



# Bishop's *Circular*

For Priests / Sisters

**Bishop George Rajendran sdb**  
**Diocese of Thuckalay**

Bishop's House, P B No: 12, Thuckalay PO,  
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30 April 2022

Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

As the Church in South India rejoices and thanks our Holy Father Pope Francis for canonising Blessed Devasahayam Pillai on 15 May 2022, let us reflect on the life and the witness that he gives to us. **I am presenting a quite long biography of this great saint for our own edification as well as for the purpose of instructing our people about him. His life, I am sure, will boost the evangelising mission in our own Eparchy.** Devasahayam Pillai was born in the year 1712 in the hamlet called Nattalam of Vilavancode Taluk in the present district of Kanyakumari. His father was Vasudevan Namputhiri, a Brahmin, and his mother Devaki Amma of the Nair Caste. His name was Nilam, also called as Nilakandan. Following the matrilineal tradition, Nilam got the caste of his mother. When Nilam grew up into an adult and had a position in the royal court of the king, people appended the appellation Pillai to his name. Pillai was a suffix added to the names of those born in a high caste and who also rise to a high position in the society.

Nilakandan Pillai started his career as a soldier and he did very well in that profession and excelled his fellow soldiers in maturity of judgment and firmness of mind. He was also an official in the Nilakandaswamy temple at Padmanabhapuram and a palace official, working in the king's treasury. This job later brought him to Udayagiri fort as in one charge of accounts while the modernization of the fort was in progress under the efficient leadership of Eustache de Lannoy between the years 1741 and 1745. Nilakandan Pillai was the paymaster to the construction labourers of the fort. Nilakandan Pillai was by nature active, energetic and committed to his duties. Therefore, he was also dear to his superiors, especially to the king. He was a good person: enthusiastic, ingenious and with a natural inclination to oppose evil and to do good. He was greatly regarded for his high education, sharp intelligence and for his upbringing in martial arts.

Nilakandan Pillai was faithful to his duties as a Hindu. He was brought up in the Hindu faith according to the faith of the parents. Like them, he faithfully observed the practices of the religion such as religious worship. He followed the Hindu religious practices of the upper castes and therefore, he was devoted to Patra Kali and worshipped her. He also worshipped Siva and Anandavalli in the temple within Udayagiri Fort. He was regular to the worship at temples and to the home puja. He and his family were great benefactors to the temple at Nattalam and contributed annually to the temple festival. He was even associated with the protection of the temple. He married Bhargaviammal, a woman from a traditional family.

In 1741, Captain Eustachius De Lannoy, a Dutch naval commander, was sent on command of a Dutch naval expedition by the Dutch East India Company to capture Colachel, a port under the control of Travancore, and to establish a trading post there. In the battle of Colachel that followed between the Travancore forces

and De Lannoy men, the Dutch forces were defeated and the men were either killed or captured. Eustachius De Lannoy, his assistant Donadi and a few other Dutch soldiers were captured and imprisoned.

De Lannoy and the Dutchmen were later pardoned by the king, on condition that they serve in the Travancore army. De Lannoy later earned the trust of the king and went on to become the commander of the Travancore armed forces, winning many battles and annexing various neighbouring territories to Travancore.

It was during their influential roles under the King of Travancore that Devasahayam Pillai and De Lannoy became well acquainted. De Lannoy's Christian faith interested Devasahayam and De Lannoy enlightened him on the faith, leading to his conversion in 1745.

It is possible that some of those who trained him in the South Indian martial art and varmasastra were Catholic by religion and it is possible that in some way he came in contact with Catholic faith in his dealings with them. As an educated person he could have read some Christian books on Malayalam and Tamil, with both of which he was very well-versed.

During first months after he joined the Travancore army, De Lannoy fought under general Duijvenschot on the side of Travancore. De Lannoy also served as instructor in the use of flintlocks. At the end of 1742, De Lannoy reorganized the palace guards and got them fully trained in three months. The palace guards were so trained that they came to be armed and dressed like the Europeans. Marthanda Varma was pleased with that and made De Lannoy commander of the palace guards. De Lannoy trained the palace guards in three months so well that Marthanda Varma could send back the Madurai troops, thus saving for the king 60,000 Rupees per month.

The king was so pleased that he appointed De Lannoy successor to Duijvenschot as Venattu Kapittan (Captain of Venad). Soon, the rest of the army was thoroughly reorganized. Together with other Europeans in the army, De Lannoy played a key role in the modernization of Travancore army through "military academies" one of which was at Udayagiri. De Lannoy also constructed firearms and established gunpowder factories near Udayagiri. De Lannoy began improving the Udayagiri Fort by replacing the mud walls with brick ones. After De Lannoy was made Commander of Udayagiri, he married Margaret, the daughter of a Syrian Christian who was serving the Travancore kings and the English as interpreter at Anjengo.

