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29 November 2016

Dear and Reverend Fathers,

Greetings from the Bishop's House!

Christmas is fast approaching! The season of Annunciation has just begun. The birth of Jesus is at hand! On 1 December we begin the 25 days fast. It is a time for looking both backward and forward. We look backward as we prepare to celebrate the historical birth of Jesus. At the same time, we look forward to his 'Second Coming' as we prepare ourselves to welcome him into all the areas of our lives during this season.

The season of annunciation culminates with the celebration of the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. It is a moment when God comes to humanity in a tangible manner by taking upon himself our flesh in order to bestow upon us the divinity that we lost with the sin of Adam.

The evangelists who narrate the infancy of Jesus emphasise the fact that his birth took place quite unnoticed. He was born in a manger. However, the ordinary people beheld him. Mary, Joseph, Shepherds, Simeon and Anna were unassuming people. The only exception is the Magi, who were considered both rich and wise. But then, all these individuals had childlike simplicity and humility to recognise the child Jesus born in the manger. We too can appreciate the birth of Jesus and spiritually profit from it if we are willing to accept him in humility acknowledging our unworthiness.

Jesus was not only born in the manger at Bethlehem but he continues to be born in the hearts of people who are willing to confess his Lordship. There are a number of spiritual exercises in the Catholic Church where Jesus continues to be present proffering his graces. The Eucharist is one such act. A devout celebration of the Holy Mass at Christmas can be a wonderful means for us to come face to face with the child Jesus. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is still another moment when Jesus can truly take his abode in our lives. Needless to say, I earnestly, invite you to make use of these spiritual exercises to make the celebration of Christmas meaningful and religious for our people in your respective parishes.

Christmas is also a feast of sharing. God, taking the initiative, shared his divinity with the humans and He deigned to accept our humanity in order to make us heavenly. During this festival season, it is important that we too share our God-given gifts with the less fortunate brothers and sisters, who may be living side by side with us. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7). Let us encourage our people to cheerfully part with whatever they can spare in order to share in the generosity of God and to receive His blessings. Explain to them the life of St. Teresa of Kolkata, who can become for them an inspiration and a model.

Although there will be occasions when we can personally wish one another, still let me, through this letter, wish you, dear Fathers, a Merry Christmas and a God-filled New Year 2017. May you have a faith experience of the Babe of Bethlehem as you prepare to celebrate Christmas!

NEWS AND EVENTS

The Pastoral Council

The Fifth Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) had its second sitting on 1 November 2016. This was a special meeting called to discuss about the suggestions and recommendations emerged during the recently concluded Syro-Malabar Assembly. Bishop, President of Pastoral Council, in his presidential address gave an over-view of the Syro-Malabar Assembly. Rev. Fr Christudas, then, presented the suggestions and recommendations that the Syro Malabar Assembly made. The members of the Pastoral Council were divided into five groups and the suggestions and recommendations were allotted to each group for discussion. Each group presented valuable points, which the Priests' Conference will take up for further study. The meeting ended at 1.00 pm with the blessing of Bishop.

The Mission League Rally

The Mission League rally was held on 6 November 2016. The route of the rally was from Plankalai to Kalluvilai. From all the Foranes of the Diocese, the little missionaries took part in the rally very actively and enthusiastically. Nearly 1500 little missionaries walked shouting slogans and singing hymns appropriate for the occasion. Rev. Fr Ginoy Thottiyil, Mission League Director, Tamilnadu Region inaugurated the *nadapayanam*. Bishop Mar George Rajendran sdb led the rally from Plankalai to Mother Theresa Church Kalluvilai. All Parish Priests and a large number of religious men and women accompanied the little missionaries in their *nadapayanam*. On reaching Kalluvilai a public meeting was conducted.

Mr Binoy, National President of Mission League, addressed the children and thanked them for taking part in the rally. He exhorted them to become missionaries among their peers. Bishop Rajendran, in his address, explained to the children about the vision and goals of Mission League. During the public gathering the winners were announced and the prizes were distributed. Manjalamoodu Forane bagged the overall championship. The second place was awarded to Soosapuram Forane. Third place went to Padanthalamoodu Forane. A special award was given to Chenkottai Mission for their presence in the rally. The good representation from Chenkottai mission was pointed out and the participants from the Mission were congratulated for their presence despite the distance.

