



# 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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**Ref. No. Priests/GR/102/2019**

31 December 2019

Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

As the year 2019 is ebbing away, we are entering the New Year 2020. Whenever we end a year and begin another year, we think of the wonderful gift of God, namely, time. Although God is above time, we are blessed with time with which we can grow, develop and become more humane and spiritual. While wishing you a prosperous and grace-filled New Year, let me remind you that we need to make good use of the precious gift of time that God has generously given to us.

On Friday, 22 November 2019, Pope Francis gave an address to the Priests, Religious, Seminarians and Catechists at St Peter's Parish, Bangkok, Thailand. I would like to summarise this address in this circular for our reflection. During his talk, the Holy Father expressed his profound gratitude to all those consecrated persons who, by their silent martyrdom of fidelity and daily commitment, have borne great fruit. Although they may not be able to appreciate or taste the fruits of their commitment, but without a doubt their lives are capable of bringing about much good. They are a promise of hope. Hence, the Holy Father wants those catechists and elderly consecrated men and women who drew us into the love and friendship of Jesus Christ to be always held in high esteem.

The Pope is of the opinion that the history of each of our vocations is marked by those people who helped us to discover and discern the fire of the Spirit. It is so good and at the same time important to be thankful. Gratitude is always a powerful weapon. Only if we are able to contemplate and feel genuine gratitude for all those ways we have experienced God's love, generosity, solidarity and trust, as well as his forgiveness, patience, forbearance and compassion, will we allow the Spirit to grant us the freshness that can renew our life and mission. So the Pope invites us to think of those persons with gratitude, and, standing on their shoulders, we too may feel called to be men and women who help to bring about the new life the Lord bestows on us. As those called to apostolic fruitfulness have to struggle valiantly for the things that the Lord loves and for which he gave his life, let us ask for the grace for our hearts to beat in unison with his own. The Holy Father wants each one of us to be wounded by that same love in order to have that same passion for Jesus and for his kingdom.

At this juncture, the Holy Father says that we can all ask ourselves: how can we cultivate apostolic fruitfulness? This is a question that each of us can ask ourselves, and can answer from our hearts.

When people narrate their vocation stories, some say that the Lord first attracted them to himself by beauty. It could be the beauty of an image of Our Lady, whose special gaze pierced their hearts and made them want to know her better. Who is that woman? It had nothing to do with words, or abstract ideas or cold syllogisms. It all started with a look, a beautiful look at Mother Mary that captivated them. The Holy

Father says that we must be alert to beauty, alert to a sense of wonder capable of opening up new horizons and raising new questions. A consecrated life incapable of openness to surprises is only half a life. A consecrated life incapable of openness to surprises each day - open to joy and to sadness, but open to surprises - is only half a life. The Lord does not call us and send us forth into the world to impose obligations on people, or to lay heavier burdens than those they already have, which are many, but rather to share joy, a beautiful, new, surprising horizon. The words of Benedict XVI are not only true but also prophetic for our times: "The Church does not grow by proselytizing but by attraction. Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful - lovely - capable of filling life with new splendour and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties."

This means that we are not afraid to look for new symbols and images, for that particular music which can help awaken in each one of us the amazement that the Lord wants to give us. Let us not be afraid to continue inculturation of the Gospel. We need to seek new ways of transmitting the word, ways that are capable of mobilizing and awakening a desire to know the Lord. Who is that man? Who are these people who follow a man who was crucified?

It is a fact that for many people Christianity is a foreign faith, a religion for foreigners. This should spur us to find ways to profess the faith 'in dialect,' like a mother who sings lullabies to her child. With that same intimacy, we need to give faith a local face and flesh, which involves much more than making translations. It is about letting the Gospel be stripped of fine but foreign garb; to let it 'sing' with the native music of our land and inspire the hearts of our brothers and sisters with the same beauty that set our own hearts on fire. The Holy Father encourages us to pray to Our Lady, to the one who by the beauty of her gaze first captivated many of us. Let our prayer be: "Obtain for us now a new ardour born of the resurrection, that we may bring to all the Gospel of life which triumphs over death. Give us a holy courage to seek new paths, that the gift of unfading beauty may reach every man and woman."

Mary's gaze impels us to look where she looks, to turn our eyes to that other gaze and to do whatever her son tells us (Jn 2:1-12). His is a gaze that captivates because it is able to penetrate appearances to find and celebrate the authentic beauty present in every person. It is a gaze that, as the Gospel teaches us, shatters all determinisms, fatalisms and standards. Where many saw only a sinner, a blasphemer, a tax collector, an evildoer or even a traitor, Jesus was able to see apostles. Such is the beauty that his gaze invites us to proclaim, a gaze that enters in, transforms and brings out the best in others.

