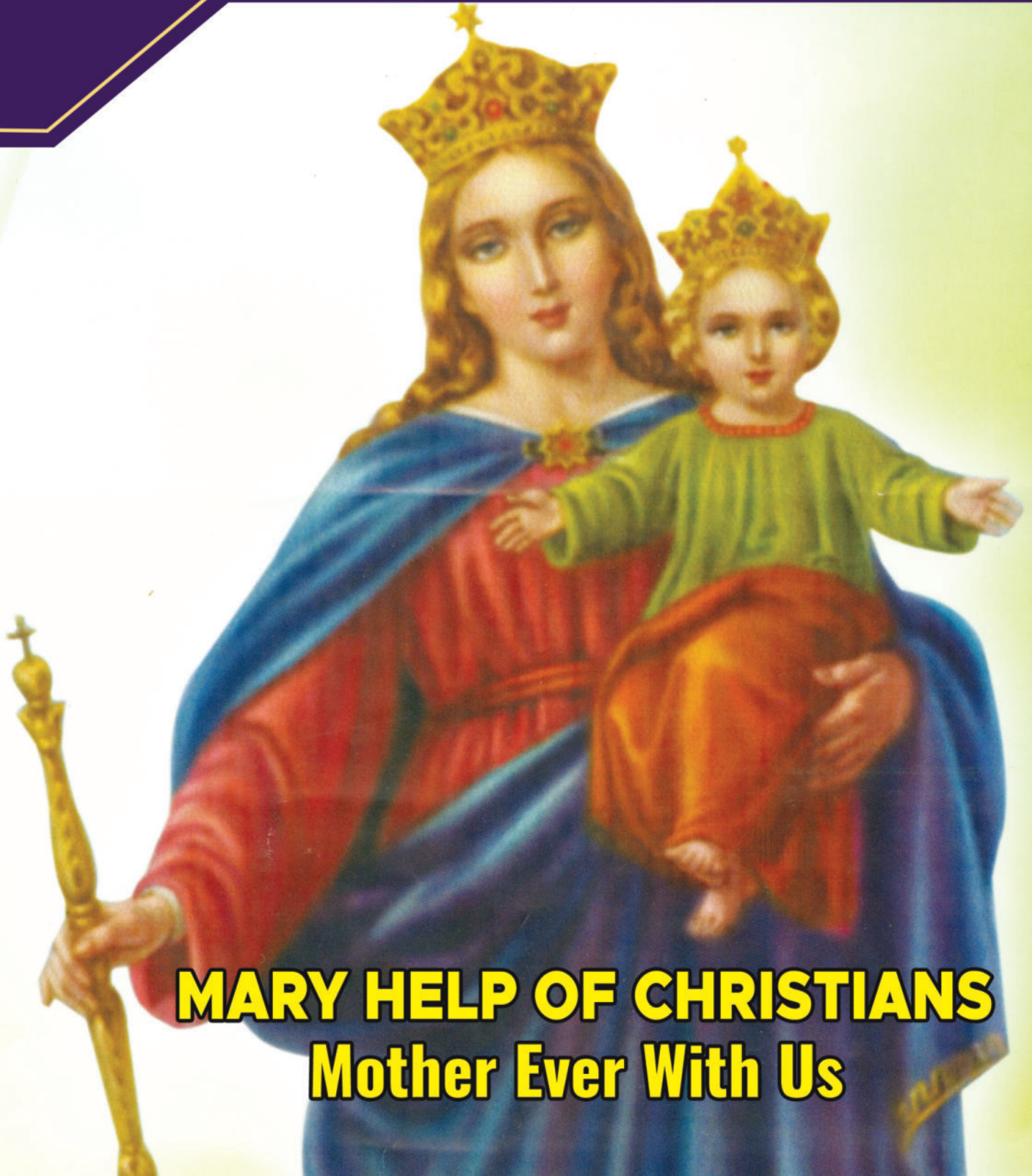


THUCKALAY TIDINGS

MAY 2023 | VOL. 3 | ISSUE 5

DIOCESE OF THUCKALAY



MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS
Mother Ever With Us



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THUCKALAY TIDINGS

May 2023 | Vol. 3 | Issue 5

A Monthly online newsletter of Diocese of Thuckalay

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Message

Dear Friends in Jesus Christ,
Greetings and best wishes from the Diocese of Thuckalay.

The month of May is a singular period for us to pay homage to our Blessed Mother Mary. She has played a unique role in salvation history. As the Mother of God, she was conceived without sin. By her own free will, she agreed to bring the “Word made flesh” (John 1:14), our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, into the world. Mary is foreshadowed as the one who would crush the head of the serpent in Genesis 3:15 through her Divine Son. Still, she in no way overshadows Him, nor would she ever wish to! Her life, as we surmise from the Gospels, was one of service and great devotion to Jesus. From the manger in Bethlehem where she gave birth to Him to Calvary in Jerusalem, where she stood by His cross in His crucifixion, she followed Him as a worthy disciple. Let us join the entire Catholic world in offering special honour to Our Blessed Mother during this month of May. Let us briefly reflect upon the role that our Blessed Mother plays in our lives.