Rev. Mother Mary Litty LSDP Passes Away

Rev. Mother Mary Litty LSDP, founder of the Little Servants of Divine Providence passed away on 5 November 2016. She dedicated her entire life for the uplift of the poor and the underprivileged in the society. I offer my heart-felt condolences to the bereaved Institute of Little Servants of Divine Providence that has lost their charismatic founder.

Mother Litty (Kochu Theresia) was born on 2 August 1935 to Mr K. P. Joseph and Mrs Brigita at Oliyapuram near Kothamangalam in the district of Ernakulam, Kerala. She

completed her schooling at Kothamangalam and College studies in Assumption College, Changanacherry.

As young girl, Mother Litty joined the Religious Congregation of Medical Sisters of St Joseph. After Vestition in the Congregation, she was sent to study medicine in Rome. During her stay in Rome, she visited the Little House of Divine Providence that St Joseph Cottolengo established in Turin on 17 January 1828. She learnt that the entire Institute totally depended on the divine providence for its sustenance. She was inspired to begin a similar Institute for poor and destitutes in Kerala. After years of prayers and counselling, she expressed her desire to Mar Antony Padiyara, then Archbishop of Changanacherry, to establish an Institute for the poor and the orphans.

On 17 January 1978 she started the Congregation of Little Servants of Divine Providence (LSDP) in a small hut located at Kunnamthanam. At present, there are 162 members working in 16 houses spread over both in India and in some countries of Africa. Following the charism of the founder, the Sisters dedicate their lives to preaching the Word of God, serving the poor and strengthening the Christian families. The Diocese of Thuckalay is privileged to have the services of these Sisters and they are serving our people with great dedication and love. I want to acknowledge their inspiring ministry and take this opportunity to thank them for being part of the Diocese.

Rev. Mother Mary Litty says: “Each bed of the patient is the Altar of God and each patient is Christ for us. These poor ones are God’s angels. There is no happiness elsewhere than being with these angels.”

Mother Litty committed her life for the poor people. Trusting in divine providence, she left all comforts of life. She submitted herself to God in all her difficulties and hardships. She drew strength for serving the poor and the needy from the holy Eucharist. She had a predilection for the socially neglected people and treated them as her own children affording them with human dignity.

We believe that Mother Mary Litty is already in heaven with God in the company of angels and saints. She is interceding for each one of us. Let us continue to remember and pray for her in our daily Eucharistic celebrations. May her departed soul rest in peace!

20th Year Diocesan Day Celebration

The Eparchy of Thuckalay was erected on 11 November 1996 and this year the Eparchy celebrated the 20th Anniversary. The Eparchial Day Celebration was conducted on Saturday, 12 November 2016. The celebration began with a concelebrated solemn Holy Qurbana. All the Priests of the Eparchy, together with many Religious and the faithful were present. Bishop Rajendran presided over the Eucharist. All the departed Priests, Religious and the faithful, were remembered during the Mass. After the Mass, there was a cultural programme. The celebration concluded with a sumptuous Agape for all those who were present.

All those who contributed towards the growth the Eparchy were felicitated. The Diocese expressed its gratitude by honouring them in public. Some Sisters and lay people were presented with *Sevai semmal* award for their long years of ministry in the Diocese. Two laypersons were awarded for their outstanding contribution in teaching and art. Bishop

Rajendran encouraged the faithful to be strong in their Christian faith and to show their interest in studying and understanding the history, tradition and spiritual richness of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui iuris*. I am grateful to all the Fathers who worked for the success of the Eparchial Day Celebration. I thank especially Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, the Proto-Syncellus, Priests, Religious and people of Thuckalay-Pilankalai Forane.