As for the first stirrings of our vocation, many of us in our early years took part in the activities of young people who wanted to put the Gospel into practice and to go out into the streets to visit the needy, the neglected and even the despised, orphans and the elderly. Surely, many of us were in turn visited by the Lord, who made you see that he was calling you to give everything away, to leave ourselves behind and, in that very movement, to find ourselves. In the faces of those we encounter on the street, we can discover the beauty of being able to treat one another as brothers and sisters. We see them no longer as orphans, derelicts, outcasts or the despised. Now each of them has the face of a brother or sister redeemed by Jesus Christ. That is what it is to be a Christian! Can holiness somehow be understood apart from this lively recognition of the dignity of each human being? The Holy Father encourages all those who, on a daily basis, spend their lives serving Jesus in their brothers and sisters. So many of us are able to manage to see beauty where others see only contempt, or abandonment or an object of sexual gratification. In this way, we can become a concrete sign of the Lord's mercy, alive and at work: a sign of the anointing of the Holy One in our lands.

Such anointing calls for prayer. Apostolic fruitfulness requires and is sustained by fidelity to deep prayer. Deep prayer like that of those elderly people who constantly pray the rosary. How many of us have received the faith from our grandparents, from seeing them doing their household chores, rosary in hand, sanctifying their entire day. This is contemplation in action, making God part of the little things of each day. It is vital that the Church today be able to proclaim the Gospel to all, in all places, on all occasions, without hesitation and without fear; as a people who every morning, in their face to face conversation with the Lord, are sent forth anew. Without prayer, our life and mission loses all its meaning, loses strength and fervour. If you are missing out on prayer, any work you do will not make sense, will have no strength, no value. Prayer is the centre of everything.

Saint Paul VI said that one of the worst obstacles to evangelization is the lack of fervour. For religious, for priests and for catechists, that fervour is nurtured by a double encounter, with the face of the Lord and with the faces of their brothers and sisters. We too need to find the space to be able to return to the source and drink of its life-giving waters. Immersed in myriad responsibilities, may we always seek that quiet place where we can remember, in prayer, that the Lord has already saved the world and that we are asked, in union with him, to make this salvation felt by all.

May these thoughts of Pope Francis on vocation and consecrate life become part of our lives and live our consecrated lives in a manner worthy of our master, whom we have promised to serve till the end of our lives!

## NEWS AND EVENTS

**Eparchial Bible Convention:** The Eparchy organised three-day convention at Kalluvilai on 29-30 November and 1 December 2019. Rev. Fr Joseph from Thanjavur diocese, together with his team, animated the convention. Our faithful from most of our parishes attended the three-day convention. On the last day we had a large number of our faithful attending the programme. It was nice to see many Fathers and Sisters along with their faithful praying at the convention. I am grateful to committee that organised this event with meticulous planning.

**New Mission in Thenkasi:** A new Mission named Amalamatha Mission began near Thenkasi Railway gate on 8 December 2019. Rev. Fr Thomas Jiji Koipuram took the initiative to start this Centre with the help of some local faithful. Around 80 people were present for the Holy Qurbana. A number of Fathers and Sisters were also present. Prior to the opening of the Mission, Fr Jiji was celebrating the Holy Qurbana every Sunday evening for five families. Rev. Sr Mary Kodiyan from Vattakkottai will join this Mission and render medical services. I am sure the people of the area will experience the compassion and love of Jesus through our services there. I congratulate Fr Jiji and wish God's blessings upon the Mission.

**UCC - Pre-Christmas Celebration:** United Christian Council arranged a pre-Christmas celebration at Chungankadai on 7 December 2019. All the Catholic Bishops, heads of other Christian denominations and representatives from the UCC were present for the gathering. The president highlighted the relevance of Christmas this year and urged all present to take an oath to protect the planet by planting more trees. This gesture assumes great importance as the coming year 2020 UCC is celebrating its silver Jubilee. All the Church leaders were given opportunities to give a brief Christmas message during the celebration.

**New Bishop for the Diocese of Palayamkottai:** His Holiness, Pope Francis has appointed Rev. Fr Antonysamy Savarimuthu (59) of the Clergy of Palayamkottai, as Bishop of Palayamkottai, Tamil Nadu. The announcement was made public on Wednesday, 20 November 2019. Rev. Dr Antonysamy Savarimuthu was consecrated Bishop and installed as the Bishop of Palayamkottai on Sunday, 15 December 2019 at 5.00 pm in St Xavier's Higher Secondary School grounds, Palayamkottai. Along with Rev. Fr Ginoy Thottiyil and Sisters from Thirunelveli and Kayathar Mission, I participated in the Episcopal Ordination and wished him God's blessings in the name our Eparchy.

