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Dear and Reverend Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

Ever since his election as the Pastor of the Universal Church, Pope Francis has been taking steps to renew the Church spiritually. He has already celebrated a number of Synods of Bishops to help the faithful to understand their respective roles in sanctifying the Church. Basing on the biblical quote "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (*Jn 15:11*), Pope Francis expressed his mind on mission work of the Church as proclaiming the joy of the Gospel. Through the Synod of Bishops on the theme of New Evangelization and the subsequent post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis has clearly spelled out the missionary nature of the Church. Similarly, through the two Synods of Bishops held on the theme of the family and the subsequent post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis dwelt at length with the various aspects of family life among the Catholics.

Now Pope Francis wants to address the spiritual renewal of young people. He has already announced a Synod of Bishops on the theme "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment." Through this Synod, Pope wants the Church to examine herself on how she can lead the young people to recognize and to accept the call to the fullness of life and love. He also intends to ask young people to help the Church in identifying the most effective ways of announcing the Good News in the present day. By listening to young people, Pope Francis believes that the Church will once again hear the Lord speaking in today's world. As in the days of Samuel (*1 Sam 3:1-21*) and Jeremiah (*Jer 1:4-10*), young people know how to discern the signs of our times through the outpouring of the Spirit. The vocation to love takes concrete form in everyday life through a series of choices, which finds expression in the states of life - marriage, ordained ministry, and consecrated life - young people opt. Likewise, the young people need to be guided in choosing their way of life in the world through different professions, forms of social and civil commitments, lifestyles, management of time, use of money, etc. The purpose of vocational discernment is to find out how to transform them, in the light of faith, towards the fullness of joy to which everyone is called.

By announcing this Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis wants to tell us about the basis of the strength and beauty of young people, namely, the ability to rejoice at the beginning of undertakings, to give oneself totally without going back, to pick oneself up and begin again in search of new conquests. The riches of the Church's spiritual tradition provide many resources in guiding the formation of conscience, which will pave way for authentic freedom. The *preparatory document* to begin the Synod's phase of consultation of the entire People of God has been published. This document is addressed to the Synods and Councils of Patriarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, the Episcopal Conferences, the dicasteries of the Roman Curia and the Union of Superiors General. The consultation intends

to include all young people. For this, a website with a set of questionnaires on their expectations and their way of living has been launched.

These series of consultations will form the basis for drafting the work-document or *Instrumentum Laboris*, which will be the reference point in the discussion of the Synod Fathers. The *preparatory document* consists of three steps. It begins with some of the social and cultural dynamics of the world in which young people grow and make their decisions. The document then retraces the fundamental steps for discernment, which the Church feels, can be offered young people to discover, in the light of faith, their vocation. Finally, the document treats key points for a pastoral vocational programme for the youth.

We need to contribute our mite towards the success of the Synod as the young people of our Diocese also face situations similar to those faced by young people in other parts of the world. I shall keep you informed about the progress of the preparations for the Synod. Let us keep the coming Synod of Bishops in our prayers and make our young people aware of it!

NEWS AND EVENTS

CATECHISM COMPETITION:

The Forane and Diocesan levels catechism competitions were well organized this year. At the Forane level, Holy Family Sunday School, Arukani, Little Flower Sunday School, Manjalumoodu, St Antony's Sunday School, Vayalinkarai, St Thomas Sunday School, Palukal, St Michael Sunday School, Kattathurai, St Alphonsa Sunday School, Nagercoil, Christ the King Sunday School, Pilankarai won the first prizes. Little Flower Sunday School, Manjalumoodu, St Antony's Sunday School, Vayalinkarai and Holy Cross Sunday School won the first, second and third prizes in the eparchial level competitions. I congratulate the Parishes, which won second and third places at the Forane level competitions. I thank all the Parishes for taking the trouble to prepare the students for the competitions. I can understand that it is easier for the large Parishes to pick and chose smart students while for smaller Parishes choices are limited. In spite of these constraints, I must say that you all have done well. A special word of thanks, appreciation and congratulation go to Rev. Fr Alex Puthettu, Director of Catechism Department in the Diocese, for organizing these competitions. Along with Fr. Alex, all the Forane Directors, Secretaries, Promoters, Teaches, Saff and Evaluators need to be complemented for your hard work in making the entire programme a success.