Mary faced her life's journey with great realism, humanity, and practicality. Three words sum up Mary's attitude: listening, decision, and action. They are words that point out a way for us as we face what the Lord asks of us in life – Listening, decision-making, and action.

Listening: What gave rise to Mary's going to visit her relative Elizabeth? A word from God's Angel about Elizabeth, “In her old age, she has conceived a son” (Lk 1:36). Mary knew how to listen to God. It was not merely hearing but listening. It requires deep attention, serene acceptance, and total availability to God. It was not in the distracted way with which we sometimes face the Lord or others: we hear their words, but we do not listen. Mary was attentive to God. She listened to God.

Decision-making: Mary's life was one of contemplation and decision, not breathlessness or restlessness. As St Luke emphasises, “She kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19, 51). Moreover, at the crucial moment of the Angel's Annunciation, she also asks, “How shall this be?” (Lk 1:34). Yet she does not stop at the moment of reflection either. She goes a step further: she decides. She

does not live in haste but goes with haste only when necessary. Mary does not let herself be dragged along by events; she does not avoid the effort of taking a decision. And this happens both in the fundamental decision that was to change her life: “I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done according to your word” (Lk 1:38) and in her daily decisions, which are routine but also full of meaning.

Action: Mary set out on a journey and went with haste (Lk 1:39). Despite the difficulties and the criticism she would have met with because of her decision to go, nothing could stop her. And here she leaves with haste. In prayer, before God who speaks, in thinking and meditating on the facts of her life, Mary is not in a hurry, she does not let herself be swept away by the moment; she does not let herself be dragged along by events. However, when she has clearly understood what God is asking of her and what she has to do, she does not loiter, she does not delay; she goes with haste. St Ambrose commented: “There is nothing slow about the Holy Spirit.” Mary's action was a consequence of her obedience to Angel's words but was combined with charity: she went to Elizabeth to make herself useful, and in going out of her home, of herself, for love, she takes with her the most precious thing she has: Jesus. She takes her son.

Before I conclude my reflection, I want to thank you, dear friends, for your constant prayers and support to the mission Diocese of Thuckalay. These days the catechism children are having Summer Bible classes and soon there will be Vocation camps. We have arranged for two days retreat for the catechism teachers. While I keep every one of your intentions in my prayers, I request you to pray for our Diocese and our mission. God bless you all.

Yours in Christ,



+ **George Rajendran sdb**
Bishop of Thuckalay

PALM SUNDAY CELEBRATIONS


Palm Sunday commemorates the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, where Jesus was joyfully greeted by the people waving palm branches. It serves as a poignant reminder to welcome Jesus into our hearts and willingly follow his teachings. With all preparation, the Diocese celebrated Palm Sunday very meaningfully on 02 April 2023. The Diocese marked the evangelization mission of the Holy Church very actively in the Mission stations and Parishes. This year, His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb and the faithful joined the Palm Sunday liturgical celebrations at St. Maria Goretti Church at Athencode.



NEED PRAYER SUPPORT!

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MAUNDY THURSDAY

On Maundy Thursday, we commemorate the sacred events of the Lord's Supper and the institution of Priesthood, which are key moments in the Christian faith. Through the solemn commemoration of these moments, we are reminded of the selfless sacrifice that Jesus made for us, and we are called upon to emulate his love and compassion toward others. During every Holy Eucharist, we have the privilege of re-enacting the profound words of Jesus, "This is my Body. This is my Blood. Do this in remembrance of Me". These words serve as a powerful reminder of the sacrifice that Jesus made for us and inspire us to follow in His footsteps. The day-long adoration on Maundy Thursday is a powerful way for the faithful to keep watch and unite with Jesus in His

agony at Gethsemane. This time of reflection and contemplation helps us to deepen our understanding of the immense love that Jesus has had for us, and to draw strength from that love as we face our challenges in life.

This year, His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb celebrated the Maundy Thursday liturgy at St. Alphonsa Shrine Church, Nagercoil on 06 April 2023. The Holy Eucharistic celebration was a beautiful and meaningful experience. The foot-washing ceremony was a poignant reminder of Jesus' humble service to others, and the traditional Pesaha Appam shared among those present was a symbol of our unity as a community of believers.