**Christmas Celebrations:** Christmas was celebrated in the Eparchy at various occasions. We had celebrations with all the heads of the institutions of our Eparchy, celebrations with all the Priests and Religious of Shenkottai Mission, celebrations with all the missionaries working in the extended mission territories at Madurai, celebrations with the migrant community at Madurai Mission, celebration with our presbyterium, celebrations with all the members of CRI- Thuckalay, and finally celebrations with all the Minor and Major Seminary inmates. The representatives of SEED (supporters of Seminary Formation) and well-wishers of the Eparchy also gathered together to celebrate Christmas. Around 20 families from in and around the neighbourhood of Bishop's House gathered at the Bishop's House to celebrate Christmas. I sincerely thank all the Fathers, Sisters and Brothers who worked hard for the success of all these celebrations.

This year, Mrs Sharanya Ari IAS, Sub Collector, Padmanabhapuram joined for the special Christmas get-together at Bishop's House on 22 December 2019 and had dinner with the community.

**Priestly Ordination of Deacon Shijo Aikkarakunnel:** I ordained Rev. Deacon Sebastian (Shijo Jose) Aikkarakunnel on 28 December 2019 at St Joseph's Church, Njarakadu at 9.00 am. A number of Priests, Religious and Faithful from our Eparchy took part in the ceremony. Fr Shijo will be in the Eparchy from 20 January 2020. I sincerely thank his parents and family members for gifting their son to our Eparchy. I also acknowledge all his formatters, benefactors and friends. Let us rejoice with Fr Shijo for this singular gift that the Lord has bestowed on him.

**Death Anniversary of Rev. Fr Thomas Thekkeyil:** The sixth death anniversary of Rev. Fr Thomas Thekkeyil was commemorated on 14 December 2018 at Mankulam. Rev. Fr Printo Kurias and Rev. Fr Joemon Mangalamadam celebrated Holy Qurbana in the parish church. They also prayed the Office for the Dead at the tomb of Rev. Fr Thomas Thekkeyil. Let us remember the departed soul of Rev. Fr Thomas Thekkeyil and pray for his eternal life.

**Catechism Competitions:** This year the Forane level Catechism Bible competition was held on 26, 27 and 30 December 2020. All the parishes took part in the various competitions. Narcheithi Nilayam organised the competitions. The themes for the various competitions were taken from the Bible itself. This helped the children read the Bible and to engender love for the Word of God. All the children after much preparation and rigorous practice took part in the competitions. I am grateful to the Rev. Fr Prince Maliyil, Director, and Rev. Fr Sajan Nettiaponghu, Assistant Director, of Catechism Department for organising the events in a professional manner. I thank all the Forane Vicars and Forane Catechism Directors for their valuable contributions in the smooth conduct of the competitions. A special word of thanks to all the Parish Priests, Sisters and teachers who have trained and prepared the children well. I am grateful to the curia members for encouraging the children with their presence during the competitions. I give below the winners of the competitions according to the Foranes:

### **Arukani Forane**

1 <sup>st</sup>	St Thomas Church, Pathukani	126 points
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Holy Family Church, Arukani	124 points
3 <sup>rd</sup>	St Thomas Church, Netta	108 Points

### **Manjalumoodu Forane**

1 <sup>st</sup>	Little Flower Church, Manjalumoodu	117 points
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Holy Cross Church, Malaicode	75 points
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Holy Family Church, Mukkoottukal	66 Points

### **Nithiravilai Forane**

1 <sup>st</sup>	St Antony's Church, Vayalinkarai	110 points
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Jayamatha Church, Nithiravilai	109 points
3 <sup>rd</sup>	St Xavier's Church, Varuthattu	88 Points

### **Padathalumoodu Forane**

1 <sup>st</sup>	Sacred Heart Church, Padanthalumoodu	103 points
2 <sup>nd</sup>	St Martin De Pores, Kazhuvanthittai	83 points
3 <sup>rd</sup>	St Mathew Church, Annikarai	78 Points

### **Thuckalay – Pilankalai Forane**

1 <sup>st</sup>	St Michaels Church, Kattathurai	116 points
2 <sup>nd</sup>	St Mary's Church, Thuckalay	78 points
3 <sup>rd</sup>	St Little Flower Church, Pilankalai	51 Points