The work of Nilakandan Pillai brought him in touch with De Lannoy again. Frequent high-level contacts brought them together and an intimate friendship blossomed between them. They would often spend time in personal conversation and which sealed their friendship further.

One day De Lannoy observed Nilakandan Pillai to be extremely sad and as a friend De Lannoy enquired about the cause of his excessive melancholy. Nilakandan Pillai then shared with De Lannoy about the losses he had incurred. After many losses, finally, as it were the last straw, some of his best bullocks had died. Nilakandan Pillai wondered whether the gods were angry with him despite the fact that he had been performing all his religious duties. He was also afraid if some persons were against him and had carried out some sort of a black magic against him, whereas in reality he had no enemies at all. Thus, Nilakandan Pillai was beset with a lot of doubts and fears.

Eustache De Lannoy was a great believer. De Lannoy consoled his friend Nilakandan by sharing with him his own faith as a Christian. He narrated to him the story of Job in the Old Testament, who was a

personification of unconditional trust in God in the face of unbearable tragedies. Nilakandan listened to him with great consolation. He was impressed by Job's sense of absolute confidence in God which was not evident in his knowledge of the Hindu faith.

Thus, the Word of God was sown on the soil of Nilakandan's heart. The ongoing discussions between both convinced Nilakandan Pillai of the truths of Christian faith and he decided to get baptized. He expressed his decision to his friend De Lannoy. De Lannoy sent Nilakandan with a letter to Fr Giovanni Battista Buttari SJ, who was the head of the Neman Mission and was residing at Vadakkankulam.

There was a reason why the Colonel sent his friend Nilakandan to a Jesuit Mission in Vadakkankulam, which was outside the kingdom of Travancore. Uppermost in the mind of De Lannoy was the Travancore Government's blanket ban on new conversions to Christianity. Except for the fisher people along the coast and in the interior hamlets, who had all already embraced Christianity, nobody could newly become a Christian.

Sometimes people had to go to the distant place of Verapuzha which was under the Dutch control to get baptized there. So, De Lannoy had to take an escape route to the Neman Mission near Vadakkankulam, beyond the Travancore border. Of course, he knew that it was a risky decision. Moreover, the Captain knew also that, being of a noble tribe, it was dangerous for Nilakandan Pillai to be baptized within Travancore, since the king of Travancore threatened with imprisonment and death every noble man who shall quit his court to become a Christian.

On arrival at Vadakkankulam, Nilakandan Pillai met Fr Buttari and placed before him his earnest desire to become a Christian and begged him for the grace of baptism. Nilam demanded immediate baptism. But for serious reasons, Fr Buttari wanted to defer it. Fr Buttari listened to him and told him to pursue a period of catechumenate, without specifying the length of that period. This he did, because he was aware that Nilakandan Pillai belonged to a noble caste and it was dangerous if the king knew about his turn over to the Christian faith. He wanted to test the maturity of his decision and the depth of his conviction in Catholic Faith. Fr Buttari may have even doubted the bona fide intention of Nilakandan since, because of the allurements of the world or because of the position he held, he could deny Faith.

During the period of catechumenate which extended for good nine months, Nilakandan stayed often at Vadakkankulam. Staying at Vadakkankulam offered another opportunity to Nilakandan to test his motives for becoming a Christian.

The village was infested with caste consciousness between the Nadars and the Vellalas, who were Catholics. Could one be a Christian and practice caste system? Should Nilakandan become a member of such a caste-ridden community? To these questions which swelled in his mind, the catechumen answered to himself that he wanted to become a Christian in the true sense of the word. He decided to become a true disciple of Christ and put an end to the system of the caste. Further, by becoming a Christian, a person of higher caste would lose his social status and would be considered equal to other Christians, who were considered as of lowest of people. In Travancore, the beginnings of Latin Catholicism were mainly among the lower castes. Nilakandan's identification with them would mean a downward mobility in all respects, socially, economically and even politically. Moreover, there was no one of his caste who had become Christian. The Kings' court, in which he was working, was dominated by Brahmins, who would detest his being a Christian. It would be dangerous to his life. But he was firm in his decision and assured Fr Buttari, that he was ready to give up even the service of the King to know the true God. He was prepared to sacrifice all advantages on earth, and even the very life itself.

For nine months, Nilakandan Pillai went up and down to Vadakkankulam and learned the truths of Catholic faith and visited the community of Christians in the neighbourhood. The person who was to be his God-Father at baptism, Chithambram Pillai, was with him briefly in Travancore. He also helped him to see Christian communities for himself. This enabled him to get to know the customs and the life of the ordinary Christians of those times. In fact, the baptismal transformation was already in him. He could not be stopped any more. He wanted to be baptized out of a deep personal conviction.