GOOD FRIDAY

On the solemn occasion of Good Friday, we come together to remember and commemorate the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the Cross, a profound demonstration of love for all humanity. This year, on 07 April 2023, every parish commemorated this Holy day through participation in liturgical ceremonies, including the Way of the Cross, and deep reflection on the mystery of the Cross. The ceremony had been a deeply moving and meaningful experience, as

Catholics joined together to contemplate the enormity of Jesus' sacrifice and to offer our heartfelt gratitude for this unparalleled act of selflessness. Overall, it was a day of solemn reflection and deep spiritual contemplation observed well in all the Parishes and Mission Stations of the Diocese. His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb prayed along with the faithful of Pathukani Parish.



EASTER VIGIL

The culmination of the Holy Week is marked by the grand Easter Vigil, an occasion that encapsulates the very essence of our faith and testimony: "The Lord is Risen indeed". Alleluia! Across all parishes, the Easter Holy Eucharist was reverentially observed on the night of 08 April 2023. His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb celebrated the Easter Vigil Holy Eucharist at St. Xavier's Church, Kaisalavilai. The procession featuring the statue of the

Risen Lord and the distribution of Easter eggs were the highlights of the jubilant ceremony, filling the hearts of the faithful with joy and hope. Witnessing the faithful take part in the celebration with unwavering enthusiasm was a truly humbling experience. Overall, the Bishop stated that the Easter Vigil at St. Xavier's Church was a sight to behold, a testament to the unwavering faith and devotion.





NAMBIKKAI ALAYAM SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATION

Nambikkai Alayam (a home for the differently abled children), a compassionate institution that serves as both a daycare and residential school for differently abled children, was established on 15 August 1998 at Kazhuvantheittai. Currently, the institution has 64 children and 9 dedicated staff members. The Sisters and Staff at *Nambikkai Alayam* are equipped with skills for sophisticated training and years of experience in providing care for the mentally challenged and have received well-deserved acclaim for their methods of nurturing these children to reach their full potential. The Silver Jubilee of the institution was celebrated with great joy and festivity, culminating in a remarkable event held on 14

April 2023. His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb presided over the meeting. The esteemed Chief Guests for this occasion were Rev. Sr. Ancy SH, Vicar Provincial, and Dr. K Vijaya Kumar MD, former President of the All-India Medical Association. The event was graced by several Fathers and Sisters from the Diocese. The public jubilee meeting was followed by a mesmerizing display of cultural performances presented by the students of *Nambikkai Alayam*. The management, staff and students took this opportunity to celebrate the birthday of His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb with great enthusiasm.



BLESSING OF NEW *KURISSADY*



A newly constructed *Kurissady* (Grotto) at Nithiravilai junction of Jaya Matha Forane Church, Nithiravilai was blessed by His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb on 16 April 2023. Fathers and Sisters from nearby parishes and faithful community members were present for the ceremony. This momentous occasion was made all the more sacred by the celebration of Sunday Holy Eucharist, which was led by the newly ordained priest, Rev. Fr. Ajin C. Joseph. The collective spirit of devotion and piety was truly palpable in the air. Following the solemn proceedings, delectable sweets were distributed as a symbol of joy and celebration.





PRESBYTERY BLESSING

Over the past few years, the lack of a dedicated space for the refreshment of the rest of the Fathers at St. Benedict Church, Bengiri has been a persistent issue. However, thanks to the visionary leadership and tireless efforts of Rev. Fr. Shijo Aikkarakunnel, this problem has now been successfully resolved. With its spacious and comfortable interior, the presbytery provides a truly remarkable and awe-inspiring space for priests to relax and unwind. On 16 April 2023, the presbytery's inauguration was graced by Rev. Fr. Sumesh Valliyamthadathil, along with priests and sisters from neighbouring parishes.



MINOR ORDERS AND VESTITION

Minor Orders were administered on 03 April 2023 by His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb at Sangamam, the pastoral centre of the Diocese. Rev. Bro Divin Raj received the Cassock. Rev. Bro Varghese (Bibin) Koyickakudiyil, Rev. Bro. Ouseph (Bibin) Vettakonam and Rev. Bro. Mathew (Tony) Kallamparambil received the Minor Order of Karoyusa. Rev. Bro Sunil Antony received the Minor Order of *Heupadiyaknusa*. Parents and

family members of the brothers, who received Cassock, Priests incharge of the regency places and Curia members were present for the ceremony. Rev. Fr. Jogi Marangattu CMI and Rev. Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal, Chancellor were the concelebrants for the Holy Eucharist. The Diocese, with prayers and gratitude, remembers all the Benefactors and Well-wishers for their support through Sponsor a Seminarian Program.