BLESSING OF THE PENU CHURCH:

The old Penu Church required a face-lift and new amenities. Rev. Fr. Davis Karukapalli CMI, Parish Priest, along with the parishioners and well-wishers worked hard to raise the necessary funds for the extension and renovation of the old Church. By the grace of God, their efforts were rewarded. The renovated Church with additional rooms for sacristy and Priests' residence was blessed on 1 January 2017. I appreciate and thank Rev. Fr. Davis Karukapalli CMI and the parishioners for their hard work to build a beautiful temple for God.

DEMISE OF ARCHBISHOP EMERITUS PETER FERNANDO:

The retired Archbishop Peter Fernando of Madurai died on 31 December 2016. He was 77. The mortal remains of the deceased Archbishop were kept in the Archbishop's House, Madurai for people to pay their respect still 11.00 a.m. on 1 January 2017. Thereafter, the body was taken to Cathedral Church, Madurai where a requiem Mass was celebrated at 3.30 p.m.

The body was then taken to the Cathedral Church at Tuticorin. At 10.00 am, on 2 January 2017, the solemn funeral mass and funeral service were held. Almost all the Bishops of TNBC attended the funeral services. I too attended the services during which I read the condolence message of our Major Archbishop Mar George Cardinal Alenchery.

Archbishop Peter Fernando was born on 22 March 1939 at Idinthakarai, Tamil Nadu. He was ordained Priest on 31 May 1971. He served the National Church as the Director of the National Vocation Service Centre, (NVSC), Pune. He also served as Rector of the St Paul's Regional Seminary, Tiruchy and as Vicar General of the Tuticorin Diocese.

Archbishop Peter Fernando was appointed Coadjutor Bishop of Tuticorin on 23 February 1996 and was consecrated Bishop on 29 May 1996. On 22 March 2003, he was appointed the Metropolitan Archbishop of Madurai. Upon reaching the age of 75, he retired from his active episcopal ministry on 26 July 2014. He was a Priest for 40 years and a Bishop for 20 years.

INAUGURATION OF CRI UNIT:

A Unit of the Conference of Religious of India (CRI) was solemnly inaugurated in the Diocese on 7 January 2017 at Sangamam. I chaired the meeting in which Rev. Sr. Celia FCC, President of CRI Unit, Thuckalay welcomed the gathering. Rev. Sr. Viji CMC and Rev. Fr. Christudas delivered words of blessing. Nearly 120 Religious both men and women were present for the function. The office bearers are: Rev. Sr. Celia FCC, President, Rev. Fr. Thomas Pockavarayath CMI, Vice President, Rev. Sr. Rose Martin SABS, Secretary and Rev. Sr. Mercy ASMI, Treasurer.

This CRI forum is created in order to have better coordination of pastoral activities and for organizing on-going formation programmes for the Religious in the Diocese. I would like to thank all the Religious for taking many initiatives in their pastoral ministries in the Diocese.

THE SYNOD:

The Syro-Malabar Synod took place from 9-14 January 2017. It was a time of grace and blessing for our Church. Around 52 Bishops were present for the Synod. Various issues and agenda related to the growth and development of the Syro-Malabar Church were taken up during the Synod. We need to thank God for the strong leadership in the Church and the love and dedication on the part of individual Bishops towards their faithful in the Diocese. I shall share with you some of the decisions and recommendations of the Synod in our next Priests' Conference.

REV. FR. DR. THOMAS (TOMY) THARAYIL APPOINTED AUXILIARY BISHOP OF THE ARCHEPARCHY OF CHANGANACHERRY:

The Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church that assembled at Mount St Thomas, Kakkanad from 9 January 2017, elected Rev. Fr (Dr.) Thomas (Tomy) Tharayil, the Auxiliary Bishop of the Syro-Malabar Archeparchy of Changanacherry, Kerala. The announcement was made on 14 January 2017 at Mount St Thomas, Kakkanad.

With the appointment of Rev. Fr. Tharayil, the total number of the Bishops in the Syro-Malabar Church has gone up to 59. Out of these, 17 are Bishop *emeriti* (retired bishops) and 8 are Auxiliary Bishops. There are 32 Syro-Malabar Dioceses all over the world. 29 are in India and 3 are abroad (Chicago, Melbourne and Great Britain). There is one Exarchate in Canada and three Apostolic Visitations (India, New Zealand and Europe). The Episcopal ordination will on 23 April, 2017. The Diocese of Thuckalay extends hearty congratulations to the Bishop-elect!