Finally, Fr Buttari, finding in him not only the desire to be baptized but also a zeal to shed his blood for faith and even to give his life for the same, agreed to baptize Nilakandan. It took place on 14 May 1745. He was then 32 years of age. The ancient chapel of the Holy Family at Vadakkankulam in which the baptism was celebrated, still has an inscription about the event of the sacrament of regeneration. At baptism, Nilakandan was given the name Devasahayam. It was the Tamil rendering of the biblical name Lazarus. Devasahayam also received the Sacraments of Confession and Communion, as he spent some days or, perhaps, even months in Vadakkankulam area.

Devasahayam experienced great joy in living out his new found faith. Throughout the seven years of his life as a Christian the future martyr, thanked God every day with tears in his eyes for the Grace of conversion to Catholic faith. He firmly dedicated himself to the reading of Christian books and to the practice of virtues and faith. Devasahayam strove entirely to fulfil the duties of a good Christian, and made it a habit to go frequently on foot to a church distant about six leagues, there to recruit himself with the Bread of Angels after having cleansed his conscience by sacramental confession. Full of joy and peace, Devasahayam was eager to share his faith with others. Moved as it were by an irresistible force, he sought to bring others to the Christian faith.

Devasahayam felt that he must make his own wife a Catholic. Her immediate reaction to Devasahayam's suggestion was one of horror. She could not comprehend or visualize how like her husband she could also be counted among the Christians who were considered as the lowest in the society, among the wretched of the earth. However, Devasahayam won over his wife and she was ready to become a Catholic. Both of them went to Vadakkankulam and Bhargaviamma was baptized and given the name Gnanapoo, the Tamil rendering of Theresa.

Returning to Padmanabhapuram, Devasahayam wanted to be enlisted in the Christian army of the king which is the battalion consisting of Christian soldiers De Lannoy was commanding that battalion and it was only natural that Devasahayam wanted to be part of it. It was reported to the king and the king was surprised to hear that Nilakandan Pillai had become a Christian and wanted to enrol himself in the Christian militia. Devasahayam succeeded in converting some soldiers and others. He also won over to the faith in Christ some of his companions in the military, who decided to fight under the sign of the Saviour, to acquire not an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly kingdom. By becoming Christians, they lost the nobility of their tribe.

As Neelakandan, now transformed into Devasahayam the Christian, resumed his duties in the palace he became an eyesore to his co-workers, especially to the Brahmins. He stopped attending the religious rituals in the temple. He began to move freely among the low caste people in violation of caste principles. He began to argue against the superstitious beliefs of the Hindus. His heated arguments with Brahmin priests and learned teachers, who wanted to re-convert him, made many of Hindu colleagues angry. He began to decline prasadam (sacred food from the temple) offered by the Brahmin priest.

Further, the king Marthanda Varma was sometimes apparently a little tolerant towards Christians. He accepted the gift of a specially made cot from De Lannoy, with a Cross sculptured into the timber of the cot. He also allowed his house to be blessed by a Christian priest who conducted the ceremony wearing the cope. All these infuriated the Brahmins. Then, Fr. Buttari was constructing a church on the land donated by the Prince, who was to succeed the king in the kingdom of Travancore. The same Prince had allowed the construction of the church. Devasahayam was in contact with this Prince. This added to the anger of the enemies of Christian faith who waited for an opportunity to bring the king back to the hatred of Christian religion and make him hate Devasahayam.

As Fr Buttari was in need of timber for the construction of the church, he was building on the land donated by the Prince. He wrote to Devasahayam Pillai to obtain from the government the permission for wood for that church. He approached the Dalava (supreme governor) who was a Brahmin. This Brahmin immediately got angry with Devasahayam and stated cursing the Christians. He threatened with the exile of Christians.

Planning to have Devasahayam arrested, tortured and put to death, the Dalava and the Secretary forged many false accusations also against him. They went immediately to the King and accused Devasahayam of influencing the heir apparent to donate the land for the construction of the church. Angrily, they impressed upon the King of the need to stop Devasahayam and put an end to the influence of Christians. They warned the king that if Devasahayam was not stopped, the region of the king would disappear. At this, the king ordered the arrest of Devasahayam. This planned representation of the King's secretary together with that of that Brahmin, were done in secret. But some good friends of Devasahayam brought it to his knowledge and warned him to keep himself safe. He did not lose courage. He considered it a shameful cowardice of a Christian to flee from the court at the well-planned revenge of the enemies of faith. He continued to live courageously carrying out the duties of a good Christian.