DIACONATE ORDINATION

A momentous occasion took place at St. Martin de Porres Church in Kazhuvanthittai on 04 April 2023, as the Major Order of Diaconate was conferred upon Rev. Bro Varghese (Amanto) Edakkootathil, Rev. Bro. Antony (Lintomon) Thakidiyel, and Rev. Bro. Kuruvila (Sanjo) Thenepackal by His Excellency Mar

George Rajendran sdb. Following the Holy Eucharist, a brief meeting was held inside the Church felicitating the Deacons. The Diocese gratefully acknowledges the contribution of benefactors for the successful formation of the three brothers.

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Kalluvilai, Mulagumoodu P.O

Kanyakumari District

Phone: +91 77087 26043; 98845 61965

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RECOLLECTION FOR PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

The Diocese hosted a profound day of recollection for all its Priests and Religious on 05 April 2023, just a day before Maundy Thursday. It was a truly special occasion, as all the Priests and Sisters of the Diocese gathered together for an unforgettable day of prayer, adoration, and confession. The day commenced with the recitation of the Holy Rosary, followed by an insightful one-hour reflection session, which was eloquently led by Rev. Fr. Servatius, an experienced priest from the Diocese of Kottar. The event culminated in the Holy Eucharist,

which was concelebrated by all the Fathers present. As a wonderful addition to the occasion, His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb had the distinct pleasure of presenting the *Vin Pathayil* (Way to Heaven), the newly published prayer and hymn book of the Diocese to the priests and religious in attendance. This was truly a momentous occasion for all who were present, and a testament to the rich spiritual traditions and values of the Diocese. The day concluded with a warm and welcoming agape, a truly fitting end to a most memorable day of prayer and reflection.



VINPATHAYIL AND URAVIYA VAZHIPPATTU NOOL

The beauty of the liturgy is amplified and enriched by the harmonious voices of the faithful as they join together in singing and prayer during both the liturgical and para-liturgical celebrations. To facilitate this sacred endeavor, and to further enable personal and familial worship, the Diocese has thoughtfully composed a Prayer Cum Hymn book entitled *Vin Pathayil* (Way to Heaven). Moreover, to cultivate and

foster active participation during *Uraviyams* (Basic Christian Communities), we have also proudly published the *Uraviya Vazhipattu Nool*, which is a prayer book to be used during prayer meetings. With assistance from friends and benefactors, we have been able to bring out the beautiful companion for the faithful and have begun the distribution in different parishes and mission centres in April 2023.





VOCATION WEEKS CELEBRATION

For promoting vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and the world vocation Sunday on 30 April 2023, the Vocation Commission of the Diocese organized vocation weeks from 16 to 30 April 2023. Inaugural and concluding celebrations were carried out in every parish. On 16 April 2023, the vocation weeks were inaugurated with the lighting of the lamp during the Holy Eucharist. To ensure a wider reach and greater impact, a special circular was sent by His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb and read

out in all parishes. Throughout the period, the vocation prayer was recited every day in our parishes, uniting us in our mission to promote vocations. On 30 April 2023, the concluding day of the vocation weeks, a symbolic offertory was conducted at the beginning of the Holy Eucharist, and intercessory prayers were offered during the *Karosusa* prayer of the day. The parish priests delivered sermons on vocation, highlighting its significance for the Church and the Diocese and encouraging young people to consider this noble calling.

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:

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Contact Mission Procure:
Rev. Fr Robin Jose
+91 4651 250633; +91 94871 65903;
Email: bishopofthuckalay@gmail.com



FORANE PRIESTS' CONFERENCES

A significant Forane level Priests' Conference for Padanthalumoodu and Nithiravilai Foranes was convened at St. Mathew's Church, Annikkarai on 01 April 2023 and for the Manjalumoodu, Kaliyal and Arukani Foranes was convened at St. Mary's Forane Church in Kaliyalon 3 April 2023. Representing the Diocesan Curia, the event at Annikkarai was graced by the presence of Rev. Fr. Johnsilal Arackaparambil, Procurator of the Diocese, and Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Vicar General, graced the occasion at Kaliyal. The Conferences were presided over by the Forane Vicars of the respective places.

The Conferences proved to be an enlightening and engaging affair, with the attendees

engrossed in a range of important discussions concerning pastoral coordination among the parishes, the pivotal role of the forane vicars, the vocation to the priesthood and religious life, and the formation of major seminarians. Rev. Fr. Justin Cheruvellil, Director of the Liturgical Commission, also introduced the revised text of the Liturgy of the Hours and the new Hymn Book of the Diocese, *Vin Pathayil*. Notably, the smaller number of participants and the generous amount of time allotted allowed for a lively and productive atmosphere, with numerous suggestions emerging for the betterment of pastoral activities