News from Shenkottai Mission

Some important events took place in Shenkottai Mission in the month of November 2016. They are given below:

Blessing of the newly built Mentally Challenged Children School in Vanchinagar: The blessing took place on 10 November at 4 pm. The CMC Sisters started this particular centre two years ago on 15 October 2014 and they look after the mentally challenged children. Under the leadership of Rev. Sr Celygrin CMC, Superior, the new building to house the school was built. Rev. Sr Viji CMC, Provincial and her Council, representatives from CMC Congregation, Rev. Fr Tobin Alapurackal, Parish Priest, other Priests working in the Mission and lay people of Shenkottai mission participated in this great event. Special congratulations and best wishes go to all the Sisters of the CMC Congregation!

Tuition Centre in Therkkumedu: On 10 November 2016, a Tuition Centre for the village students was inaugurated in a one-cent land in Therkkumedu, which is situated 2 kilometres away from Puliয়ারai. The land was bought from Mrs. Selvi, Therkkumedu. I blessed the Tuition Centre and Mr Kannan, the Panchayathu Thalivar of Puliয়ারai, inaugurated it. Rev. Fr Peter Kizhakkal is in-charge of this Tuition Centre and the CMC Sisters will be taking care of it by giving tuition to the children. They will also undertake house visits. Sr. Christy CMC and Sr. Elsina CMC, the former superiors of Puliয়ারai, took the initiative to start this Centre. We sincerely thank Rev. Fr Babu Puthenpura and the parishioners of St Alphonsa Church Sreekariam of Thiruvananthapuram Forane for the financial help to build this Tuition Centre. The members of the Vincent de Paul Society of Diocese of Thuckalay and of the Archdiocese of Changanacherry also helped financially. I thank them too!

Tuition Centre in Mekkarai: This Centre situated in the parish of St George Church, Mekkarai was blessed on 10 November 2016. Mr Revi Onnam Valavu, Accountant of Mekkarai, inaugurated the Centre.

Kurusadi at St. George Church, Mekkarai: St. George Church Mekkarai constructed a beautiful Kurusadi and it was blessed on 10 November 2016. Rev. Fr Christudas, Chancellor of the Diocese, opened the newly made gate of the Church. After the blessing, the children put up a short cultural programme.

Conference of Priests and Religious: After all the blessings, all the Priests and Sisters of Shenkottai Mission came together for a Conference. I thank all the Priests and Sisters who worked hard for the enhancement of the Mission in Shenkottai

Conclusion of the Year of Mercy

We celebrated the Year of Mercy from 8 December 2015 to 20 November 2016. The Year of Mercy was a blessing to the Diocese. We had planned meticulously and carried out

systematically both the spiritual and temporal works of mercy both at the Diocesan and Parish level. The Doors of Mercy were opened at Sacred Heart Church Padanthalumoodu, St. George Church Munchirai and St Alphonsa Church, Nagercoil. A seminar was conducted on *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, the Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis in the course of the year.

During the Year of Mercy, Mother Teresa Mobile Palliative Care was inaugurated. It is aimed at providing nursing care to the bed ridden persons in their homes. At the parish level, adoration and rosary services, house visits, retreats, seminars, classes on confession, charity works, essay writing on mercy of God, etc. were conducted. Other events like job arrangements, pilgrimages, visit to old age homes, charity to widows, helping to build houses for the poor, charity for poor girls' marriages, etc. were also organised. The school children and the members of the various pious associations also undertook different forms of charity and other activities. I am grateful to all the Fathers and Religious for taking initiatives to celebrate this year in a fitting manner.

Coinciding with the closing ceremony of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis has come out with an Apostolic Letter titled 'Mercy and Misery.' I am enclosing together with this letter some reflections on this Apostolic Letter, which I am sure will inspire you to continue to keep the door of mercy open to our faithful in all our Centres.

Funeral of Mar Mathew Vattakuzhy

Bishop Emeritus Mar Mathew Vattakuzhy, former Bishop of Kanjirappally, passed away at a private hospital in Kanjirapally on Tuesday, 22 November 2016. He was 86 years old. The funeral was held at Kanjirappally St. Dominic's Cathedral at 2.00 pm on Thursday, 24 November 2016. He was born to Mr. Joseph and Mrs. Thankamma in Vazhoor in 1930 and Bishop Vattakuzhy was ordained a Priest in 1956. In 1959, he was appointed secretary to Archbishop Mar Mathew Kavukattu.