SYRO-MALABAR QURBANA IN NATTALAM:

The Diocese of Kuzhithurai celebrated the Feast of Blessed Devasahayam Pillai in Nattalam. On Sunday 15 January 2017, together with the Curia members and many other Fathers, I celebrated the Syro-Malabar Qurbana. Rev. Fr. Christudas, Chancellor of the Diocese, shared the Word of God explaining the life of Blessed Devasahayam Pillai. Rev. Fr. Antony Jose made all the arrangements for the Qurbana. All the Fathers from the Soosaipuram Forane, other Priests of our Diocese and a large number of people participated in this memorable event.

TNBC MEETING:

The Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council was held from 18-19 January 2017 at Matha Malai Retreat Centre, Hosur. This was the first meeting for the year 2017 in which the Archbishops and Bishops of 18 Latin Rite Dioceses and 3 Oriental Rite Dioceses came together to discuss about the state of the Church in Tamil Nadu. Various issues related to the Church were discussed during the meeting.

PASTORAL COUNCIL:

The 5th Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) had its 3rd sitting on 16 January 2017. This time the DPC took up the theme **Alcohol Free Diocese** (*Mathu thavirkkum Maraimavattam*). Rev. Fr Nelson from Kottar Diocese animated the members. He presented the evil effects of alcoholism and explained that addiction is a sickness. Mr. Rajesh, Mrs. Sheela and Mr. Selvaraj shared their personal experiences of being alcoholic or being associated with alcoholics.

After the talk, the members were divided into five groups. Each group was given some questions regarding the treatment of alcoholics in the Diocese. At the end of the discussion, a volunteer team was formed from the members present. Some Fathers and Sisters were also included. Rev. Fr. Felix heads the team. I am grateful to Fr. Felix and the family apostolate team for taking up this problem very seriously and finding means to help the affected people.

THUCKALAY FRIENDS PONGAL GATHERING:

On Saturday 21 January 2017, the Thuckalay Friends gathered at Sangamam for the *Anpin Sangamam Pongal* gathering. Mr. G. Arankaswamy, Mr. M. S. Paisalkhan and I were the chief guests. Many of them expressed the view that even though we belong to different religions and castes, we are primarily human beings. We are Indians. We are brothers and sisters of the same Father who is in heaven. The spirit of brotherhood and the value of toleration need to be inculcated among the children for a brighter tomorrow. After the talks, a number of cultural programmes were staged. The Curia members and some of our Fathers and Sisters participated in this traditional interreligious gathering of friends. A special word of thanks goes to Rev. Fr. Christudas and Mr. Edvinson for making all the preparations for the smooth functioning of the programme.

ASEER VIDYALAYA TURNS SILVER:

The Aseer Vidyalaya School, Thettiyode that looks after the mentally challenged children, celebrated 25 years of its existence. In order to thank God for the blessings we received as a Diocese through this institution, a solemn function was organized on 28 January 2017 in the school auditorium. During the programme, the pioneering FCC Sisters were remembered gratefully for this humanitarian initiative.

This special school was started on 1 December 1991. The Franciscan Clarist Sisters (FCC) opened it in order to serve the mentally challenged children of the area. The school had its humble beginning with 10 children and 2 teachers. The affected children and their parents found it as a special home where children are helped and trained to stand on their own. Nearly 300 children have passed through this institution in the past 25 years. We congratulate the Provincial and the staff of *Aseer Vidyalaya* for serving the Diocese and the society for the last 25 years.

INFORMATION

- Rev. Fr. Sajan Nettiaponghu left for the UK on 13 January 2017. On his arrival at the Manchester Airport, Rev. Fr. Tony, Parish Priest of Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, to which Fr. Sajan is appointed, received him. The climate is rather cold but Fr. Sajan is getting adjusted with it. He is happy. He sends his loving regards to all.
- As you are aware, the Major Seminarians were in the Diocese for Christmas Vacation. They returned to their respective Seminaries on 7 January 2017. We thank them for their presence and ministry in the various Parishes during Christmas.
- Month of January had a number of celebrations and Annual Day Programmes in all our Tamil and English medium Schools. I was personally present for some of these celebrations. The programmes were well prepared and executed. The children and teachers along with our Fathers worked very hard to make these events experiences of learning. Congratulations to all of them!
- The Kalial Church building has been dismantled in order to expand and renovate the old Church. At present, the Sunday liturgical celebrations are held in the CMC convent nearby. Let us support the Fathers and parishioners with our prayers.