MARATHON ON WORLD HEALTH DAY

On the occasion of World Health Day, the Health Commission of the Diocese, in collaboration with St. Alphonsa College of Arts and Science, organized a marathon with the theme 'Care Your Heart' on 14 April 2023. His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb had the privilege of inaugurating the marathon from Colachel. Dr. P. D. Seelan, Physical Director of St. Alphonsa College, Karungal, provided the participants with the necessary instructions. The marathon kick-started at 7:30 AM and concluded at 9:00 AM at St. Alphonsa College, Karungal. At the concluding meeting presided over by His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb, he expressed his

gratitude to all the participants and volunteers for making the event a grand success. Rev. Sr. Josephine CTC, Secretary of the Health Commission, Tamilnadu Bishops Council (TNBC) graced the event with her special address, which was inspiring and enlightening. The felicitation by Mr. Thankaraman, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, added further colour to the event. The prize distribution ceremony was a moment of great pride and joy for the participants. The marathon witnessed enthusiastic participation from 340 young individuals who showed great interest in promoting heart care awareness among the people.



INTENSIVE TAMIL COURSE FOR MAJOR SEMINARIANS

Language plays a crucial role in the daily lives of individuals within a society, as it enables them to articulate their emotions, aspirations, uncertainties, and existential queries. When it comes to spreading the message of the Gospel and sharing one's faith with others, language becomes an indispensable tool. In recognition of its significance, an intensive Tamil language course was held for our major seminarians at Sangamam from 24 to 28 April 2023, under the able guidance of Rev. Fr. Joseph Santhosh, Youth Director. Over five days, the program imparted essential skills to confidently write, speak, and read Tamil. Highly proficient teachers who possess expertise in Tamil language, culture, and lifestyle took the classes. Thuckalay Youth Educational Services (TYES) animated the program, and every evening, a range of activities was conducted, including drama, debates, and literary competitions, to enhance language efficiency.





ORIENTATION FOR YOUTH RETREAT

A half-day orientation session was organized at Kalluvilaion 22 April 2023 for the youth in preparation for the upcoming Youth Retreat at St. Alphonse College of Arts and Science from 16 to 18 June 2023. The orientation was attended by a total of 48 enthusiastic youth and five esteemed religious sisters. The youth volunteers also did an outstanding job of animating the programme with their melodious songs and lively performances. As a whole, the session was a tremendous success and served as an excellent platform for the youth to gain valuable insights and knowledge in preparation for the upcoming Youth Retreat. It was a truly enriching experience for all who attended the orientation programme.



INTERNATIONAL GGM CONGRESS 2023

Fiat Mission's 4th International GGM Mission Congress 2023, the Great Gathering of Mission, was a significant event held at the Jerusalem Retreat Centre in Thrissur from 19 - 23 April 2023. The congress aimed to provide an opportunity for Indian missionaries to convene and promote vocations to the mission. Furthermore, it facilitated a profound understanding of the

mission by the Church in Kerala, through an array of mission exhibitions and programmes, instilling a passion and love for the mission. Among 52 other Diocesan and religious mission exhibition stalls the Mission Diocese of Thuckalay also made the presentation at the exhibition. Two of our minor seminarians, Rev. Bros. Vincilin and Bibin spent four days showcasing the mission activities of the Diocese of Thuckalay at the congress.





VPV TRAINING FOR THE CATECHISM TEACHERS

Visuwasa Payirchi Vizha (VPV – Vacation Bible School) training course for catechism teachers and seminarians took place at the Aseer Auditorium in Kalluvilai on 29 April 2023. The training programme was graced by the presence of the Vicar General, Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil, who officiated the inauguration ceremony with great poise and dignity. After the inaugural session, Rev. Fr. Robin Jose animated the teachers by providing tips to conduct VPV effectively. Then a team of teachers from the Kottar Diocese animated the course by giving action song practices. In the afternoon session, the catechetical department took centre stage, ably assisted by major seminarians, to introduce the VPV textbooks. We were happy that about 120 teachers took part in the programme.



MAJOR SEMINARIANS' WORK CAMP

This year's work camp for major seminarians was held at Little Flower Church, Puliyarai in Tenkasi Mission from 16 to 23 April 2023. A total of 18 brothers, including 3 deacons, arrived a day before and undertook the work of cleaning the Church Campus on the following day. During their stay, the brothers had the opportunity to visit neighbouring villages such as Manmoottikalambam, Bhagavathipuram, Thatkonagar, Therkumedu, and Kamaraj Nagar. They spent a considerable amount of time visiting families of various religious backgrounds, which allowed them to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the cultural differences among the people. Throughout the week, Reverend Fathers from

the Tenkasi mission and the Aryankavu area of Kerala celebrated Holy Eucharist for the brothers. Additionally, the brothers attended sessions led by Rev. Frs. Peter Kizhakeyil and Rajesh Vayalunkal MCBS, which provided them with valuable insights into mission work in the territory. The brothers enjoyed an outing to various places in and around Thenmala on 22 April 2023, which provided them with a much-needed break and a chance to experience fun and camaraderie. The work camp concluded on 23 April 2023 with a solemn Holy Eucharist with the parishioners, followed by a lunch shared with the people of the parish. Overall, the work camp proved to be a fruitful experience for the parish, the villagers, and the brothers.