### **Soosaipuram Forane**

1 <sup>st</sup>	St Joseph Church, Soosaipuram	140 points
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Christ the King Church, Palapallam	118 points
3 <sup>rd</sup>	St James Church, Mankarai	71 Points

## **INFORMATION**

- ❖ **News from the Extended Mission Territories:** Missionaries from the Mission districts of Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi, Sivagangai, Ramanathapuram, Viruthunagar, Madurai and Theni gathered at St Chavara Mission Church, Madurai on 16 December 2019 at 11.30am. All the Fathers and Sisters participated in the meeting and shared their mission experiences. Along with Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil and Rev. Fr Thomas Sathianesan, I joined the meeting and wished them Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. The gathering ended with lunch at 1.30pm. I sincerely thank and congratulate all the Fathers and Sisters who are directly involved in the mission work of the Church as well of the Eparchy.

1. **Tirunelveli Mission:** Rev. Fr Ginoy Thottiyil, Rev. Sr Elsit SABS and Rev. Sr Vineetha SABS of Thuckalay Region are doing mission work in the Tirunelveli Mission. Around 40 Syro-Malabar migrant faithful gather at Velankanni Hospital on Sundays for the Holy Qurbana. Some families attend the Holy Qurbana on weekdays. Mother Theresa Palliative Care Unit is functioning well and the SABS Sisters are giving medical care to 45 patients in their homes.
  2. **Kayathar, TN Kulam, Mission:** Rev. Sr Linsy FCC and Rev. Sr Lysa FCC of Thuckalay Province are doing mission work in the village, T.N Kulam of Thoothukudy District. The Sisters have started Tuition Centre for the children and more than twenty children benefit from the classes. Rev. Fr Ginoy Thottiyil provides pastoral care to the Sisters
  3. **Sivagangai and Ramnathapuram Missions:** Rev. Fr Thomas Moolechalil stays in a rented house at Sivagangai and is visiting villages. He found some Syro-Malabar Christian students and a family from Kerala. With their help he has planned to expand the Mission. As you know, the Eparchy of Pala has taken up these districts for mission work.
  4. **Virudhunagar Mission:** Rev. Fr Peter Kizhakkeyil is pioneering this Mission. He is visiting the nearby villages and towns. The Archeparchy of Changanassery looks after the mission work of this district.
  5. **Madurai Mission:** The migrant families in St Chavara Mission Church have increased to 50. They are very active and regular for the various church activities. Along with Rev. Fr Aneesh Cheruparampil CMI, Rev. Sr Joselin SABS and Rev. Sr Missy Maria SABS are visiting the families of the parish and the villages. People in many villages are very receptive and are asking the Sisters to do something for the development of the village. At Ariyur a Tailoring Centre has been set up and more than 35 women are being trained in stitching. At present, six women are working in the Tailoring Centre on a permanent basis. We have already begun the construction of a building for a house and the Centre.
  6. **Theni, Chinnamanoor Mission:** Rev. Sr Alice Maria FCC, Rev. Sr Vincy Antony FCC and Rev. Sr Vimal FCC belonging to Idukki Province are working in Chinnamanoor. They have begun the house visits and have started two Tuition Centres. More than 40 children are getting benefit from the Tuition Centres. A mission community is also formed there and Fr Benny Thattamparampil is celebrating Holy Qurbana. In this small community, around 15 people are coming for the Sunday Qurbana. The Eparchy of Kanjirapally is looking after this Mission.
- ❖ **TNBC Meeting at Sangamam:** The half-yearly meeting of Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council (TNBC) will be held on 21-22 January 2020 at Sangamam, Thuckalay. It is a great blessing for our Eparchy to host this important event. All the Bishops of Tamil Nadu will stay at Sangamam. As you are aware, we have very limited facilities in Sangamam. These days a team of Fathers and Brothers under the leadership of Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil are working hard to get the rooms, conference hall, refectory and other facilities ready for the event. We have more than 30 Fathers in the organising committee. They are divided into various sub-committees in order to prepare for the meeting. I ask all the Fathers to be present at Sangamam on 21 January at 8.30 am in order to welcome the Bishops. We shall also bless the renovated conference hall before the beginning of the TNBC meeting.
- ❖ **Jubilee Holy Qurbana by TNBC Bishops:** On 21 January we are organizing a solemn Holy Qurbana where all the TNBC Bishops will take part at 5.30pm in St Alphonsa Shrine, Nagercoil. Please announce this event well in advance in your respective parishes and make plans to bring people from your respective parishes. We need to give witness to the liturgy and shared patrimony of our Syro-Malabar Church to rest of the Church in Tamil Nadu. A committee for transport and accommodation has been set up and it will see to the transportation of the faithful from your respective parishes to

Nagercoil and back. I request you, dear Fathers, to give your support for the success of the entire events both at Sangamam and Nagercoil. We have decided to invite the Priests and Sisters from Lourdes (Trivandrum) and Amboori Foranes of Changanacherry Archdiocese. Kindly be present at St Alphonsa Shrine by 5.30 pm and concelebrate in the Holy Qurbana. Please bring along with you the full Mass Vestments.