Devasahayam frequented to a church at a distance of 18 miles away from the palace. He often went to that church and nourished himself by the bread of angels after having purified his conscience by the sacrament of confession. Even, now, as he knew that he would be soon put in prison, he would certainly have gone to consult Fr Buttari at Vadakkankulam, from whom he got good counsel and encouragement. He visited the Christian community with whom he spent his first days as a new Christian, before he returned and was ready for the call from the king.

The order of the King was brought to Devasahayam, who conveyed the news to his friend De Lannoy. He encouraged Devasahayam to be firm in his faith despite all persecution and pleaded the authority for some more time. Then De Lannoy took Devasahayam to Fr Barreiros SJ who heard his confession and gave him communion which strengthened him further.

Thus, Devasahayam was prepared like a lamp to be sacrificed just as the martyrs of the early Church willingly sacrificed their lives. He was arrested on 23 February 1749, almost four years after his baptism.

Devasahayam Pillai was brought before the king. The king told Devasahayam to renounce the Christian faith and threatened him with cruel punishment if he refused to leave the religion of the Christians. He replied politely to the king and asserted his firm resolve to stick on to the faith even to the point of death. The king also promised a high position in his kingdom if he denied his Christian faith. Enraged at the firm resolve of Devasahayam to cling on to Christian faith despite threats and allurements, the king ordered him to be immediately put in prison. Devasahayam was immediately put in a prison. This was the time when a great persecution broke out against all Christians except those along the coast. Heavy punishments and fines were inflicted on the Christians, many of whom escaped to mountains and some even fled out of the

kingdom. A few even denied the faith and many of them came back later on. But most of the people were brave at the face of persecution.

Despite undergoing various forms of tortures in the prison, Devasahayam spent long time in prayer and meditation. A number of people came to meet him and to ask for his prayers. One of them was his own jailer, the executioner. The Jailer had no issue. He and his wife came to the Devasahayam asking for his blessing and prayers. He spoke to them of trust in God and assured them that God would hear their prayer. Their prayer was eventually granted. This made the executioner very kind and sympathetic towards him.

By the kindness of the soldiers, Devasahayam was able to meet some priests in the prison. One of them was Fr Pimentel SJ, to whom Devasahayam shared the great joy he experienced in the grace of having to suffer for Christ. Fr Thommaso de Fonseca SJ, Parish Priest of Kottar, came to meet him at night and administered him the Sacrament of Reconciliation and gave him Holy Communion.

The prison guards were so kind to Devasahayam Pillai that they offered him an opportunity to escape and even told him to avail himself of the opportunity to run away. He consulted De Lannoy and Fr. Buttari. Both of them were of the opinion that it was cowardice to escape but a bravery to face death for one's faith. Devasahayam was encouraged by their response and decided in prayerful discernment to face the challenge of death in joyful expectation.

To the people who came to meet him, Devasahayam spoke on the passion of Christ. He made one person from the coastal area read the Bible to him and to the people. Since hundreds of people started visiting Devasahayam daily at Peruvilai and the place of imprisonment was turning out into a place of prayer and meditation, the king was disappointed that the purpose of the tortures inflicted on Devasahayam was not only being defeated but on the contrary it gave Devasahayam more and more opportunity to bring many people to Christian faith, he ordered that he be taken to Aralvaimozhi and be shut up in prison there. He had to endure many more tortures.

There are different accounts regarding the martyrdom of Devasahayam Pillai. In 1752, the original order of the King and his Dewan was to deport him from Travancore, into the Pandya country, at Aralvaimozhy. He was let off in the forested hills near Aralvaimozhy. There, he is believed to have begun deep meditations, and the people from the adjacent villages began visiting the holy man. However, the high caste Hindus plotted to do away with Devasahayam.

Some soldiers were sent to the forested hills and they tried to shoot Devasahayam, but were unable to fire; after which he took the gun in his hands, blessed it and gave it back to the soldiers to shoot him to death, if they wished to. The soldiers took the gun back and fired at him five times. His body was then carelessly thrown out near the foothills at Kattadimalai.

It was at Kattadimali in Kanyakumari district that Devasahayam Pillai died on 14 January 1752. His mortal remains were interred near the altar inside St Xavier's Church, Kottar, Nagercoil, which is now the Cathedral of the Diocese of Kottar.

When Devasahayam Pillai was declared a Blessed on 2 December 2012, Pope Benedict XVI during his Angelus Message said in Italian: "Today in Kottar, India, Devasahayam Pillai, a faithful layman, who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and died a martyr, was proclaimed Blessed. Let us join in the joy of the Church in India and pray that this newly Beatified sustain the faith of the Christians of that great and noble country." Then he addressed the crowds in English: "I welcome all gathered here today to pray with me. I especially greet

the people of Kottar who celebrate today the beatification of Devasahayam Pillai. His witness to Christ is an example of that attentiveness to the coming of Christ recalled by this first Sunday of Advent. May this holy season help us to centre our lives once more on Christ, our hope. God bless all of you!”