FABC WORKSHOP AT KATHMANDU, NEPAL

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) is a voluntary association of Episcopal Conferences in Asia, approved by the Holy See, which aims to cultivate solidarity and co-responsibility among its members for the betterment of the Church and society in Asia. The decisions made by the Federation are not legally binding, but rather an expression of collective responsibility. The FABC held its 50th General Conference, which took place from 12 to 30 October 2022 at the Baan PhuWaan - Pastoral Training Centre of the Bangkok Archdiocese in Thailand. The Bangkok Document is the product of the FABC General Conference to be introduced to all the bishops, and subsequently to all faithful in the dioceses of South Asia. To accomplish this task, the FABC organized a workshop on Insights from the FABC Documents, with a particular focus on the FABC 50 Bangkok Document 2022. This workshop took place from 23 to 28 April 2023 in Kathmandu, Nepal, and was attended by 30 participants, including 20 bishops from India, Sri

Lanka, and Bangladesh. His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb attended the workshop.

The workshop proved to be an invaluable learning opportunity, where the participants were enriched through the exploration of the documents and their theology. It was truly a journey of discovery, where the treasures of Asian Church theology were unearthed.

The main organizer of the Conference was Bishop Allwyn, who was aided by Rev. Fr. Joshua and Rev. Sr. Shimi. This dedicated team displayed exceptional leadership qualities, and together they ensured that the workshop was a resounding success. The main resource person for the conference was Rev. Fr. Vimal, the FABC theologian from Sri Lanka, whose vast knowledge and experience of FABC enriched the participants on various topics. These topics included the importance of FABC teachings for pastors, the roles of faith and reason in theologizing, the context of FABC theologizing, harmony, care for the earth and its connection to caring for the poor, inter-faith marriages and their pastoral relevance for Asia, *Amoris Laetitia* - a call to love, and walking together with the people of Asia. Bishop Paul, the Bishop of Nepal Vicariate, and the Godavari Jesuit Community provided excellent arrangements for accommodation, food, and conveyance, which contributed to the overall success of the workshop. All the participants were enriched by this workshop and gained a deep understanding of the Church of South Asia's way of thinking.





PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS

Every priest is a blessing to the Church and we have every reason to rejoice and thank God for the gift of three new Priests this year. The solemn ceremonies held on three separate days were a testament to the meticulous planning and execution of the devoted parishioners, family members, and Parish Priests involved. All the sacraments of the priesthood were administered by His Excellency Mar George Rajendran sdb. At the auspicious venue of St. George's Church, Lalam Puthenpally, Pala, Deacon George Kandathil was ordained priest on 12 April 2023. The Rector of Minor Seminary Pala, Fr. Jacob Vadakkal, delivered a profound homily that touched the hearts of all those present. On the following day, on 13 April 2023, Deacon Joseph (Prince) Cherippanattu was ordained priest at the Infant Jesus Church in Thovarayar. The inspiring homily delivered by Fr. Jiji left a lasting impression on the congregation. Finally, on 15 April 2023, the ordination of Deacon Ajin C. Joseph took place at the Jayamatha Forane Church, Nithiravilai. Let us pray that they receive God's choicest blessings in their pastoral ministry. The Diocese of Thuckalay is grateful to the benefactors for their generous support for the formation of seminarians. The newly ordained priests placed all your intentions on the altar in their very first Eucharistic celebrations.



VOCATION AND MISSION

REV. SR CEELIA FCC

“ECCE ANCILLA DOMINI”

“The call to religious life is an invaluable gift that the Lord has given me. I owe my vocation in the first place to God, but also to my parents who passed on religious and human values to me from an early age.”



Rev. Sr. Ceelia FCC, the provincial of San Joe Province Thuckalay, welcomed the Tidings team with these words to portray the history line of her dedicated religious life.

Tidings: We are very grateful to you, dear sister, for the kind acceptance of our invitation to share your life story with our readers. Let us begin with your family ...

Sr. Ceelia: Thank you so much for your invitation and I am very glad to share my life with the readers of ThuckalayTidings. What I am is the result of the initial formation which I received from my family. I was born on 15 March 1966 as the first child to my loving parents Mr. Thomas and Mrs. Catherine in a small village called Iravuchira, near Changanacherry. It was after eight years of their marriage that I was born and they used to say that I was a blessing for them. I have a brother and two sisters.

