

THUCKALAY TIDINGS

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DIOCESE OF THUCKALAY



ST. GEORGE
VALIANT FOR CHRIST



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THUCKALAY TIDINGS

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A Monthly online newsletter of Diocese of Thuckalay

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Kanyakumari District, Tamilnadu – 629 175



Message

Dear Friends in Jesus Christ,

May my affectionate and sincere wishes reach all of you. It is a great joy for me to turn to you after the Feast of St. George the Martyr, the co-patron of our Diocesan family that lives with great enthusiasm, passion and devotion. The book of Apocalypse recalls the value of the testimony of the martyrdom of very many "our brothers" in the history of the Church. St. George is one of these brothers who, in every season of history, even today, continue to give their lives for the faith, peace, justice, care and health of people. It is a testimony that finds its truth and its strength in the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ, which we celebrate in this Easter season, the foundation of our faith.

And at this time of great difficulty, we need to feel that Christ lives - as Pope Francis reminded the young people - Christ is present among us, Risen and asks for witnesses who, like St. George, know not to flee from situations, but to rearrange our own lives, sharing, not forgetting what really matters, but preparing the future with social, political and economic choices that start from the least, the sick, the lonely, those who have lost their jobs and risk closing of factories / shops / places of work. We need men who have the courage of faith, like St. George, so that we do not forget the causes and effects of this pandemic and return to live as if nothing had happened, forgetting the sick who were cured, the dead and their families, young people and their future. We must have the courage to be different - as the Holy Father writes in the exhortation *Christus vivit* - to show other dreams that this world does not offer, to witness the beauty of generosity, service, purity, strength, forgiveness, of fidelity to one's vocation, of prayer, of the struggle for justice and the common good, of love for the poor, of social friendship.

Dear Friends in Jesus Christ, in this time of suffering, poverty and fear, we want to entrust ourselves to our patron St. George, who strengthens us with his unconditional faith in Jesus Christ. A personal, family and social lifestyle that places service at the center, up to the gift of life, which leads to the communion of goods and to renounce mere profit and accumulation. We are called upon to bear witness to the truth, in a world where falsehood and deception are often tools to humiliate and condemn. The Christian finds in the Cross not only a sign to show, but a path to follow, which leads to the transformation of the person, to the point of assuming the criteria and intentions of the living Christ.

I am quite sure that this Living Christ is present in our Diocese through each one of you, not only with material support you render constantly, but the spiritual encouragement at every stride of our journey. It's the love of Christ which unites us to experience this familial koinonia inside the mission Diocese of Thuckalay. St. Paul's letter to the Romans reminds us that the Christian in the world knows how to choose and live being aware that nothing "can ever separate us from the love of God, in Christ Jesus our Lord". St. George shows us this greatness of Christian life through witnessing Christ, even shedding His Blood for the propagation of Divine love to all.

Let me wish you in the words of an ancient antiphon of the Greek Liturgy: Liberator of prisoners, defender of the poor, doctor of the sick, support of kings, victorious and great martyr St. George, pray to Christ to save our bodies and our souls.

May the Risen Lord continue to bless you all.

+ 

+ **George Rajendran sdb**
Bishop of Thuckalay





MAJOR SEMINARIANS

The major seminarians came to the Eparchy directly from their respective seminaries as early as 25 March 2021 and they were engaged in the vacation ministry in the Eparchy, as had been noted in the previous issues of the Tidings. The Brothers helped in the Holy Week programme in the parishes and gained wonderful experience of the missionary activities in the Diocese. They attended the Tamil classes for 13 days. They also took part in the Work Camp held at Kanyakumari Social Service Society (KKSSS) and *Preumchilampu* for four days.

On 22 April 2021, they participated in the one-day Retreat to prepare themselves to receive the minor and major orders. The Brothers were administered the minor orders on 23 April 2021 at Sangamam. Br Antony Sunil received the Cassock. Br Albin Jose, Br Lindo, Br Amanto and Br Sanjoe Mon received *Karoyusa*. Br Liju, Br Prince, Br Shijin Dev and Br Ajin C. received the order of *Heupathiaknousa* (Sub-Diaconate). Br George Kutty, studying in Rome, received the order of *Heupathiaknousa* (Sub-Diaconate) in Rome from Bishop Stephan Chirapanath. Due to Corona restrictions, Br Mahesh Mario and Br Jose Mon received the major order of Diaconate on 27 April 2021 at Sangamam, which was supposed to be held at Palapallam on 8 May 2021.