After his higher studies in Pontifical Lateran University Rome, he obtained a Doctorate in Canon Law in 1964. In 1977 he was appointed Vicar General and Chancellor of Kanjirapally Diocese. When Mar Joseph Powathil was appointed Archbishop of Changanassery in 1986, he was elected the Administrator and in 1987 he was appointed Bishop of Kanjirapally. He was leading a retired life at the Kanjirappally Bishop's House since 2001.

From our Diocese, Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, Vicar General, Rev. F. Christudas, Chancellor, and Rev. Fr Dency Mundunadackal, Procurator and I attended the funeral service. Let us continue to pray for the departed soul of Bishop Vattakuzhy.

Bible Convention

Like in previous years, the Diocesan Bible Convention will be conducted this year from 2 to 4 December 2016 at Padanthalumoodu. Earlier we thought of having the Convention in Kalluvilai, but the venue was changed to Padanthalumoodu due to some technical difficulties. Please remember that *Kuzhandai Iso Iyakkam* will organise Convention for children on 3 and 4 December in two groups: one group will gather in Padanthalumoodu Church and the other group will assemble in Kamaraj Nagar School. Dear Fathers, please encourage all the

Christian faithful and neighbours to participate in the Convention and make necessary arrangements for the transportation of the people to come to Padanthalumoodu.

Syro-Malabar Mission Week

Syro-Malabar Mission Week will be celebrated in our Diocese from 6 to 8 January 2017 and the Syro-Malabar Mission Sunday celebration is celebrated on Sunday, 8 January. Dear Fathers, please remember to celebrate Syro-Malabar Mission Sunday in your Parishes on 8 January and take a collection during the Holy Qurbana. The collection from all the Parishes will go to our Syro-Malabar Church Head Office for the mission work of the Church. Mar George Cardinal Allencherry, our Major Archbishop, wrote a circular letter to all the Christian faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church. This circular letter will be sent to you and kindly read this letter during the Holy Qurbana on Sunday, 1 January 2017. A clear direction on how to celebrate the Syro-Malabar Mission Sunday will come from the Director, Mission League a little later.

Child Migrants' Day

Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care for Migrants and Itinerant People published the Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees under the title "CHILD MIGRANTS, THE VULNERABLE AND THE VOICELESS." The World Day of Migrants and Refugees will be celebrated on 15 January of 2017. Since migration is a worldwide phenomenon, men and women, the elderly and children are forced to leave their homes in the hope of finding safety, peace and security. Most of them are moving around for the dignified work or better living conditions. Among them, children have to pay a heavy toll. Violence, poverty, environmental conditions as well as the negative aspects of globalization cause migration. Unrestrained competition of quick and easy profit, child trafficking, abuse of minors and depriving of rights intrinsic to childhood have great repercussions on human dignity. Such exploitation harms young girls and boys. They are often led into prostitution or into the mire of pornography. They are enslaved as child labourers or soldiers. They are caught up in drug trafficking and other forms of criminality. They are forced to flee from conflict and persecution, risking isolation and abandonment.

For this reason, on the occasion of the Annual World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis wants to bring the attention of the Universal Church on the reality of child migrants and he has asked to take care of the young migrant children, who are defenceless in three ways: they are children, they are foreigners, and they have no means to protect themselves. He cited the biblical sentences: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me" (Mk 9:37; Mt 18:5; Lk 9:48; Jn 13:20) and "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin: it is better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Mt 18:6; Mk 9: 42; Lk 17: 2).

Dear Fathers, the Papal message in English is attached along with this circular letter. The Tamil translation of the Papal message will be sent to you later to be read in the Parishes on 15 January 2017.