**As we read the life of Blessed Devasahayam Pillai and prepare ourselves to honour him a saint, let us joyfully celebrate this great event with our people in a prayerful way. I encourage all of you to make some reflections on the life of this great son from our own soil in your homilies on 15 May 2022, the canonisation day. I shall personally attend the celebrations in Rome on 15 May 2022. Let us ask his intercession as carry out our various ministries!**

## NEWS AND EVENTS

**Consecration of Virudunagar Mission Parish:** On 30 May 2019, Fr Peter Kizhakeyil was appointed by the Archdiocese of Changanacherry to Virudunagar district to start the mission work. The Archdiocese of Changanacherry bought 34.5 cents of land on 8 April 2021 at O. Kovilpatti, a village situated 15 kilometres away from the city. On 31 October 2021, the foundation stone was laid down for a Church by Mar Joseph Perunthottam, Archbishop of Changanacherry. Within five months, the construction of the Church was completed with the financial help from St George Forane, Edathua and other benefactors from Kerala. On 3 April 2022, the Church was consecrated by Mar Joseph Perunthottam. I celebrated the Holy Qurbana and the Archbishop of Changanacherry delivered homily. Priests, Sisters, Seminarians and lay representatives from all the extended mission territories and Kanyakumari district participated in the event. I congratulate and thank Fr Peter Kizhakeyil, first vicar of the parish, for his missionary zeal and Fr Akash Keeranchira, second missionary priest from Changanacherry to Virudunagar mission.

**Priests' Conference:** An extra-ordinary Priests' Conference was held on 4 April 2022 at Sangamam to discuss and to finalize the policy of Thuckalay Priests' Welfare Association. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal presented the statutes of the Association and Fr Johnsila, procurator explained the financial position of the Eparchy and how much the Eparchy has to invest for Priests' welfare. After discussions and elections, I announced the names of following Fathers as governing body members: Fr Joshy Kulathumkal (President), Fr Joseph Santhosh (Secretary), Fr Geo Choozhikunnel (Treasurer), Fr Antony Jose (member), Fr Johnsila (member), Fr Dency Mundunadaackal (member), Fr Vinu D Joseph (member) and Fr Seby (member). Best wishes for the newly elected and ex officio members of the Governing body. After tea break, an open discussion took place regarding the construction of the Cathedral Church of the Eparchy. At the end, it was decided that a committee will be set up to study the way forward with regard to the construction.

**Send-off Gathering for Catechism Promoters:** Send-off gathering for catechism promoters was held on 4 April 2022 at 6.00 pm in Sangamam. All the promoters were invited. Vicar General, Director and Assistant Director of *Narchaithi Nilayam* were present for the meeting. The meeting was held in order to thank and to appreciate the services of promoters, who worked for 5 to 40 years. The promoters were given a solemn adieu. They were honoured with mementos and shawls. I appreciated and thanked their services to the Narchaithi Nilayam.

**Major Seminarians' Meet:** All Major Seminarians came to the Eparchy for their summer vacation on 5 April 2022 and on the same day evening the annual gathering was held in my presence at Sangamam. Except Cl. Georgekutty, who is in Rome, all the Major Seminarians were present for the meeting. The personal sharing of their Seminary experiences made us aware of the richness of formation that they receive in various Seminaries. Fr Thomas Pawathuparampil gave a message and Fr Joshy Kulathumkal provided the necessary instructions for their vacation ministries in the Eparchy. Cl. Linto was elected the leader of



Major Seminarians and Cl. Godwin as assistant leader. We wish them all fruitful time to know and love the Eparchy.

**Palm Sunday Celebrations and the Blessing of *Kalkurishu* and Renovated Madhubaha at Thakkalivilai:** Palm Sunday recalls the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and how he was greeted by the people waving palm branches. For us, it is a reminder that we need to welcome Jesus into our hearts and that we must be willing to follow him. This year, I celebrated the Palm Sunday in Thakkalivilai Parish. Liturgical celebrations started at 7.30 am in front of the old church building and at the end of the procession holding palm leaves, newly built *kalkurishu* in front of the new Church was blessed. The renovated Madhubaha was also blessed. I congratulate Fr Subin and all the parishioners for the efforts that they took for creating a beautiful and devotional atmosphere for prayer.