The Brothers went home for vacation on 27 April 2021 since the *Viswasa Payirchi Vizha* (Vacation Bible School) for the catechism students was cancelled due to COVID-19 lock down in Tamilnadu. During their stay at Sangamam, they were introduced and instructed on the topics of Safe Environment Policy (Guidelines for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons) of the Eparchy, Statutes of the Major Seminarians and about the Silver Jubilee Action-Plan.

We do believe that the Lord will continue to strengthen and prepare the seminarians for His Vineyard. We also seek God's intervention and inspiration to dwell upon the young minds to choose vocation to priesthood. We are grateful to the benefactors who through the *Sponsor a Seminarian Program* support the Diocese.

You can support the missionary activities by sponsoring a Seminarian in his formation:

Please write / mail to us for any enquiry / details. We shall contact you with all further details soliciting your generous support:

Postal Address:

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YOUTH FEST 2021

The Eparchial Movement of Youth Apostolate conducted Jubilee Year special cultural competitions in the month of April 2021. Prove yourself, Just a Minute Speech and WhatsApp Status Creation were the individual competitions. The group competitions had been Song, Dance, Choreography and Mime. '25 years of Eparchy of Thuckalay' was the main theme for the Youth Fest.

The Forane level competitions were held on 14 April 2021. Members of the Diocesan Executive Team were given the responsibilities to conduct the events. Youth Forane Directors oversaw the programme. The individuals and groups that secured first two places at the Forane level took part in the final competition conducted on 24 April 2021 at St. Joseph's Church Campus, Soosaipuram.

The Youth Fest began with the inaugural address delivered by Rev. Fr. Antony Jose. The Youth Fest witnessed competitive spirit among all the participating teams from various parishes. The Fest was very colourful and appreciated by the youth of the Diocese. Christ the King Unit Palapallam and St. Xavier's Unit Varuthattu were declared joint Champions and St. Antony's Unit Vayalankarai were the runners up. The prize distribution function was presided over by Mr. S. Isias, Principal of St. Alphonsa College of Arts and Science, Karinkal. The TCYM expressed joy and gratitude to Rev. Fr. Subin Scaria, Forane Director of Soosaipuram and the youth of St. Joseph's Unit Soosaipuram who helped to arrange the venue for the finals.



INTENSIVE TAMIL COACHING CLASSES



The Diocese of Thuckalay appreciates the women missionaries from different parts of Kerala, who are providing selfless service in our missions. We believe, to understand the way of life of the people we serve, we need to know the language of the place. In order to preach the Gospel and to share one's faith with the people, the local language is essential. Realising its importance, the religious Sisters of the Eparchy, both young and old, made efforts to learn Tamil language in their own missions. The Diocese organized coaching classes to learn Tamil from the first week of January 2021, on every Saturday. Continuous and intensive training was provided to the sisters from 5 to 13 April 2021 from 9.30 AM to 12.30 PM at Sangamam. The Tamil teachers who provided service were Mr Kamala Selvaraj, Mr Selvamani and Mr Ayyappan. The Diocese is grateful to the trainers for strengthening our missionary spirit through this effort.



Demise of Rev. Fr John Nattunilathu MST

We are grieved to announce the passing away of Rev. Fr John Nattunilathu MST in a road accident on 2 April 2021. While Fr John was travelling to a mission station early in the morning, he collided with a truck and died on the spot. We pray for the departed soul and express our condolence to MST community. Fr John had worked in our Eparchy for five years and has been instrumental in organizing everything for building the Church at Anumugam. On 6 April 2021, His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb, along with some priests and parishioners, offered a Requiem Mass and prayed for the departed soul in the Anumugam Parish. RIP