- ❖ **Syro-Malabar Synod:** It will be held from 7-15 January 2020 at St Thomas Mount, Kakkanadu. I request the prayers of all the Priests, Religious and Faithful for the success of the Synod and for the wellbeing of Syro-Malabar Church.
- ❖ **Syro-Malabar Mission Week:** The Syro-Malabar Mission week is observed from 6-12 January 2020 all over the world. As in every year, we celebrate the week in our Eparchy with the help of Mission League. In the meeting of Mission League office bearers, it was decided to observe the Mission Week in our Eparchy on 11-12 January 2020. Prior to this celebration, kindly read the circular that our Major Archbishop has issued in all our parishes on 5 January 2020. The Director, Mission League, will communicate to all the Mission League Animators in the parishes on how to celebrate these days in order to instil love for the mission and to promote vocations for priesthood and the religious life. The Mission League children will take a collection through the specially prepared envelopes. These envelopes will be offered during the offertory during the Holy Qurbana. Kindly send this amount to the Bishop's House in order to send to the Syro-Malabar Church.
- ❖ **Blessing of new SABS Community at Madurai:** The SABS province of Idukki has taken up residence at Madurai near the Kamaraj University. This will be the second presence in Madurai. The two Sisters will begin the community in a rented house. The name of the religious community is St Martin Adoration Convent, Madurai. The formal blessing of the convent will be held on 16 January 2020 at 2.30 pm along with Holy Qurbana. They will be visiting the nearby villages and study the possibility of beginning a Mission Centre. I am grateful SABS provincial of Idukki for taking up the Madurai Mission.
- ❖ **First Profession and Vestition:** Br Dominic CMI from St Thomas Church, Muzhucode made his first profession and received the religious habit in the CMI Congregation on 8 December 2019 at Chethipuzha, Changanassery. He belongs to the CMI province of Trivandrum. Prayerful wishes to him for the future religious and priestly formation.
- ❖ **Welcome to Fr Shoji:** Rev. Fr Shoji Puthenpurackal will be coming home for holidays on 16 January. He will be in the diocese from 18 January onwards. We welcome Fr Shoji and wish him a happy holiday.
- ❖ **Fr Justin Cheruvilil's visit:** Rev. Fr Justin will come home on 3 January in order to attend his Father's first death anniversary Holy Qurbana on 7 January. He will be coming to the diocese during the TNBC meetings. We welcome him to the diocese.
- ❖ **Rev. Fr Jimmy defends Doctoral Thesis:** We all feel happy and proud that Fr. Jimmy Thekkekadumathil has defended his Doctoral Thesis on the topic: *Women empowerment in the family and society through self help groups with a special reference to Kanyakumari Social Service Society in Tamilnadu.* The defence was held on 18 December, 2019 at 4.00 pm in Italian time. He secured

**Summa Cum Laude** (29.90/30) score. We congratulate Fr Jimmy for this great achievement. He will complete some more requirements for the final submission of the Thesis and will return to the diocese as early as possible. We welcome back Fr Jimmy.

#### UPCOMING EVENTS

01 January 2020	-	New Year 2020
06 January 2020	-	TNBC Committee meeting
07-15 January 2020	-	Syro-Malabar Synod at Kakkanadu
10 January 2020	-	Priest conference (Venue: KKSSS at 9.30 am)
11-12 January 2020	-	Syro-Malabar Mission Week
16 January 2020	-	SABS Convent Blessing in Madurai
18 January 2020	-	Special Priests conference at KKSSS
19 January 2020	-	Elevation of Kaliyal Church as Forane Church
20-22 January 2020	-	TNBC at Sangamam Thuckalay

#### CONCLUSION

On the first day of the year, we celebrate the feast of Mary, Mother of God. It is indeed a wonderful opportunity for all of us to entrust ourselves to the maternal care and protection of Mary as we begin the New Year, a precious gift from God. Let us make good use of this year in order to become more Christ-like and to bring his message to as many people as possible so that the invocation that recite in the prayer Our Father may be realised: Thy kingdom come.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**  
Bishop of Thuckalay