**Minor Orders and Vestition at Sangamam:** On 11 April 2022, Minor Orders were administered at Sangamam at 07.00 am. Cl. Alwin John, Cl. Bibin KJ, Cl. Bibin R Mathew, Cl. Jubin and Cl. Tony received their Cassocks. Cl. Antony Sunil received the Minor Order of *Karoyusa*. Cl. Albin Jose, Cl. Amento, Cl. Linto and Cl. Sanjo received the Minor Order of *Heupadiyaknusa*. Parents and family members of the Brothers who received Cassocks, Priests in-charge of the regency places and Curia members were present for the ceremony. Fr Thomas Pawathuparampil and Fr Joshy Kulathumkal were the concelebrants for the Holy Qurbana. Cl. Alwin John thanked everyone during the meal.

**Ordination to Diaconate:** On 12 April 2022, the Major Order of Diaconate was conferred to Cl. Ajin, Cl. Liju Marattukulam and Cl. Prince Cherippanattu at Varuthattu Parish Church. The liturgical celebration began at 5.30 pm and it was well animated by the major seminarians and parishioners. After the Holy Qurbana, a brief meeting was held inside the church and newly ordained Deacon Ajin C. thanked everyone. The programme ended with dinner. I thank wholeheartedly Fr Printo Kurias, Parish Priest, and the parishioners for organizing the entire event very well.

**Priests and Religious Recollection and Myron Blessing:** On 13 April 2022, the day before Maundy Thursday, the Eparchy observed a day of recollection for all its Priests and Religious. During the Holy Qurbana, the Myron was also blessed. All the Priests and Sisters joined in the prayer, adoration, confession and Myron blessing. At the end, my birthday was also celebrated. I thank each and every one for the time you spent to prepare for Easter and for wishing me in advance for my birthday.

**CRI Meeting and New Office Bearers:** The CRI meeting was held on 13 April 2022 at Sinai Retreat Centre, Kalluviali at 2.30 pm. The meeting was presided over by Fr Thomas Pawathuparampil, Vicar General. The CRI members including all the Major Superiors took part in the meeting. During the meeting the following members were elected as new office bearers: Rev. Sr Celia FCC - President; Rev. Sr Pavana CMC - Vice President; Rev. Sr Anu SH - Secretary and Rev. Sr Lins Vallavinthara – Treasurer. I extend my best wishes to the newly elected team.

**Maundy Thursday at Tirunelveli mission:** On Maundy Thursday we commemorate the institution of the Lord's Supper and the institution of the Priesthood. During every Holy Qurbana, we re-enact the words of Jesus: 'This is my Body. This is my Blood. Do this in remembrance of me'. The day long adoration helped us and the faithful, to keep watch and to be united in the agony of Jesus in Gethsemane. This year I celebrated Maundy Thursday liturgy with the migrant community at St George Mission, Thirunelveli. During the Holy Qurbana, foot washing ceremony was held. The traditional Pesaha Appam was broken and shared among those present. Almost fifty Catholics were present for the ceremony. The community also observed my birthday.



**Good Friday at Manjalumoodu and Karode Parishes:** On Good Friday, we recall the death of Jesus on the cross. The cross is a radical expression of love for others. On 15 April 2022, all the parishes commemorated the Passion and the Death of Jesus by participating in the liturgical ceremonies, taking part in the Way of the Cross and meditating on the mystery of the Cross. I participated at Manjalumoodu Forane Church for the first part of the Good Friday liturgical ceremony. At noon I moved to Karode Mountain in procession making the Way of the Cross. Many people from nearby parishes took part in it. This year we celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> year of climbing the Karode Mountain on Good Friday. Centralized sound system was arranged till the top. I appreciate Fr Ajeesh Attiyil, Parish Priest, for organizing the Way of the Cross very well.

**Easter Vigil at Malaicode Parish:** Holy week culminates with the great Easter Vigil. ‘The Lord is Risen indeed’ is the sum and substance of our faith and witness. All the parishes had the Easter Holy Qurbana on the night of 16 April 2022 or on the early morning of 17 April 2022. On 16 April at 10.00 pm I celebrated the Easter Vigil Holy Qurbana at Malaicode Parish. Procession with the statue of the Risen Lord and the distribution of the Easter eggs were the highlights of the celebration. It was good to see our faithful taking part in the celebration with great enthusiasm.

**Priestly Ordinations of Deacon Antony Mahesh and Deacon Josemon:** Every priest is a blessing to the Church and we have every reason to rejoice and thank God for the gift of two new Priests. Deacon Josemon was ordained priest on 20 April 2022 at St Thomas Church, Annikkarai. The ordination ceremony began at 9.30 am. The parents and relatives of Deacon Josemon and parishioners from his native parish, many priests and religious from Kerala participated in the ceremony. After the Ordination, the newly ordained priest, Fr Josemon celebrated his first Holy Qurbana. I appreciate and thank Fr Sumesh Vallyamthadathil, Parish Priest, and all the parishioners of Annikkarai for coordinating well the event.