Blessing of THE ADDITIONAL BLOCK OF KARUNAI ILLAM

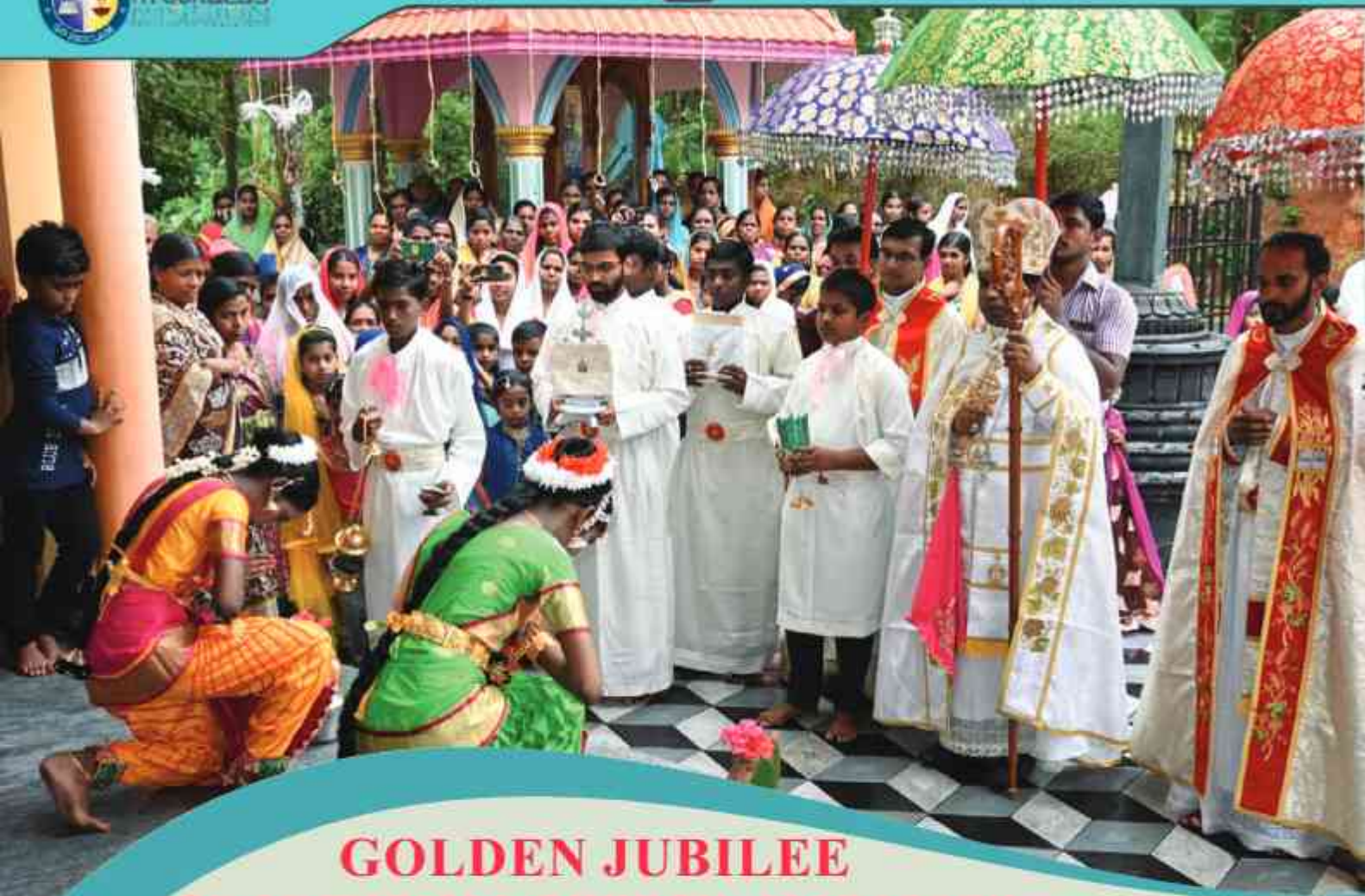
Missionary life and spirit are very much ingrained in the lives of all the Religious Congregations serving in the Diocese. We all learn to live with minimum facilities for self and provide the maximum for the people we serve. For many years the ASMI Sisters ministering in Karunai Illam have been staying in an extremely limited space with bare minimum facilities. It was a long felt need to have some additional rooms for the Sisters to reside. Through the prayers and hard work of the Sisters and the support of the benefactors, they have constructed an additional block for their residence along with the convent building on the vacant terrace on the ground floor. His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb blessed the new block on 7 April 2021 in the presence of Curia Members, Parish Priest and the ASMI Sisters. We thank God for providing these facilities for the sisters.



