in the ignorance of those girls that the Chhattisgarh State Legislative Assembly enacted a law in 2013 – Private Placement Regulation Act, which requires everyone who migrate to another district or State for any purpose should register their names in a Government portal online. The girls have not done it and the Sisters were unaware about it. Indeed, this law was enacted in the State for the protection of the people, in particular the tribal youth, who move out from native villages in search of job elsewhere in the State and country. In fact the Maoist activities in the State have necessitated such a law in the State. Besides, the entry of these girls to Durg railway station without valid documents and train tickets added fuel to fire. The Sisters cannot be blamed for such pitfalls. Lack of caution and ignorance from the part of girls might have resulted in such helpless situation. Hidden agendas of some miscreants have manoeuvred the situation shrewdly to target Christian missionaries. They availed the opportunity and worked out 'well' to trap the Sisters. This was not a first instance, there have been many such instances in the past.

Now it is a great relief for all of us that the two Sisters confined behind bars in Chhattisgarh jail is bailed out. We shall stand with the Sisters in their ordeal that they had to undergo in prison for almost nine days. As they are our co-missionaries we are duty-bound to stand with them and support them showing our concern, compassion and communion as they are also the members of the Mystical Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-31).

Anyhow we shall learn some lessons for future from these incidents. We shall take more caution when we extent help to others for job placement in our institutions. And also meticulous care is required when we recruit youths/students for formation or higher studies. Everyone is requested to follow the guidelines as given below for our safety and good of the Church.

- 1) Make sure that everyone always carry valid ID Documents.



- 2) It is highly recommended that parents or siblings of candidates accompany them to the destination.
- 3) Avoid that Priests, Brothers or Sisters accompany the candidates for job, studies or formation.
- 4) In all cases get from the concerned the consent form duly filled and signed as required, both from the parents and the candidates for job placement, formation/studies.
- 5) In the case of job placement keep ready in advance the agreement form duly signed by the concerned for salary and for other provisions.
- 6) More caution is required when anyone below 18 years is recruited for formation.

I request everyone to pay attention to these guidelines.

Though we have cancelled the scheduled prayer and protest rally, may I request everyone to have a prayer session or adoration tomorrow Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2025 in all our parishes and institutions immediately after Holy Qurbana to express our solidarity with the Sisters. Kindly explain to the people the context of this circular so as to create an awareness among them about anti-Christian activities and atrocities against Christian missionaries. Please fortify our people's faith to witness Christ in words and deeds. We shall pray for those two Sisters, their family members and for all the missionaries in the world. God bless everyone.



Yours devotedly in Christ

† Ephrem Nariculam  
Bishop, Diocese of Chanda