New Mission at Thiruvarambu

23 November 2016 was the historical day for the Diocese. We inaugurated and blessed the Thiruvarambu Mission. Rev. Fr Peter Kizhakeyil initiated the mission and it is entrusted to FCC Sisters of Chenamcode community who did the home visit. As Parish Priest of Marapady, Rev. Fr Joseph Nedumpuram took great interest and studied the possibility of establishing a Centre at Thiruvarambu. Mr Kurusumuthu, a parishner of Marapady, willingly donated 3.5 cents land in Thiruvarambu. When Rev. Fr Joemon, became Parish Priest of Marapaddy, he took forward the project. Last year he established a nursery school in the house of Mr Kurusumuthu and began the preparation for the construction of new mission. The going was not easy. Fr. Jomon had to face a number of difficulties with regard to getting permissions from the Government and from local authority. However through prayer and hard work of Fr Jomon and some supporters from the Parish, a new shed was constructed and the necessary permissions to run the nursery were obtained. We congratulate Fr Joemon! I thank Fr Peter Kizhakeyil, Fr Joseph Nedumpuram and all those who are associated with the project. Special thanks to Mr Kurusumuthu and his family! Thank you Fathers for your prayerful support.

INFORMATION

- Deacon Vinu and Deacon John Joseph came back to our Diocese to begin their diaconal ministries after the completion of their theology studies in their respective Seminaries. Deacon Vinu is now staying in KKSSS and doing pastoral work at Malaicode on Saturdays and Sundays. Deacon John Joseph is doing his pastoral work in St Alphonsa Church, Nagercoil. Both the deacons will go for a retreat in preparation for their priestly ordinations from 9 to 14 December 2016. We welcome them to the Diocese and wish them all the best.
- Karode Church has now a new Madhubaha and ceiling. This was realised due to the hard work and prayers of Rev. Fr Vinod Kanakalil, Parish Priest and the parishioners. It was blessed on 29 November 2016. Congratulations and thanks to Rev. Fr Vinod and all the benefactors!
- 14 December is the 3rd Death anniversary of Fr. Thomas Thekkeyil, I will be going to Mankulam, Idukki for the Holy Qurbana with the family. Let's remember to pray for the departed soul.
- Our Brothers from the Major Seminaries of Kerala and Bangalore will be in the Diocese for Christmas Holidays. Let's welcome them and wish them happy days.
- The formal inauguration of the CRI unit of Thuckalay will be on 7 January 2017, the CRI President is Rev. Sr. Celia FCC, Provincial, Sanjo Province, Plankalai.
- Rev. Fr. Kurian Koipuram is gone to Saudi Arabia for a longer term to serve the Syro-Malabar faithful there.
- The construction work for the additional floor in St. Alphonsa College has begun. Kindly keep the project in your prayers.
- Pre-Christmas get together for fathers will be on 16 December at Sangamam. The program that begins at 9.30 am includes a short family circle and family meal. I invite everyone to attend.
- This year our diocese will be hoisting the annual Christmas gathering of Ecumenical council at Sangamam on 22 December. It will be a gathering of all the heads of Ecumenical churches in Kanyakumari district.

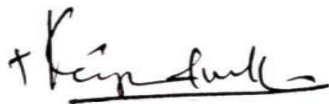
- I have called for a special priest conference on 6 January 2017 in order to implement the proposals and recommendations of Syro-malabar Synod in our diocese. The meeting will begin at 9.30 am and end at 1 pm. Since it binds all of us and our parishes and institutions I request your valuable presence.
- *Irakkathai Thedi*: Plankalai Parish is organizing a Quiz Competition and for this they brought out a text containing 150 questions on Scripture. I encourage the catechism students to join this competition and widen the knowledge about the Word of God. The winners will be announced on 24 December 2016.
- *Karunai Illam*, the home for the mentally challenged children at Nithravilai, will be inaugurating the silver jubilee celebration on 10 December.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

- 2-4 December: Diocesan Bible Convention at Padanthalumoodu.
- 6 December: Priests conference
- 8 December: Inter department meeting (finalising the pastoral plan 2017)
- 13 December: Requiem Mass for Mother Mary Litty LSDP at Perunchilampu
- 14 December: Death anniversary of Fr. Thomas Thekkeyil
- 16 December: Pre-Christmas Celebration for priests
- 19 December: Pre-Christmas Celebration for Sengottai Mission
- 21 December: Pre-Christmas Celebration at Minor Seminary
- 22 December: Pre-Christmas Celebration of Ecumenical council

With the assurance of my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+George Rajendran SDB
Bishop of Thuckalay