ALTAR BLESSING AT ANAYADI



The Parish Priest and Faithful of St. George Mission, Anayadi had taken initiative to construct a new altar in the sanctuary of the Church and it was blessed on 22 April 2021. The holy altar is the focal point in our Christian faith and draws our attention to re-live Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. It is on this alter the bread and wine through the mystery of transubstantiation becomes the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We congratulate and appreciate the efforts of Rev. Fr Vinu Joseph, Parish Priest of Anayadi and all the parishioners.



GOLDEN JUBILEE OF ST THOMAS CHURCH, MARAPADY

With Manjalumoodu Mission as Centre, the pioneer missionary Rev. Fr Joseph Madathil began many mission stations like Thettivilai, Mukkootukal, Malaicodu, Karodu and Marapaddy. Rev. Fr Cyriac Kootumelil was the Assistant Parish Priest who helped him in this mission. In 1970, near the house of Mr Muttupillai at Marapaddy, a thatched house was built for the Catholics to gather for their prayers. At first 6 families joined the mission. Among them are Mr Muthunayagam and Mr Rasalraj. On 3 July 1972, Fr Joseph Madathil baptised 36 members and later in the same year Archbishop Antony Padiyara baptised another 33 members.

Rev Fr Jacob Kadathukalam became the Mission in-charge in 1973. He worked till 1975. Late Fr Cyriac Kootummel bought a piece of land and built a Church in 1975 and dedicated it to St. Thomas the Apostle. The Sacred Heart (SH) Sisters reached Marapaddy in 1971 under the leadership of Sr Isabella and Sr Lissy Jose. In 1998, the Mission became an independent Parish and Rev. Fr Geo Choozhikunnel was appointed its first Parish Priest. He built the present presbytery in the year 2000. Rev Fr Tomy Alappattukunnel CSSR renovated the Church and it was blessed by then Bishop of Thuckalay and now Major Archbishop Mar George Cardinal Alencherry.

Due to COVID restrictions the year long Golden Jubilee celebrations were concluded in a simple manner on 13 April 2021 with solemn Holy Qurbana. A brief meeting was held in the Church itself during which all the pioneering missionaries were remembered gratefully. On behalf of the Eparchy, the Bishop Mar George Rajendran sdb thanked all the faithful, Fathers and Sisters for their dedicated ministry in Marapady. The Diocese congratulates and gives its best wishes to Rev. Fr Vinod, Parish Priest and to all the parishioners. We offer our prayers for the strengthening of faith at Marapady.



FEAST OF ST GEORGE

Feast of St George, the second Patron of the Diocese was celebrated on 24 April 2021. It was also the feast of Bishop Mar George Rajendran sdb. A special function was held at Sangamam to celebrate these twin feasts. All the priests and some representatives from the religious sisters were present for the function. The celebration started with the priests' conference. The Sisters joined for the prayer session at 12.30 PM. The celebration concluded with the felicitation for our Bishop and agape. It was a nice opportunity to gather as a family to thank the Lord for all His blessings. We pray that the Lord continues to shower His abundant blessings upon our Diocese and our Shepherd through the intercession of St. George.

PRIESTS CONFERENCE

The Priests Conference was held on 24 April 2021 on the feast of our beloved Bishop Mar George Rajendran sdb. The meeting commenced at 10.30 AM at Sangamam. All the priests from the Eparchy participated in it. All the departments and pious associations in the eparchy were given time to present their programs and activities. Vocation crisis in the Diocese was the topic that was seriously dealt with and the entire Presbyterium looked at this issue and contributed valuable suggestions to promote vocations to priesthood and religious life in the Eparchy. The Bishop delivered the concluding address and guided the Presbyterium to have more hope to face the challenges we face amidst the current Covid-19.





MAUNDY THURSDAY

Maundy Thursday marked the commemoration of the institution of the Lord's Supper was observed on 1 April 2021. The faithful come to Church in the evening for re-enacting the washing of the feet and for the Holy Qurbana. After the Mass, as per the tradition of the Syro Malabar Church, the faithful gather in front of the Church with specially made unleavened breads being brought from home to the Church. The priest blesses the breads symbolically and the family members take the breads home. The eldest member of the family explains the Paschal tradition. He then breaks the unleavened bread and along with special milk shares them with other members of the family, thus commemorating the Paschal night of the Israelites.