As every child in our time, I was very much obedient to my parents and it helped me a lot in my initial human and spiritual formation. One of the important factors of my religious orientation is the daily family prayer, where we gather together and pray under the guidance of our loving parents. Being a simple family, it was also easy to be in communion with each other. Today, though my parents are no more here on earth, I feel their presence at each moment of my life, especially experiencing their spiritual nearness to me.

Tidings: Wonderful, sister, and thanks be to God. Can you share about your schooling and various influences for your religious vocation?

Sr. Ceelia: Yes, of course. School formation was a continuation of what I received initially from my family. Teachers were my second parents in every aspect. I started my primary school education at St. Mary's School, Iravuchira. As the school was run by Franciscan Clarist sisters, we experienced a spiritual atmosphere on the whole campus. Sisters were very dear to us, helping with all our needs. It is one of the reasons for my religious vocation and the courage to respond to it.

Another important spiritual assistance during this period was the “Little Way Association”. It was a great help for us children to listen to the inspiring and faithful lives of many saints and martyrs. Sisters, amidst their busy schedule of social and community life, were always careful about our integral development both spiritual and material. Besides, catechism classes, mission league, etc. infused in me a special love towards Jesus and Church.

After my primary education, I was taken to St. Thomas School for high school education. The school was run by Jacobite Fathers. Being a Christian Institution, there too I experienced a peaceful and spiritual ambiance, especially at the time of adolescence. I passed the SSLC with 80% marks and I render all glory to God for this great achievement. Later I joined Assumption College for pre-degree studies, which is equivalent to the +2 studies today. Initially, I was so stressed to learn the English language as the medium of teaching was in

English. I tried my level best to learn the language and worked hard to pass the exams. When the results came, I secured first class and was one of the toppers in the college. To be very frank, I must reveal that God's mysterious hand was always with me, helping me to overcome all the trials.

Tidings: Congratulations Sister. Then what was your dream?

Sr. Ceelia: Till then I had never thought seriously about joining a convent and becoming a nun. Nursing was my dream after my pre-degree studies and it was not so tough to find a seat in a college as my academic performance was high. The objective was to support financially my family. Though these were my plans, God had another project for me. As the prophet Jeremiah says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jer 29,11)

Tidings: Was it a sudden revelation? How did you find it?

Sr. Ceelia: Vocation is not a sudden action or magic. It is not even an option while other ways get closed before us, as the media propagates today. Vocation is a gift of God and at the same time, it is also a mystery as St. John Paul II asserts in his encyclical. I can confirm that it is true from my experiences of my life. Reading was my hobby from early childhood and I used to read the life histories of saints. There was a precious book gifted by the catechism teachers, the life story of St. Little Therese. I was so impressed by this book and especially by the heroic life story of the saint. It was my dream to help others though I have never thought about joining a convent.

Tidings: Great sister. Then when did you start seriously to recognize the call of God?

Sr. Ceelia: Prayer is the only tool to understand the plans of God. My desire to help others and in a particular way to dedicate my life to the poor, infused in me a thought of choosing religious life. I wished to join a cloister to serve the Lord in silence and to help others. It was an inspiration I received from St. Therese of Lisieux, who prayed



unceasingly for the sinners and their salvation. After my pre-degree studies, I started searching for a cloister and later God helped me to rethink to opt for a mission. My father was not so happy with my decision to go on a mission. There was also a big opposition from the whole family. It was the turning point or better speaking, distinguishing the will of God to opt for the FCC congregation as my religious refuge.

Tidings: How were your formation and other experiences in the convent?

Sr. Ceelia: I had many loving experiences with the FCC sisters during my primary education. I had already heard the life stories of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Clare and many services rendered by the Congregation all over the world. I joined the Congregation on 13 June 1983. I did my Aspirancy and Postulancy in Devamatha Provincial House, Changanacherry under the guidance of Rev. Sr Berta and Rev. Sr Generous. And I did my novitiate in Assisi Novitiate House, Puthupally. The classes, directions, and instructions of my novice master, Rev. Fr Joseph Kadukkunnel, and the novice mistress, Rev. Sr Sifincy, helped me much in my formation to mould myself to be lovable to Jesus. On 18 January 1986, I made my first profession and it was celebrated just before the arrival of Pope John Paul II in Kerala. I was blessed to receive the religious vestments from Mar Joseph Powathil in

SB High School Auditorium, Changanacherry. On 1 October 1991, I made my final profession. Meanwhile, I completed degree courses of M. Sc. and B.Ed. as per the direction of my superiors.

Tidings: Whom do you remember most during those years of formation?

Sr. Ceelia: There are many and I am very much grateful to all those who took part in my life. The words and life of Rev. Sr Jose Martin, who prepared me for the first Holy Communion touched me a lot. I was so inspired by the silent life and prayers of my mother and also the reading habit of my father. The love and care of the teachers during my high school studies strengthened me and today I recognize that God was working through these people even from the early days of my life to prepare myself to respond to the call of God.