- The construction works of Palukal Church has begun. I request your valuable prayers for the successful completion of the work.
- In order to accommodate more deserving patients at DNN, we are constructing an extension wing. We have begun the work with limited resources. I request your prayers that we may find some generous benefactors.
- For the information those Fathers who did not attend the last Priests' Conference, I give some of the points that we discussed:
 - Sisters in our convents should not be deprived of daily Holy Qurbana. In case you are absent from the Parish for some reason or another, kindly make alternative arrangements.
 - If you are going to be absent from the Parish for two days or more, please inform the Vicar General or me.
 - New marriage certificate forms are ready and are available at the Bishop's House. Kindly use the new form from 1st February onwards.
 - Parish level data collection forms are being distributed. Those who did not get the forms, kindly approach the Eparchial Secretary. You are requested to fill the forms and submit the same to Rev. Fr. Sathianesan, Secretary at the Bishop's House or at the Catechism Department office at Kalluvilai by 10th February
 - Priests are requested to volunteer for Palliative Care Unit at KKSSS.
- Foundation stone was blessed for a Girls' Hostel at Soosaipuram. We felt the need to give more attention and facilities to the girl students of our Alphonsa College. The SABS Sisters are constructing the hostel. I blessed the foundation on 28 January 2017 in the presence of Rev. Sr. Rose Martin SABS, Regional Superior, other Sisters and Fathers.
- CML quiz competition was held on 15 January 2017 at Kalluvilai. Nearly 20 students took part in the competition. I thank the Fathers who encouraged the children to take part. I am also grateful to the Director and Assistant Director of CML for organising it.
- For the last three months, I have been meeting with Rev. Sisters according to their congregations and sometimes in common to share with them the pastoral challenges that the Diocese faces. These meetings have come up with some responses. Hereafter, the Sisters will be meeting the Parish Priests regularly to discuss about their pastoral work in their respective Parishes. I request you to make time to meet them and help them to plan their work.
- The feast of Don Bosco was celebrated in the Bishop's House on 31 January 2017 in the presence of Curia members and Forane Directors. I thank all the Fathers for responding to the invitation positively.
- The meeting of Soosaipuram Forane Fathers was held on 31 January 2017.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

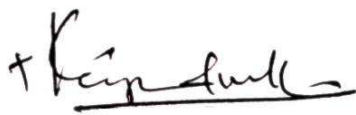
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| 09 February 2017 | - Death Anniversary of Rev. Fr. Philip Kodiyanthara
Holy Qurbana at Padanthalumoodu at 6.00 pm |
| 10 February 2017 | - Holy Qurbana for Late Fr. Philip Kodiyanthara at Kayalpuram at 2.00 pm |
| 13 February 2017 | - Jubilee of SDS Sisters at Manjalumoodu |
| 14 February 2017 | - Priests' Conference (Discussion on Syro-Malabar Assembly) |
| 16 February 2017 | - Interdepartmental Meeting at Padanthalumoodu at 2.00 pm |
| 26 February 2017 | - Catechism Bible Quiz competition at Padanthalumoodu |
| 27 February 2017 | - Ash Monday |

CONCLUSION

On 27 February 2017, we begin the holy season of Lent. It is the period of Great Fast (*Sauma Ramba*). The seven weeks before the solemnity of Easter are set apart for prayer, fasting, abstinence and reparation. The name 'Great Fast' (*Sauma Ramba*) signifies the great fast of Jesus for forty days in the wilderness before the beginning of his public life (Mt 4:2). Still we call this period as fifty days of fasting. This is because the St Thomas Christians fasted and abstained from Pethurtha Sunday to Easter Sunday. Lent is a season to stop all the worldly pleasures and to return to God. This period motivates the faithful to enter into the process of being one with Jesus through his paschal mysteries of suffering, death, and burial as the bridal price of purification. I exhort you, dear Fathers, to prepare our people and to help them to enter into this holy season in the right spirit.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+George Rajendran SDB
Bishop of Thuckalay