GOOD FRIDAY

The Cross involves death as depicted in the passion narratives. Although the death of Jesus was something very cruel, it was a death accomplished out of love. The Cross is a radical expression of love for others. On 2 April 2021, all the parishes commemorated the Good Friday with prayers and meditation. Since Covid-19 protocol was in place, some parishes avoided using the public road for the Way of the Cross and confined themselves to their church campuses.



MIGRANTS ONLINE MEET

The Commission for Migrant Mission in the Diocese of Thuckalay is involved in coordinating the faithful of the Diocese who are residing / working / studying outside the jurisdiction of the Diocese, within India and Abroad. The Commission organises online meets at least twice a year in the seasons of Christmas and Easter and enquire about their spiritual welfare. Rev. Fr Sumesh, Director of the Commission, coordinates the various groups in different cities and towns organised the Online Migrant meeting on 9 April 2021. His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb joined the meeting and gave an Easter message of peace and blessings at this difficult time of pandemic and urged upon the participants to remain rooted to our faith and with God's blessings we will have the strength to go through these moments. Majority of the migrants from the Diocese participated and expressed their joy of being in touch with the Mother Church.



EASTER




Holy Week culminates with the cheerful celebration of the Easter Vigil. All the parishes had the Easter Vigil Holy Qurbana on the night of 3 April 2021 or on the early morning of 4 April 2021. His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb led the Easter Vigil Service at Jaya Matha Church, Nithravilai which commenced at 10:00 PM. It was good to see our faithful taking part in the celebrations with great enthusiasm. We believe that the Risen Christ will bring relief during the time of the pandemic to the individuals who are suffering and solace and peace in the families and faithful.

Alleluia! He is Risen



NEED PRAYER SUPPORT!


The Diocese has prayer groups.
Please write the following and send SMS
 +91 94871 65903:

Name:

Place:

Intentions:

In detail you wish to express,

 : bishopofthuckalay@gmail.com

First Holy Communion at Karodu and Munchirai



In the year of Silver Jubilee, the Diocese of Thuckalay has been blessed with children who received the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. On 24 April 2021, St George Church, Munchirai celebrated the feast of its patron St George. On this occasion Bishop Mar George Rajendran sdb celebrated Holy Qurbana and administered the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist to 25 children. On the very same day, St Joseph's Church, Karodu began the Church Feast and hoisting the flag followed by a solemn Holy Qurbana led by the Bishop during which 23 children received the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.



Abundance *in spite of* Disability

Ms S. Soumya of Jothi Nilayam Special School

Born with mental disabilities, Soumya, born on 20 December 1999 was fully dependent on her parents (Mr S. Sahaya Raj, Mrs R. Anitha) for most routine tasks. She was not able even to move from one place to another. The situation was very painful to the parents who were feeding the family with their daily wages, which is not sufficient for all the members. At this juncture of big agony, at the age of 8, Soumya was brought to Jothi Nilayam Special School at Chevilai, Kanyakumari District, run by SABS sisters in the Diocese of Thuckalay.

Continuous care and vocational training have changed the total life of Soumya and today she is one of the best students in the district of Kanyakumari and she has secured many prizes and awards in different levels like Special Olympics, Cultural competitions, Drama competition, Speech competition, Clay modeling, to name a few. Today she is so much confident in herself and she is ready to take up any initiative in life. She confirms, "Teachers and my parents are my backbone here. We may not be able to do different things but we do things differently and we are happy to be called as differently abled children. Before, most of the people were looking at me with some prejudices that I am not able to do anything. Today they do not bully, they do not care how I look, but they just love me."

What has changed the life of Soumya? It is none other than the love which was shared by parents, religious sisters, teachers and friends at this happy home. Soumya comments, "I feel that I am more accepted here and it is the reason behind my success". Soumya is an exemplary model for many, who are discouraged by different reasons in life. "Nothing is impossible to God", Jothi Nilayam Special School runs their daily activities on this basic divine principle. Today the family of Soumya rejoices much on this unbelievable change and progress of their child. While we interview her, she is very busy making floor mats and we are wonderstruck at the speed with which she does the work.