Tidings: Then, what about your desire to go on a mission?

Sr. Ceelia: Mission and service were the two terms I wanted to put into practice in my life. I had been waiting for the time of God, who is the master of every religious to lead them to the right path. It was in 1998, FCC Changanacherry province decided to extend its province to the Kanniyakumari district and to form a region in Tamilnadu. When there was an option to choose the region, I said yes. It was another turning point in my life to reach the mission I wanted from my early life. I came to Kattathurai Convent on 21 May 1998; it was my first mission place.

Tidings: Where did you work these years of your mission service in this territory? Can you share some experiences?

Sr. Ceelia: In 1998, I was appointed as the principal of St. Michael's Matriculation School, Kattathurai and I continued the service until I was elected as the Provincial of San Joe province in 2012. Meanwhile, I was also teaching in Sunday school. Besides Kattathurai, I rendered my services at Paraicode, Mezhacode, and Plankalai parishes. I enjoyed a lot the catechism classes and it was also an opportunity to know more about the Sacred Scriptures and the teachings of the Church. The



home mission was another milestone of my life experience. It was an opportunity to know personally many families and to understand the traits and trials of life. As a provincial, I got many chances to love, to know, and to be closer to the Diocese as well as to the priests.

In 2014, His Excellency Mar George Rajendransdb, Bishop of Thuckalay started CRI, he appointed me as its president. Thus, I got many chances to work and cooperate with other religious congregations. When I was selected for the second time as the provincial on 21 November 2021, I got the responsibilities of CRI. It was a great time to have retreats and pilgrimages together with other religious congregations and to know more about their spirituality and charisms. It was an enriching experience for us all.

Tidings: We came to know also about your heroic decisions like resigning from aided school teacher post, renouncing the high salary, etc. Can you throw light on them?

Sr. Ceelia: God has His plans which are unique and unpredictable. For us religious, it is important to renounce our comfort zones and to work according to the will of God. I came to Thuckalay Mission after resigning from an aided school in Kerala where I had been working for five years from 1993 to 1998. When I came here on the mission, I wanted to work among the poor. But my superiors again asked me to take charge of an English Medium school. That was a great burden to me as I didn't

know the language, needed to upgrade the school, there weren't many people to help me, economic crisis, get on and off government offices, etc. I was feeling like I was in the midst of an ocean. But God's mercy is endless. Late Rev. Fr. Philip Kodiyanthara was a great help in my trials. He spent much of his time helping me. He accompanied me several times to Madurai and Chennai for different needs of the school. I suffered a lot for the government recognition of St. Michel's School, Kattathurai.

Once I went to Chennai with Rev. Sr Martin CMC in a government office and we were praying to seek the intercession of St. Alphonsa. And I remember, as a miracle, we got the recognition till 10th grade. These are the adventurous experiences that I remember. But I believe in the words of the Psalmist, "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, and he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Psalm 23)

Tidings: You wanted to work with the poor and the marginalized? How did you realize it?

Sr. Ceelia: I desired to work for mentally disabled children. Though I could not do it directly as many of my loving sisters do, God has chosen me as an instrument to begin a home for them when I was provincial.

Tidings: In Thuckalay, how do you enjoy your missionary experience?



Sr. Ceelia: There may be occasions during which we think nothing is possible, but for God nothing is impossible. I experienced the mercy of God in each service we render in our province. This is one of the best places for evangelization. Our desires and our projects become an obstacle if we do not plan them with God.

Tidings: What is the great challenge which you face?

Sr. Ceelia: As a provincial, it is my great concern about vocations and the well-being of my sisters. Today the number of aspirants is very less as we become older. With this reduced number of vocations, it is very difficult to think about beginning new missions, in different areas especially in the extended territories of the Diocese.

Tidings: Thank you very much, sister, for the precious time you spent with us. Let us conclude this talk with a positive vibe of your life and a message for the young generation of today.

Sr. Ceelia: I must thank you for your kindness to make ordinary people like me share our life with others. I am very much satisfied with my religious life. It is not me to select the religious life and the FCC Congregation, rather God called me to cooperate with His plan and I have obeyed Him. Today, I am very proud to be called a religious of the Franciscan Clarist Congregation. But I am also conscious about my imperfections and weaknesses and I surrender fully to the mercy of God. The young generation must deepen their faith and pray for an understanding of the will of God. Blessed be the God who created me. Praise be to God. Amen.





THUCKALAY
MISSION
DIOCESE OF THUCKALAY



Happy Feast of Ascension!
Jesus ascended into Heaven
Bless us to be with you eternally

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