Deacon Antony Mahesh was ordained priest on 23 April 2022 at Sacred Heart Forane Church, Padanthalumoodu. The ordination ceremony began at 2.30 pm. After the ordination ceremony, the newly ordained priest celebrated his first Holy Qurbana. The presence of staff and students from Becchi Don Bosco Theological Centre, Kavarapettai and representatives from Madurai and Virudunagar made it very eventful. I thank Fr Dency Mundunadackal, Parish Priest, for organizing the entire ceremony flawlessly.

**Missionaries’ Meet at Thenkasi Mission:** As part of the Silver Jubilee of Thenkasi Mission, a Missionary Meet was held on 22 April 2022 at Thenkasi. All the missionaries, both Priests and Religious Sisters, who worked in the Mission were invited. The programme began with lunch at Anbu Illam. It was followed by personal sharing of their experiences in the Mission. Everyone was inspired to hear the hardships the missionaries endured at the early period. Vicar General and I were present for the meet. At 5.00 pm, a solemn Holy Qurbana was held at Mekkarai Parish church. Representatives from all the Mission stations participated. I appreciate Fr Thomas Thakkalai for coordinating the event.

**Staff Day 2022:** An annual gathering of all Tamil Medium School Staff was held on 23 April 2022 at Kaluvilai. 143 staff working in our 9 aided schools attended the programme. The management bade farewell to three of the staff members, namely, Mrs Ramani Premala, who worked 35 years as teacher, Mrs Vijaya Kumari, who worked 25 years as clerk and Mr Robinson, who worked 28 years as office assistant in St James High School, Valiyavilai, Mar Mathew Kavukattu Memorial High School, Varuthattu and Holy Family Higher Secondary School, Mukkuttukal respectively. I presided over the function which commenced at 9:40 am and it came to an end by 11.00 am.

**Concluding ceremony of the Golden Jubilee of Munchirai Parish:** St George Parish, Munchirai completed 50 years of its existence in 2021. Due to covid pandemic the celebration was postponed to this year. On Sunday, 24 April 2022, at 4.00 pm, I celebrated the thanksgiving Holy Qurbana and Fr Robin Jose concelebrated with me. In the meeting held thereafter, all the Priests, Sisters and lay people who were involved in the pastoral mission were remembered. The community celebrated my feast day during the meeting. I used the opportunity to thank all the Fathers, especially Fr Jomon, SD Sisters and parishioners who are in the Parish.

**Priests' Conference and Feast Day Celebrations:** A special Priests' Conference was held at Sangamam on 25 April 2022 at 10.00 am. The Vicar General coordinated the Conference and I presided over it. During the meeting following major events took place:

- **Send off to Fr Mathew Mulangasseril MST:** After 22 years of compassionate service in the Eparchy of Thuckalay, Fr Mathew Mulangasseril is going back to his Society. During these years, he rendered his service in the following places holding various offices: Parish Priest of Varuthattu, Annikkarai, Palappallam, Perumchilambu, Cheenivilai, Kazhuvanthittai, Athencode, Diocesan Procurator, Director of Nambikkai Alayam and Director of Diocesan Estate at Kozhipporvilai. We thank God for the gift of Fr Mathew Mulangasseril to the Eparchy. On behalf on the entire Eparchial family, I express our heartfelt gratitude to him. His services will always be remembered in the annals of the Eparchy.
- **Welcome to Fr Akash Keeranchira:** Fr Akash, a priest from the Archdiocese of Changanacherry and appointed Assistant Priest in the Virudunagar Mission, was welcomed during the Priests' Conference.
- **Welcome to the New Priests and Fr Justin Cheruvelil:** The newly ordained priests, Fr Josemon and Fr Mahesh were welcomed officially to the presbyterium. Fr Justin Cheruvelil who completed his doctoral studies in liturgy was also welcomed to the presbyterium. We congratulate him for the successful completion of his thesis.
- **Feast Day Celebration:** After the Conference a special noon prayer service was conducted in the chapel by Rev. Sisters. We then gathered in the refectory. During the lunch, my feast was celebrated with due solemnity. Most Rev. Nazarene Soosai, Bishop of Kottar and Mar Vincent Paulos, Bishop of Marthandam and Provincial Superiors of Religious Congregations from Thuckalay Eparchy were special guests for the function. I thank all the Priests and the Religious for your prayers and wishes. In a special way, I thank Fr Thomas Pawathuparampil for organizing the whole programme very well.

**Golden Jubilee and Final Profession:** The Golden Jubilee of the religious profession of Sr Lizet FCC and Sr Rosikutty FCC was celebrated with concelebrated Holy Qurbana on 28 April 2022, Thursday at San Joe FCC Provincial House, Azhakiyamandapam. In my absence, Fr Thomas Sathianesan, Chancellor, was the main celebrant and Fr Joshy Kulathumkal delivered the homily. Sr Jesseentha FCC, who made her final profession on 27 April 2022, was also felicitated during the celebration. The Holy Qurbana was followed by felicitation meeting and meal.