Let us thank and praise the Lord for his intervention in bringing about an honourable living to many differently abled persons through the dedicated services of the religious sisters.



For more information on the services for the differently abled persons by the SABS Sisters:

Rev. Sr Linse Vallomthara

Principal

Jothi Nilayam School for the Differently Abled
 Chevilai, Palapallam, Kanyakumari District
 Tamilnadu – 629 159

Phone: +91 75986 17704

E-mail: jothinilayam2009@gmail.com



In Persistent Love of God

the Mission with a special design

The task of mission is central to the life of the Church. It brings

the presence of Jesus into every human situation and life, aiming at the conversion and formation of individuals, the building up of Christian communities that in turn can evangelize leading to the permeation and transformation of societies and cultures with Gospel values – making all creation new. Eparchy of Thuckalay as a mission territory of the Syro-Malabar Church in Tamilnadu takes up this great invitation of the Church to share the love of God with other people belonging to other faiths and other Christian denominations.

After 25 years of the Diocesan missionary service in the district of Kanyakumari and Shenkottai Taluk in Tirunelveli, the boundary of the Diocese of Thuckalay was extended by the Supreme Roman Pontiff, Pope Francis, on 9 October 2017 from Kanyakumari to Madurai including the districts of Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi, Ramanathapuram, Virudhunagar, Sivagangai, Theni and Madurai of the state of Tamilnadu and at present the total area comes under our Diocese is 32,374.30 sq. kms. With limited resource, it is a great challenge for the Diocese to begin new services at these extended territories even though it is a big need at various places. As a result of long hours of prayers and fasting, the first mission centre was opened up at Madurai in 2018 and not so late the second one was began at Tirunelveli. Amidst various financial difficulties, after the inter-diocesan meetings held in the months of February and March in 2019 different dioceses belonging to the Changanacherry province have offered their generous help for the development of the extended mission territory. Changanacherry Archdiocese has adopted Virudhunagar Mission for the pastoral care and appointed Rev. Fr Peter Kizhakayil as the first missionary there on 16 May, 2019. On 30th of the same month the mission work was started in a rented house at Athumedu, Sivanthinagar. From there he started visiting houses in nearby villages and has kept a good relation with the people. Till 13th September, he continued to stay at the same house and by the time he found that there was a family originally from Shenkottai Syro Malabar Mission. It was a great help at primary stages for Fr. Peter to find out new places for his mission services. He was organizing various pastoral activities like house visits, prayer services, counselling, etc. and people started coming for adoration to the Blessed Sacrament, Holy Qurbana and other pious activities. "The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord." (ACTS 11:21). As a part of the mission expansion in Virudhunagar district one tuition centre was established in front of the house of Mr. Michael (one who is originally from Shenkottai Mission) with the help of two teachers. Around



30 children were participating for the tuition classes. When the number increased, centre was shifted to another place owned by a well-wisher named Mr. Sebastian. But there were so many difficulties hindering the smooth running of the mission. The same difficulties forced Fr. Peter to quit the place and leave all the good works which he had already started. "For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart." (JEREMIAH 29:11-12). It is the reason that God gave more time to Fr. Peter to spend more time before the Blessed Sacrament during the Corona lockdown. Fr. Peter says, <<there were moments in which I said that I am alone and I am so tired. But the words of the Lord echoed in my ears, "See, the Lord's hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear." (ISAIAH 59:1)>>.

After a few days, people started coming for prayers, talks, counselling, Holy Mass, visit to the Blessed Sacrament and other pious activities. By this time Fr. Peter was searching for other missions in nearby places. Later, in a village called O. Kovilpatty, Fr. Peter got a house on monthly rent and started a prayer house and a tuition centre. Around 37 children were coming in the beginning with the help of a teacher but later for some social issues they were supposed to abandon the house. After all these glitches, with the help of some protestant members of World Vision Organization, they restarted the tuition centre. It was a new opening for the mission services and those protestant members later joined to our community. During the corona season, while people were travelling much with the restrictions, a number of relief kits were prepared and distributed among the poor village people. Catechism classes are also conducted for different age groups. The visits of the Bishop, Vicar General, and other priests were of great comfort during the trials. Christmas 2020 was an unforgettable moment for the Virudhunagar mission. On Christmas Eve, five families joined the community and nine people received baptism and four received the First Holy Communion. Altogether 60 people participated in the Christmas celebrations. On 6 January 2021, around 70 people participated for the Denha celebrations. On the same day Fr Peter was asked to vacate the house and it was a great pain not only for Fr Peter but also for all the faithful who had been harboured in the Lord's name. But God had greater plans for Virudhunagar Mission. "An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise and take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you" (MATHEW 2:13). Within a short time, they found another place nearby and on 5 February 2021 Mar Thomas Tharayil, Auxiliary Bishop of Changanacherry together with Mar. George Rajendran sdb paid a visit to Fr. Peter and Mar Thomas Tharayil stayed with him over night. It was a blessed moment for the mission to be recognized as the most important moment in the life of the Church. Today, even though there are difficulties both financial and social, God continues to lead Fr Peter and the faithful to propagate His kingdom among the people.

In Conversation with

REV. FR MATHEW THEKKEKUTT



A Missionary at the Door Step of the Faithful

Thuckalay Tidings is happy to obtain the views of Rev. Fr Mathew Thekkekutt, Diocesan Priest on his life and mission in the Diocese.

Tidings: Fr Mathew, tell us about your siblings.

Fr Thekkekutt: We are 10 siblings in the family. We have only one sister, who is a religious sister with Daughters of St. Joseph. We are 9 brothers and I am the youngest in the family. Four of us are priests – while I am a priest of the Diocese of Thuckalay, one of my brothers is a missionary in the Diocese of Raipur, another brother is serving in the Diocese of Rome, Italy and one is a religious priest with the MCBS.

Tidings: Indeed, a large family and half the family is dedicated to serving God and His people. Would you mind sharing with us about your vocation to priesthood?

Fr Thekkekutt: I finished my SSLC examination in 1977. My elder brother Fr. Cyriac Thekkekutt MCBS inspired me to join the seminary. It wasn't easy. As a boy, I had spent long hours of prayers in my Parish Church, dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima before I could take the final decision. I was constantly directed to move forward by the motto of the seminary Cult, Culture and Cultivation. After PDC, I was sent to St. Joseph's Major Seminary, Carmelgiri, Aluva for Philosophy. Within one year, I had to discontinue due to health issues. Meanwhile Archbishop Mar Jacob Thoomkuzhy directed me for degree studies at S B College, Changanacherry. I rejoined my Philosophy studies at Dharmaram College, Bangalore and staying at San Thome Study House at Hulimavu. I went on to study Theology at Dharmaram. Tribulations began, I was sent back home due to some misunderstanding. I tried to complete Theology as a lay person, but I couldn't complete. With assistance from a friend of mine, I began to work in Thumsup, Ludhiana. I attended Holy Qurbana on Fridays and Sundays. I got an opportunity to visit and pray at Mother Theresa's Missionaries of Charity convent every second Saturday of the month. The core desire of mine kept ringing in my heart. I strongly believed that the Lord was purifying me for a life of priesthood. Promotions and higher perks did not satisfy me. I resigned my job after two and half years and in 1993 I rejoined in Dharmaram College to continue my theology studies as a lay person. Fr. Thomas Aykara CMI, President of the Institute introduced me to Bishop Fulgence Le Roy OSB, Bishop of Pietersburg, South Africa and he invited me to join his Diocese and made all arrangements to complete my studies. When I completed my theology studies in 1996, I went to South Africa on visiting visa. Some technical



fulfilments failed me and I had to return to India. When I heard of the erection of the new Diocese of Thuckalay, with the permission of Bishop Fulgence, I approached Mar George Alencherry. He received me to my great joy and I was sent to St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor for a pastoral course, while staying at Thazhathangady Church with Fr. Zacharia Kayithara, who was a pioneer missionary in the Thuckalay Mission under Archdiocese of Changanacherry. He implanted in me a broadminded missionary zeal. I was ordained on 31 December 1997 by Mar George Alencherry at Fatima Matha Church, Nedumanni.

Tidings: A long life to priesthood, Fr Mathew.