**Graduation Day at St Alphonsa College:** The fourth Graduation Ceremony of St Alphonsa College of Arts and Science, Soosaipuram, Karungal was held on 29 April 2022 at 10.00 am in the College Multipurpose Hall. I presided over the Graduation Ceremony. The Chief Guest, Dr A. Suriliandi, Controller of Examination, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli presented the UG and PG Degrees to 273 candidates. In my presidential address, I congratulated all the Graduate and Post Graduate students and urged them to focus on the right things in their lives for their personal and societal development. The Chief Guest narrated a number of events from his childhood to motivate the students to work for success. Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Vicar General of the Eparchy, and Rev. Fr Antony Jose, Secretary and Correspondent of the College, also attended the event

## **INFORMATION**

- The National level St Vincent De Paul Society meeting was held at Sangamam on 3 April 2022.
- This year we have three regent Brothers from other Eparchies. They are Cl. Ajo Ishnasseril and Cl. Josin Adichilamakkal from the Eparchy of Kanjirapally and Cl. Sajan Puthenparambu from the Archeparchy of Changanacherry. We welcome them whole heartedly to our Eparchy and wish them fruitful ministry!
- Cl. Ajo Ishnasseril from the Eparchy Kanjirapally will be regent at Sangamam, Cl. Josin Adichilamakkal from the Eparchy Kanjirapally will be regent at KKSSS, Kalluvilai, Cl. Sajan Puthenparambu from the Archeparchy of Changanacherry will be regent at Bishop's House, Cl. Albin Kallummakkal (probation period) from Kumali Parish will be regent at St Mary's Minor Seminary Mukkoottukal and Cl. Divin Raj from Varuthattu Parish will be regent in Kayathar Mission
- The Major Seminarians were/are having the following common programmes in the Eparchy:
  - Psycho Sexual and Spiritual integration course by Sr Josephine CTC from 6-8 April 2022 at Sangamam.
  - Monthly Recollection in preparation for Major and Minor Orders and Vestition on 8 and 9 April 2022.
  - Tamil Course at Kalluvilai from 25 - 28 April 2022
  - Work camp at Kalluvilai from 29 April - 02 May 2022
  - Common Outing on 3 May 2022
- Brothers will go for their home vacation on 4 May 2022.
- Regarding VPV, it will be conducted in all the parishes from 15 - 29 May 2022. Fathers, who need seminarians for VPV, can contact Fr Joshy.
- The English Department of Alphonsa College organised a national level seminar on 5 April 2022.
- I am leaving for Europe on 3 May from Chennai International Airport to attend the Canonisation ceremony of Martyr Devasahayam Pillai. During my trip, I will visit all our Fathers staying in Europe. I request your prayers for a fruitful trip.
- Moth of May is dedicated to Our Blessed Mother, I wish every one of you a faith filled Marian month devotion in the parishes.

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

1 May 2022	-	St Joseph the worker
8 May 2022	-	World vocation prayer day
9 May 2022	-	Forane Priest conference (Padanthalumoodu and Nithravilai)
10 May 2022	-	Forane Priests conference (Thuckalay Plankalai and Soosaipuram)
12 May 2022	-	Forane Priests conference (Manjalumoodu, Kaliyal and Arukani)
14 May 2022	-	Priests conference: Thenkasi and Madurai mission
15 May 2022	-	Marian Senai Golden jubilee
15 May 2022	-	Canonisation of Blessed Devasahayam Pillai
21 May 2022	-	Vocation Seminar for girls
22 May 2022	-	Inauguration of 3 <sup>rd</sup> batch of Theology course
24 May 2022	-	Transfers
27-29 May 2022	-	Vocation camp at Minor Seminary
28 May 2022	-	Thenkasi Ecumenical and inter faith leaders meet
29 May 2022	-	Inauguration of CML activity year
31 May 2022	-	Marian month ends

## CONCLUSION

Dear Fathers, we are entering the month of May, which is dear to every Catholic. It is definitely a beautiful month in which we manifest our devotion to Mary, our mother, in a special way. It is also a grace-filled time for receiving the showers of blessings from our heavenly Mother. Just like the blooming lilies which beautify our gardens and refresh the air with their sweet fragrance, the presence of our blessed Mother beautifies our parish communities, removes every element of evil and spreads the fragrance of her maternal love, peace, serenity and harmony. Our Blessed Lord wants the heart of every Priest to be a home of Mother Mary, where she is the mother, guide and help. Let us give her the rightful place and honour her with profound love and devotion especially on her feast on 31 May.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**  
Bishop of Thuckalay