Fr Thekkekutt: Indeed, it was not a simple journey of formation but a pilgrimage and at times a pilgrimage to Calvary. But at each moment, I experienced the loving care of God and motherly concern of our Mother Mary.

Tidings: Please share with us, Father, about the kind of responsibilities you have held in the Diocese.

Fr Thekkekutt: There have been very challenging missions and parishes that I have served as a Parish Priest, namely, Mukootukkal, Karode, Kattathurai, Paraicode, Anayadi, Manjalumoodu, Palugal and Mezhakodu. I also served as the spiritual father for one year in the Seminary. I had held responsibilities as the Vicar General and Chancellor of the Diocese. Presently, I am the Assistant Parish Priest of St. Joseph's Church, Soosaipuram and the Chaplin of St. Alphonsa College of Arts and Science.

Tidings: Fr Mathew, enlighten us on one of the most challenging missions as a Priest of the Diocese of Thuckalay.

Fr Thekkekutt: In one of the parishes that I served, I found that the people were lacking in spiritual life as they had not truly understood the Christian Life and the Principles of the

Catholic Church. I began to teach them with firmness. There was a lot of opposition from a section of the faithful, who were regularly turning the minds of the youth against deep rooted policies and functioning of the Church. But I stood firm on what I was ought to do as a priest for his flock. Gradually, people of the parish understood the mission of the Church and grew in faith.

Tidings: What is the special step or the strategy that you undertook for faith formation among the people?

Fr Thekkekutt: Family prayer is one of the backbones of Christian faith. Let us remember Matthew 18:19-20, "... If on earth two of you are united in asking for anything, it will be granted to you by my Heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered in my Name, I am there among them". I am convinced, this begins in the family. I visited each and every family, interacted with them and prayed with them. I spent about two hours in one family. This strengthened the families and I believe I was enriched in my personal faith.

Tidings: Fr Mathew, what is that one thing that is responsible for joy in our Christian faith and spiritual life?

Fr Thekkekutt: Once again, it begins with family prayer and ends with community prayer in Uraviyams or as a community in the Parish. Rosary is a powerful means to reach God through Our Blessed Mother. Rosary has the power to heal and empower; brings contentment and joy. The various mysteries are from the Word of God. Every Word is powerful. Even the word 'Amen' has immense power. When Rosary is recited in faith, it does affect individuals, families and parish communities. Rosary is not merely a devotion to Mother Mary; rather Rosary is a reflection of the salvation, our redemption.

Tidings: How do we overcome the continuous pain and suffering that we undergo in our everyday life, Fr Mathew?

Fr Thekkekutt: The secret, with my own personal experience and as experiences shared by laypersons, is spending time in the Church. Kneeling in front of the Blessed Sacrament and pouring out every thought and feelings of oneself brings in the miraculous intervention of God. The peace that a true and open heart experiences in front of the Blessed Sacrament is immense. Ninety percent of a person's troubles find solutions when we kneel before the Blessed Sacrament. I prefer to open the Church and open my heart very early in the morning and close its doors long after the night fall.

Tidings: In comparison to your long struggle to become a priest, Fr. Mathew, what is your strength in priesthood?

Fr Thekkekutt: I find my joy through prayer and closeness with the Blessed Sacrament, in addition gaining strength through the recitation of the Rosary. It is not my merit, but there are many members of the family who are praying for me to be faithful. My brothers and sister and the extended family in the Church provides me all support to be close with God.

Tidings: Thank you very much, Fr Mathew. We would like to know more of your God experience. But we shall do the same at some other opportunity.

Fr Thekkekutt: God bless you!



THUCKALAY
MISSION

May 2021 : Marian Month

*A Month Dedicated for Devotion
to Our Blessed Mother Mary*

We are urged to take up pious activities such as

- ✓ Personal Rosary
- ✓ Family Rosary
- ✓ Community Rosary (*wherever possible, Catholic neighbours come together, maintain social distancing, follow the Covid-19 SOP and recite the Rosary loud*)
- ✓ Chain Rosary

Let us benefit the powerful fruits of reciting the Rosary.

May Lord Jesus Christ continue to bless each one of us through the ardent intercession of Our Blessed Mother and keep us all safe in His protective and consoling arm.



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